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## Editorial

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*Indian Journal of Theology* joins the Indian Christian community and the world wide ecumenical Christian community in commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation on October 31, 2017. As a part of the efforts of churches and mission agencies around the world to celebrate the event through ecumenical prayer gatherings, seminars and symposiums, a special seminar was organized at Bishop's College, Kolkata, 24-25 August, 2017 focusing on the theme "Reformation". The current issue carries the seven major papers presented on the occasion.

The first article, "Transforming Biblical Interpretation: A Brief Overview of the Contribution of the Reformers" by V.J. John, emphasizes the major contributions of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and John Knox towards the interpretation of the Bible. Tracing the setting of reformation biblical interpretation, he highlights their focus on scripture, with its authority. Their sermons and exegetical commentaries were based on the study of biblical languages, laying emphasis on the importance of translating Bible into vernacular languages. They took the historical context of the text very seriously and their interpretations were brief and centred on Christ. While gospel, word and sacraments took priority, the interpreter was to depend on the Holy Spirit for guidance and stressed that all believers shared in the priesthood of Christ. Their emphasis was so radical that it completely transformed the contours of biblical interpretation since Reformation.

In the second article, "Biblical Exegesis in John Calvin (1509-1564) and in the Dalit Bible Commentary with Special Reference to their Respective Commentaries on John 4:1-42" by Sunil M. Caleb takes a specific example of reformation interpretation by Calvin and compares it with the attempt by Raj Irudaya s.j on the

same text. While Calvin's interpretation of John 4 is set within the wider context of biblical exegesis as evident in his commentaries, Irudaya's study is analysed from the perspective of the Dalit Bible Commentaries. Caleb finds divergences in their interpretation as their respective context differed. He stress that the universal message of the Bible needs to be continuously re-interpreted so as to enable people to hear the Word of God in their own time and context.

"The Unsong Reformers of Israel" by Alfred Lalruatfela focuses on the "law against interest on loan" in the Old Testament Law Code found in the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 22:25), Holiness Code (Lev. 25:35-37) and Deuteronomic Code (Deut. 23:29-20). He argues that they were produced in different socio-historical contexts of the Israelite people. Writers in different periods of history faced with different social issues have "revised, rewrote and revitalized their laws to meet the demands of the context". The same laws are therefore recorded in different places with "subtle modification". "[T]he reformative outlook of these unsung reformers is evident behind the laws of the Old Testament". He calls for revitalizing of laws to protect the weaker sections of society and to meet their needs and concerns so as to enable them to enjoy fullness of life as a challenging task for churches and theologians today.

B. Silpa Rani, in her essay, "A Call for Reformation in Indian Ecclesial Context by Affirming Belongingness of People with Same-Sex Orientation: Re-Interpreting Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13" attempts discussing the issue of homosexuality which is being stigmatized by the church and society. She re-interprets the biblical texts of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that are used to condemn homosexuality, and calls for reformation within the Indian church, so that the people of same sex orientation would find their belongingness within the church and society.

Swarup Bar focuses on the understanding of the Holy Spirit in his article, "Exploration of Pioneering Indian

Christian Pneumatology and a Conversation with Reformation Pneumatology". He argues that the first strains of Indian pneumatological discourse of any Christian import appear in the works of prominent Brahma Samajists. Of the three prominent among them, namely, Rammohan Roy, Keshub Chunder Sen and Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, he focuses on the first two. The paper shows that rudiments of Indian pneumatological thinking could be remarkably found in these Brahma Samajists, who never explicitly confessed the Christian faith. While Rammohan may be said to have inaugurated the pneumatological moment in Indian Christian theology, Keshub Chunder Sen brought forth significantly new pneumatological paradigms which are taken up in earnest by later Indian thinkers and theologians. The article concludes with an attempt to elicit a dialogue with the understanding of the Holy Spirit by the Brahma Samajists and the Reformists so as to broaden and widen the understanding of the Spirit that while being biblically correct could speak to their own people.

Limatula Longkumer in "Revisiting Sixteenth Century Reformers' View on Women and Women's Education" examines reformers' view and contributions on women and their educational process as they recognized that education was the key for the success of reformation. While she recognizes that many reformers had contributed for the upliftment of women and education of women, the article focuses on Martin Luther and John Calvin. Looking at their contributions with a critical lens, she calls for more reformation in our educational process to achieve gender justice and equality for all so as to achieve partnership of men and women in all spheres in church and society.

The last article, "Reimagining and Reforming Pastoral Care in the Light of Contemporary Contextual Challenges: Healing Potency of Hope" by James Wesley S. makes an attempt to "discuss the importance of reimagining and reforming pastoral care practice in response to the unique and diverse contextual needs and challenges of today". He makes an effort to understand "What

should be the main focal point of Pastoral Care in contemporary context of war, violence, instability and insecurity often resulting in a sense of helplessness and hopelessness?” In other words, what can bring healing and wholeness in lives of people in the midst of local as well as global challenges today? He suggests that the task of pastoral care is to “help people find hope in the midst of hopelessness by discovering a good and meaningful reason to live for and fight for” as hope has “a remarkable potential to motivate as well as instigate healing in a person’s life”.

**V.J. John**  
Editor

## **Transforming Biblical Interpretation: A Brief Overview of the Contribution of the Reformers**

***V.J. John\****

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### **Introduction**

October 31, 2017 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Reformation that began in Europe with the nailing of 95 theses by Martin Luther on the door of the Castle Church, Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. The event had far reaching import, with the wide ranging changes that it set in motion, not only in the history of Europe but also in the wider global scenario. While we had several occasions in the past to reflect upon the impact of Reformation on human history, it is not out of place to once again look at it, being detached from the original event for the last five centuries and with the world having changed rapidly in all spheres of life in more recent times. It is possible to measure the influence of the event from various perspectives, such as, from a social, political, economic, or religious point of view. In this essay, however, our modest attempt shall be limited to briefly highlight some of the contributions of the reformers, particularly Martin Luther,<sup>1</sup> John Calvin,<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Zwingli,<sup>3</sup> and John Knox,<sup>4</sup> towards altering the method of interpreting the Bible that was prevalent up until the beginning of the Reformation and which continue to impact biblical interpretation to the present. Firstly, we briefly sketch

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the practice of biblical interpretation in the Medieval Period. Secondly, a short analysis of the major developments in biblical interpretation during the Reformation period will be attempted. Finally, a few highlights of the contribution of the Reformers towards a transformation in the craft of biblical interpretation and its possible bearing on us today.

### 1. Biblical Interpretation in the Reformation Setting

The era covered is the Medieval Age (600-1340 C.E.), stretching a period little less than a thousand years, beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and going on to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The phase was marked by the rise of monasticism, founding of universities, growth of scholasticism and Christian philosophy. It saw a synthesis between religion and culture in Europe, even the creation of a so-called Christian culture.<sup>5</sup> However, it was not a great period of biblical scholarship. Church tradition held the highest authority. Biblical writings and writings of Church fathers were used to help support the authority and power of the church while the Monks were instrumental in copying and transmitting the Scripture.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible in use was the Latin Bible translated by Jerome between 375-400 C.E., and it shaped medieval biblical interpretation. Jerome used the original sources in both Hebrew and Greek, and rejected the apocryphal additions to the OT found in the Greek LXX. Later generations not only did not follow him but also failed to pay attention to the study of biblical languages. They regarded the Vulgate as an infallible text in itself.<sup>7</sup>

Allegorical interpretation was the predominant method of interpretation. Scripture could be interpreted in a number of senses. They included the literal – plain, evident meaning, allegorical -- set forth what was to be believed, moral -- sense of behaviour and conduct and anagogical – what Christians were to hope for. An example is the interpretation of the city of ‘Jerusalem’ which meant literally the city in Palestine, allegorically the church, morally (topologically) human soul and anagogically, the heavenly city.<sup>8</sup>

The “Sea” could mean “a gathering of water, Scripture, the present age, the human heart, the active life, heathen or baptism.”<sup>9</sup>

A number of exegetical anthologies from the Church fathers were in circulation; fathers such as Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Bede, and Isidore of Seville were cited. Biblical text printed by hand with comments written in margin or between lines. Sum total of biblical studies during Middle Ages was called *Glossa Ordinaria*.<sup>10</sup> The main purpose of *Glossa* was to remove mysteries in the text with the help of ancient laws and teaching of Church fathers.<sup>11</sup> There was also attempt to study background detail (i.e. Peter Lombard, ca. 1100-1160 C.E.) and attack on allegorical tendency. A manual for preachers prepared by Peter the Chanter divided biblical interpretation into three parts; namely, *lectio* - relationship of a word to the thing it describes, *disputatio* – process by which one part of scripture harmonized with others, and *Praedicatio* – domain of allegory were bringing people to a deeper mystical experience of God such as through preaching. There was less emphasis on “spiritual interpretation”.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 C.E.) was the greatest theologian and philosopher of Middle Ages. He emphasized the literal sense of Scripture as the basis for theological reasoning. A balancing of the literal and spiritual senses began to emerge with St. Thomas Aquinas’ synthesis. However, he persisted in his belief in the multiple sense of meaning of Scripture, as he felt God cannot be restricted to just one meaning.<sup>12</sup> Reformists exposed the inadequacies of medieval interpretation and developed it further. Advocates of Renaissance humanism demanded the need to return to the sources and a more critical approach to them, including, clarity and perspicuity of literal sense and study of grammar of original texts.<sup>13</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536 C.E.) stressed on historical-critical interpretation together with his critical edition of the Greek NT and a fresh Latin translation that signalled the end of medieval era of biblical interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

Having worked with a defective text and allegory the most “notorious” of their interpretive methods, medieval exegesis is considered to be ‘obsolete and unreliable’. They used fanciful etymologies in exegesis and digress on subjects like “witchcraft and alchemy.”<sup>15</sup>

Because of its inadequacies, or despite it, medieval interpretation set the stage for the Reformation. The key points that stood out in medieval interpretation were: (1) Importance of textual criticism for establishing the text of Scripture, weighing the variant readings though they could not adequately perform due to lack of resources. (2) Scholars need to work from an agreed set of assumptions and stressed the doctrine of the church though more radical theologians like Wycliffe stressed Scripture itself provided the reliable criteria for its interpretation. (3) The church must be spiritually edified by biblical teaching. Literal sense of the text helped find spiritual truth that led them to develop extensive ministry of expository preaching such as by the friars. (4) They were aware that ‘spiritual’ realm was inalienably linked to the material world and hence biblical interpretation relied on, and had to be integrated with other branches of learning. What we said of Scripture had to be “consonant with what we know of the law, of history, and of the natural sciences.”<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Biblical Interpretation and Reformation

Many factors have contributed towards the Reformation that came about in sixteenth century. They include: development of science and humanism, growth in number of territories and cities, growing political power of the Princes, economic development of accumulation of capital, new methods of production and manufacturing including mining, religious practices wherein authority was vested in Pope and clergy with traditional practices reigning supreme.<sup>17</sup> While all these have had their role in contributing towards Reformation, our focus shall be limited to the religious element, with particular emphasis on Biblical interpretation.

Medieval interpretation with emphasis on allegorization was abandoned, in favour of the right of the biblical text, though not entirely literally interpreted. It was considered important to struggle with Church dogmas and hierarchy exposing many ecclesiastical customs as that were not biblical.<sup>18</sup> The centre of emphasis shifted to Scripture and its interpretation.

### a. Focus on Scripture

Foremost among the emphasis of the reformers was the centrality of the Bible.<sup>19</sup> The predominant place assigned to the church and the councils was now replaced with the pivotal role of Scripture for faith and practice. The authority of the Bible, study of biblical languages, translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, writing commentaries on the Bible and biblical preaching began to take centre of attention.

### i. The Authority of the Bible

The Reformation obtained a new point of departure for the framing of Christian faith in the Word of God and it discarded all forms of infallibility that was advocated during the medieval period including the “infallible organization of the Church, the infallible doctrinal tradition of the Church, and the infallible Scriptural codex.”<sup>20</sup> Biblical text became Luther’s weapon against the power of the Church.<sup>21</sup> He exalted the authority of Scripture against the power of the Church. He argued that it was on the gospel as proclaimed message than the written Word that the authority and correct interpretation of the Bible depended. Bible alone was to be trusted as the prime agent of the Holy Spirit<sup>22</sup> as scripture was its own interpreter. Attention was on the biblical text over against the “human traditions” of ecclesiastical interpretation.<sup>23</sup> Luther overturned ecclesiastical authority and interpretation held under the canon Law.<sup>24</sup> “It is against this understanding of tradition that the full and positive power of *Sola Scriptura* asserts itself in Luther’s theology. The Word of God alone, that is certain and

unchanging. *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola fides* and *Sola gracia* were the slogans of reformation.

For Luther, literal sense of the scripture is identical with historical context and Bible had a “universal and immediate sense granted by the Holy Spirit, recognized by the eyes of faith that transcends historical conditions and events.”<sup>25</sup>

“Essentially an existential, imaginative, and spontaneous thinker”, Luther was not given to systematic exposition. For him, ‘Theology as object of intellectual inquiry and theology as sphere of personal encounter formed a unity,’ A personal encounter with the Bible was paramount as humans were in total rebellion against God.<sup>26</sup> He said, “. . . without grace of God we will produce of necessity an action which is wicked and wrong” as humans are “innately and inevitably corrupt.”<sup>27</sup> In his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-16) Luther portrays humans at the same time as justified and sinners. The righteousness of God could not be earned by humans but received as a gift. Human both a sinner and righteous, though a sinner but by “virtue of the reckoning and the certain power of God that he will redeem him from sin”<sup>28</sup> “My will” Luther realized, “is the will to undo” (Rom. 7:19) A person at the base is a “furious and untamed beast”<sup>29</sup> who does not want God to be God. He emphasized the hiddenness of Christian truth, need for critical discernment of Scriptures and absoluteness of the Word of God, though *radical* for its time, failed to effect immediate methodological consequences.<sup>30</sup> Yet, Scriptures served as the basis of his understanding of doctrine, e.g. faith.<sup>31</sup>

## ii. Study of Biblical Languages

Luther was influenced by Erasmus’ *New Testament* to restore the Greek text of the Gospels. It was also the same with Zwingli, Calvin and others. Some of them were converted to Christian Humanism and others to radical reforming careers.<sup>32</sup> Calvin studied original languages of Hebrew and Greek. He studied Romans in Greek and translated into Latin than using Vulgate. Zwingli diligently studied NT Greek, was influenced by John Gospel and Pauline

Writings. He also studied Early Church Fathers and was influenced by Augustine, Jerome, Origen, Ambrose, Irenaeus and Erasmus.

## iii. Translation of the Bible

Luther translated the Bible into the vernacular and encouraged literacy for both men and women, boys and girls so that they can read it. The vernacular became the basis of lay authority.<sup>33</sup> Luther combined three things in his work of translation. (1) a grammatical and historical understanding of the text, (2) a profound spiritual and theological understanding from his own religious experience, and (3) a great understanding of the German language. Harbison observes:

Luther succeeded so well in Germanizing the Bible that the reader could scarcely believe the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes were not originally spoken in German. Moses and Christ were brought into every German hamlet, and men hardly knew they came from far away in time and place.<sup>34</sup>

Luther presented biblical stories in contemporary language, Herod and Christ in sixteenth century soil. Luther engaged in ‘reshaping and purifying’ Christian tradition itself. Calvin studied the text of the Bible in Greek and translated it into Latin.

## iv. Biblical Commentaries

Although the gospel was meant to be proclaimed, it had to be committed to writing due to “heretics” and “false teachers”<sup>35</sup> Calvin wrote 59 volumes to preserve the faith holy and systematically present the Christian faith. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, contain summary of piety and what needed to be known about the doctrine of salvation.<sup>36</sup> He wrote commentaries for laity and ministers in Latin and French. He followed sequential interpretation of text book by book, chapter by chapter, than thematic treatment.<sup>37</sup> His *Commentaries* centered around the axis of the *Institutes* and was characterized by a passion for systematization, maintained a

balance between subjectivity and objectivity of the truth itself, and the usefulness, advantage or utility of what he wrote to those who would read or hear.<sup>38</sup> They were concise and focused with brief discussions on philology, meaning of the text and with occasional applications. He avoided dogmatic and philosophical discussions. His commentaries addressed all NT books except 2 & 3 John and Revelation. On OT, he wrote commentaries on Isaiah, Pentateuch, Psalms, Joshua, Jeremiah, Lamentations, portions of Ezekiel, Daniel and minor Prophets.<sup>39</sup>

Calvin's earliest exegetical work was his 1539 commentary on *Romans* which clearly articulate his commitment. To Calvin a commentary should help "lay open the mind of the writer." The 'instructional and organizing' urge was behind the writing of his commentaries as made evident in *Romans*. Inspiration emphasised Bible's indebtedness in history and culture. "Hence the best tools for unlocking the mind of the scriptural writer", according to Calvin, "always included a solid understanding of history, geography and chronology, as well as matters of Hebrew and Greek grammar; genre and context."<sup>40</sup> The ideal commentary is one that is brief and simple, one that conveys the best interpretations of the past to the ordinary reader, one that brings out the religious "usefulness" of the Scripture considered. Readers should not be disturbed that all interpreters have not agreed. They might not agree on details, but do so on fundamentals.<sup>41</sup>

## v. Sermons on the Bible

While lectures of Calvin were detailed, his sermons had implications of text for belief and conduct. He had preached over 2000 sermons before 1549 although none of those could be preserved. He did not use notes for preaching.<sup>42</sup> He sought to preach through the chosen book of the Bible than from the Sunday's gospel. He began preaching in 1519 and preached through Matthew, Acts, Epistles, portions of Old Testament and Psalms. Calvin used Greek and Hebrew Texts for his preaching. He was of the view that Hebrew language was important for

both Old and New Testament as all witnesses were of a strongly Hebrew mindset.<sup>43</sup>

The primary responsibility of the Christian community was the transmission of the living word or faith in the encounter of preaching and hearing.<sup>44</sup> According to James Nicholas, Reformation provided the revival of preaching in the history of the Church.<sup>45</sup> Both in Zurich and Geneva it was sermons preached by Zwingli and Calvin that set the Reformation in motion. The gospel proclaims forgiveness and hence to be preached. Emphasize importance of "fine, godly learned, spiritual, diligent preachers without books who extract the living word from the old scripture and uncompromisingly inculcate into people just as the apostles did."<sup>46</sup>

In his Preface to the *Commentary on Psalms* of 1557 Calvin states "If the reading of these commentaries brings as much advantage to the Church of God as the profit I have gained in writing them, I will have no reason to regret having undertaken this work."<sup>47</sup> The Psalms is "an anatomy of all parts of the soul" including 'the gloom, sadness, fears, doubts, worries, perplexities yes, all the confused emotions that agitate human soul.'<sup>48</sup> According to T.H.L. Parker, for Calvin the creaturliness of the Bible is no hindrance, but a necessary condition to hearing God's Word.<sup>49</sup>

John Knox saw himself as a preacher sent to speak the Word of God to contemporaries. He wrote no commentaries but pamphlets. Though he was a powerful preacher, no transcript of his sermons is available.

## b. Method of Biblical Interpretation

Interpretation of the Bible by the reformers was characterized by the attention they gave to the historical context of the text, centrality of Christ, brevity of interpretation, priority of the gospel, role of the Holy Spirit and priesthood of all believers.

### **i) The Historical Context of the Text**

The Reformers were influenced by their medieval interpreters. Luther had knowledge of the Latin classics, of ecclesiastical history, of scholastic philosophy and theology, Christian Humanists, acquaintance with the Fathers and good knowledge of the Bible.<sup>50</sup> The reformers were committed to literal, historical sense of the text. Luther recognized the Importance of historical concern for theology.<sup>51</sup> For reformers Scriptural context was important for underscoring the essence of their message. They studied matters of etymology, geography, nuances of word and their linguistic structure and ancient historical setting of particular passages. e.g. Parables of Jesus, Eucharist as recollection: a spiritual eating rather than a physical bodily presence as in Luther.<sup>52</sup>

He sought to draw the meaning of the biblical text by paying attention to the historical context of passages: eg.: “For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 1:12). Historical criticism recognizes conflict among biblical texts. Luther declares:

The histories in the scriptures are often concise and confused so that they cannot be easily harmonized, as, for example, the denials of Peter and the history of Christ’s passion, etc. Thus Paul is not reciting the entire history here. Therefore, I do not expend any labor or concern on harmonizing the things, but here pay attention to Paul’s purpose and intention.<sup>53</sup>

Calvin paid attention to the background and historical context of passages. He followed a similar pattern in his commentaries, lectures and sermons; begins with an exegesis of the text followed by applying it to readers or hearers.<sup>54</sup> Difference between Paul (Rom. 3:28) and James (2:26) regarding their emphasis on ‘faith’ and “work” were to be understood with reference to them speaking to their own respective contexts.

Psalm 8:4-5 “Yet you have made him a little lower than the angels.” To Calvin it speaks of the nature of human before the fall. While same Psalm is read messianically, this does not override original character of those Psalms, whether David or other OT figures. Is 7:14 Divine covenant God made with Israel providing Ahaz a real hope for deliverance from the original situation as it points ahead to Christ. Israel’s crossing Red Sea (Ex. 14-15) Paul’s interpretation in 1 Cor. 10:1-15. Exodus commentary primarily focuses on the Exodus. Israel’s understanding of its history and its identity as the people of God. In Corinthians explores Paul’s typological reapplication to the Christian practices of baptism and Lord’s Supper.<sup>55</sup>

Huser further states, “The perspective of Calvin on the interwovenness and continuity of salvation history is crucial to understanding his strong commitment to a contextual, historical orientation in his exegesis and his dislike for allegory.”<sup>56</sup> Gal. 4:24 Paul uses typology.

Calvin appreciated use of images, metaphors, allegories, other figures of speech and linguistic devices. Critically looked at figures such as Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Hagar, Ishmael, Samaritan woman, Nicodemus and even David for their moral lapses.<sup>57</sup>

### **ii) Christ-centred Approach**

Central purpose of interpretation is to understanding the mind and intention of the biblical writer. While background and history, geography & chronology are important as well as use of Hebrew and Greek in interpretive work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit it is importance to recognize that Christ was the centre of the interpretive process. Christ is the key to interpretation. Without Christ to bring it to culmination, the OT is an obtuse book. Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic (Rom. 3; 1 Cor. 2) even though taught by St. Peter or St. Paul. Whatever preaches Christ should be apostolic.<sup>58</sup>

All Bible clearly point to Christ. Gen. 22 Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac found type of Christ. Moses, Noah, Melchizedek, Isaac,

Jacob, J. Material sense foundation, moral & mystical, allegorical to typology. Natural sense is the foundation on which all else must be built, figurative sense, hyperbole, metaphor and synecdoche. Mt. 5:34 oath taking exaggerated. And the emphasis is avoid defaming God's name.<sup>59</sup> Luther's lectures on *Psalms*, *Romans* and *Galatians* emphasize faith in Christ crucified counted as righteousness by a merciful God.<sup>60</sup>

Calvin's study of biblical text in the original language of Hebrew and Greek led for instance, to denounce excessive use of allegory (e.g. Origen). He has engaged with Church Fathers, e.g. John Chrysostom, debated exegetical details with them though frequently disagreed with them. Calvin argues 'the Fathers provide solid guidance in discerning the meaning of Scripture and teach us about the early Church, which is power and in better order than later times.'<sup>61</sup>

### iii) Brevity in Interpretation

The goal or purpose of the writer was the key to understanding the scope of the Scripture. He made use of the rhetorical agenda of Renaissance humanism, a return to the truest human knowledge including rhetoric to understand the author's meaning and to communicate it persuasively.<sup>62</sup>

Calvin wrote commentaries with "lucid brevity."<sup>63</sup> It was expressive of his commitment to exegesis in service of the church, including the laity. Interpretation emphasized what benefits Scriptures reveal and to communicate it persuasively. For Calvin Scriptures represent God's accommodation of revelation to human capacity so must interpreters accommodate their proclamation and teaching to the benefit of the audience.<sup>64</sup> He found no tension between the homiletical role of the exegete and the more dogmatic or didactic role of the theologian. For him, a dogmatic or systematic exposition of doctrine is a natural outgrowth of exegesis. Compare Preface to 1539 edition of *institutes* and *Romans'* commentary.<sup>65</sup>

Scriptures is read best in dialogue with one's predecessors and contemporaries. He rejected those interpretations that could not

find support in "simple, literary, historical, or genuine meaning of the text such as fanciful allegorical reading eg. Origen."<sup>66</sup> Calvin's theological interpretation of Scripture "finds a unity throughout the bible and brings Scripture to bear on the life and faith of its readers."<sup>67</sup>

### iv) Priority of the Gospel, Word & Sacrament

Luther was not another Christian Humanist, or scholarly reformer inspired by revival of learning or by Erasmus himself to assail ecclesiastical abuses due to the ignorance of people's philosophy of Christ.<sup>68</sup> "The dogmatic principle of law and gospel holds greater authority in his theology than strict exposition of biblical passages."<sup>69</sup> To him, Christ takes preference over the law.<sup>70</sup> "The law consists of the moral imperatives given by the righteous God to order society and especially to expose the sinner as a fallen creature. The gospel is the gracious love of God in Christ, which accepts the sinner even though fallen and unworthy. To read the Bible with the gospel as its heart is to "urge Christ" in each biblical text."<sup>71</sup>

Both James and Hebrews were held by Luther as not acceptable due to want of emphasis on the gospel. He held letter of James as a "strawy epistle" due to its dependence on works and Hebrews as erring on matter of repentance as it forbids sinners repentance after baptism.<sup>72</sup>

"Luther's use of Law and Gospel to understand and interpret scripture, however, introduced a dramatically new perspective into biblical interpretation . . . so did Zwingli's emphasis on the importance of the Spirit in biblical interpretation."<sup>73</sup>

### v) Role of the Holy Spirit

While commitment to study is the first step towards knowledge, Bible cannot be mastered by study or talent alone but by the influx of the Holy Spirit.<sup>74</sup> In *Bondage of the Will* Luther said, Scripture may be obscure in certain parts but not in what matters. "Its meaning is simple, clear and plain as day to the discerning

heart.<sup>75</sup> Spirit always guides the Church through the process of interpreting Scripture and not apart from that process. Holy Spirit is the guide of both the writer and the reader.<sup>76</sup>

### vi) Priesthood of All Believers

Luther protested against the Roman Church's understanding of the Church as the interpreter of the Scripture. According to him,

The Romanists want to be the only masters of Holy Scripture, although they never learn a thing from the Bible all their life long. . . . Their claim that only the people may interpret scripture is an outrageous fancied fable. . . . Although, they allege that their power was given to St. Peter when the keys were given him, it is clear enough that they keys were not given to Peter alone but to the whole community.<sup>77</sup>

Reformers emphasized the priesthood of all believers. No distinction between laity and clergy. The whole community of the church shares the priesthood of believers and thence in the understanding and interpretation of scripture (1 Cor. 12:12-13). They affirmed *Sola Scriptura* and the perspicuity of Scripture – Bible as plain and clear in content. Open for all believers. Moral uprightness, the Fathers and the Holy Spirit who spoke plainly help laity in their reading of Scripture. Believing the words of God than human senses is the ground for the understanding of scripture.<sup>78</sup> The common person of common sense, under guidance of Holy Spirit, is able to discern Scripture's truth. Scripture a gift given to the whole church and empowers all its members.<sup>79</sup>

### 3. Reformers and the Transformation of Biblical Interpretation

While the reformers had their differences on many aspects of interpretation there was broad agreement among several central precepts of Christian faith. They have emphasized the priority of Scripture over all else including church councils, church fathers and scholastic interpretation. The literal and plain meaning of

the text was stressed. Influenced by Renaissance Humanism they emphasized study of biblical languages and wrote commentaries on biblical books. They used new tools for scriptural interpretation such as, background, language, and historical context. They applied the plain, simple meaning of the text to their time, Christocentric approach to the biblical text and emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process.<sup>80</sup>

The reformers emphasized the need for commitment on the part of the scholar for fruitful result in the study of Scripture. For reformation to happen it is imperative to uproot the basic foundations of dogma, as Harnack<sup>81</sup> remarked, for any new principles of Christian faith to emerge.

Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and John Knox had a profound impact on the protestant interpretation of the Bible. It is their understanding and interpretation of the Bible grounded on a deep commitment to the authority of the Word coupled with deep study including the biblical languages and their complete reliance on the Holy Spirit that brought about monumental changes within church and society. Their work had helped to lay the foundation that paved the way for modern biblical criticism. Biblical interpretation has turned the full circle from its medieval moorings due to the work of the reformers. We do see a proliferation of methods in biblical interpretation but with apparently very little effect on Christian community, let alone the wider society. Perhaps, reformers provide us a challenge today to return to the spirit of reformation with regard to the practices of our faith and interpretation of scripture if there were to be any transformation within our churches.

### End Notes

- 1 Luther (1483-1546) was born of a peasant stock in Eisleben, Germany.
- 2 Calvin, born in Noyen, France in 1509. Died 1564
- 3 Zwingli (1484-1531) came from a family of farmers from the Continent St. Gallen of the Swiss Federation.

- 4 John Knox (1513-1572) Scottish Reformer, born in Haddington, Scotland in a farming family
- 5 Daniel J. Adams, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. rev. I.T.L (SSC Madras: CLS, 1987), 20-21.
- 6 Adams, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 21.
- 7 Gerlad Bray, "Medieval Biblical Interpretation" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Gen. Ed. (SPCK/Baker Academic, 2005), 500.
- 8 A. Berkeley Michelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 19630), 35.
- 9 Adams, *Interpreting the Bible*, 22.
- 10 Adams, *Interpreting the Bible*, 22-23.
- 11 "Medieval Biblical Interpretation", 501.
- 12 Adams, *Interpreting the Bible*, 23.
- 13 "Medieval Biblical Interpretation", 502.
- 14 "Medieval Biblical Interpretation", 503.
- 15 Gerald Bray, "Medieval Biblical Interpretation" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Gen. Ed. (SPCK/Baker Academic, 2005), 499 (499-503).
- 16 "Medieval Biblical Interpretation," 503; Henry Brinton, *The Context of the Reformation* (Hutchinson Educational, 19680, 68-80.
- 17 Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*
- 18 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* Steven L. McKenzie, ed. In chief, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2013), 527.
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- 20 Harnack, *History of Dogmas*, 1907, 7:24 cited in Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 528.
- 21 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 528.
- 22 LW 26.56-57 cited by Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 528.
- 23 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 527.
- 24 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 526.
- 25 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 528.
- 26 Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* transl. by R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 95-96. Cited by Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 529.

- 27 LW 31.10, *Scholastic Disputation* 1517 cited by Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 529.
- 28 Luther, *Lectures on Romans* trans.Pauek, 1961, 127 cited by Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation", 529-30.
- 29 LW 26. 308.
- 30 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 530.
- 31 Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1954, xx.
- 32 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 104.
- 33 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 527.
- 34 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 129.
- 35 LW 52, 2016,cited in Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 525.
- 36 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 148
- 37 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. In chief, Steven L. McKenzie vol. 2 (OUP, 2013), 255.
- 38 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation*, 156-58.
- 39 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2:255.
- 40 John L. Thompson, "John Calvin" *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* , Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Gen. Ed. (SPCK/Baker Academic, 2005), 96 (96-97).
- 41 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 152.
- 42 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 255.
- 43 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 253.
- 44 See T.H.L. parker, *Calvin's Preaching*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992.
- 45 Cited by John H. Leith, , "The Ethos of the Reformed Tradition" in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, Donakd K, McKim, ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B, Eerdmans, 1992, 13.
- 46 LW 52, 205f.
- 47 *Opera*, CR, XXXI, 14-36 cited E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation*, 140-41.
- 48 *Opera*, CR, XXXI, 14-36 cited E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation*, 140-41.
- 49 T.H.L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography*., Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975, 77.

- 50 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 114.
- 51 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 527.
- 52 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 253.
- 53 LW 26.62 quoted in Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 527.
- 54 T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*. Edinburgh: T & t Clark, 1986, 34.
- 55 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 255-57
- 56 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 257.
- 57 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 258.
- 58 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 525.
- 59 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 253.
- 60 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 122.
- 61 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 255.
- 62 John L. Thompson, "John Calvin" *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (hereafter *DTIB*), Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Gen. Ed. (SPCK/Baker Academic, 2005), 96 (96-97).
- 63 T.H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993, 85.
- 64 J. L. Thompson, "John Calvin" *DTIB*, 96..
- 65 J. L. Thompson, "John Calvin" *DTIB*, 96.
- 66 J. L. Thompson, "John Calvin" *DTIB*, 96-97.
- 67 J.L. Thompson, "John Calvin" *DTIB*, 96-97.
- 68 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 104-105.
- 69 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* Steven L. McKenzie, ed. In chief, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2013), 524.
- 70 LW 34.112 cited in Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 524.
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- 73 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. In chief, Steven L. McKenzie vol. 2 (OUP, 2013), 252.
- 74 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 107.
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- 78 E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 105.
- 79 Walter Sunberg, "Lutheran Interpretation" *OEBI* 1, 531.
- 80 Alan J. Hauser, "Reformed Christian Interpretation" *OEBI* 2, 260-61.
- 81 Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1907, 7.22

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## **Biblical Exegesis in John Calvin (1509-1564) and in the Dalit Bible Commentary with Special Reference to Their Respective Commentaries on John 4:1-42**

*Sunil M. Caleb\**

### **Introduction**

In this paper I will first focus on the biblical exegesis of John Calvin as displayed through his various commentaries on the books of the Bible. I will then look at Calvin's exegesis of Chapter 4:1-42. I will then discuss the biblical exegesis that is used in the Dalit Bible Commentary in general and Gospel of John 4:1-42 in particular. Then I will attempt to derive some conclusions.

### **1. The Bible in the Time of the Reformation**

It is sometimes thought by ill-informed Protestants that it was only the Protestant Reformation that brought the Bible to light after it had been hidden away by the Catholic Church for centuries. But, this was not the case, for the Bible was always used in the worship of the Catholic Church. Preaching on Sundays and on Feast days was from the Latin Bible and the Latin Vulgate edition of the Bible was painstakingly copied by thousands of monks who in their daily prayers would read and sing the scriptures. However, it was true that the laity had very little knowledge of the Bible, partly because it was in Latin which was not a language

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spoken in every-day life. Secondly, even if they could read Latin, the copies of the Bible were too expensive for them to purchase. However, two changes in the fifteenth century made it possible for the Bible to have the impact that it did in the time of John Calvin and the Reformation in general. The first was the Renaissance which resulted in the rediscovery of a vast store of ancient learning including classical texts from the past and the second, the invention and rapid development of printing.<sup>1</sup> An important result of new discoveries and studies on ancient texts was the preparation of fresh editions of these classics and in the case of Erasmus a fresh edition of the Greek New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Owing to the appearance of these new editions many interested scholars began to learn Greek and Hebrew so as to be able to get back to the original sources instead of relying on the Latin Vulgate. One of them was John Calvin, [1509-1564], a Frenchman, who was the main driver of the Reformation in Geneva, Switzerland, out of which came the Reformed church tradition now usually called Presbyterianism. Secondly, the way in which intellectual discourse was conducted forever changed with the invention of the Printing press in the fifteenth century. Ideas could now spread much quicker and because the cost of books came down, reach a far greater audience than was earlier possible.

### **2. Calvin's Efforts at Biblical Exegesis**

As the pastor and administrator of the reformed church in Geneva, John Calvin felt it his bounden duty to give to his flock the benefits of a clear but brief exposition of all the books of the Bible so that they were well educated in the Bible. Calvin wanted to depart from the way in which Protestant biblical commentaries of his time were written and return to the method of *brevitas et facilitas* (clarity and simplicity).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, as he wrote in 1551 in the preface to the Commentary on the Canonical Epistles,

I, at any rate, have destined the rest of my life, if leisure and freedom are granted me, chiefly to this task. The church to which I am bound [i.e. Geneva] shall enjoy the first fruit of this labour, that it may endure the longer. For although the discharging of my duties leaves me very little time, yet, however short it may be, I have determined to devote it to this kind of writing.<sup>4</sup>

John Calvin was an extremely brilliant man for, though his formal education was all in Latin, it seems that he picked up Greek and Hebrew partly by himself and partly with the help of scholars in France. In fact, he was so good at *koine* Greek that in his commentary on Romans published in 1540 he made his own translation into Latin and did not depend upon the Vulgate.<sup>5</sup> Calvin had a very high regard for the Bible for he saw that ‘the revelation given to us though Scripture is the only reliable source of our knowledge of God.’<sup>6</sup> This could also be summarized by the Latin phrase characteristic of the Reformation, ‘*sola scriptura*’ (by Scripture alone). Calvin did not hold to a mechanical dictation view of scripture and believed that though Scripture was definitely inspired by the Holy Spirit and made understandable through the Holy Spirit, this was not at the expense of the personalities of the human writers. Scripture had both a Divine side as well as a Human side to it. The ‘inspiration of scripture did not occur at the expense of the personalities of the human writers’.<sup>7</sup> Since he believed that the Bible was the only source of knowledge about God, Calvin spent most of his time in Geneva preaching (in French),<sup>8</sup> teaching and writing commentaries (in Latin) on different books of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> His first commentary, a commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans, was completed in 1539 and published in 1540.

Calvin in his biblical exegesis always sought to stick to the literal, historical sense of the text and was often very critical of the third century Alexandrian church father, Origen, whom he felt went too far in the direction of an allegorical interpretation of a biblical text.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, he was a great admirer of the

preaching and teaching of another early teacher of the faith, John Chrysostom, mainly because he found in his biblical exegesis, the ‘literal’ and ‘historical’ sense of the text. Even though John Chrysostom might have flaws, for Calvin he is to be appreciated for sticking to the plain meaning of scripture.<sup>11</sup>

It is obvious that Calvin, being engaged in practical matters of building up the theological understanding of the believers, did not write a proper article or book on his exegetical method. However, there are hints scattered here and there. In the Preface of his first commentary (Romans) he wrote:

...We both [Calvin and his friend Simon Gyrnaeus] thought that the chief virtue of an interpreter consists in lucid brevity (*perspicua brevitate*). And truly, since almost his only responsibility is to always open the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to explain, to the degree that he leads his readers away from it, he goes astray from his own purpose.<sup>12</sup>

Calvin sought to write in a way that was easily understandable to reasonably competent readers of Latin. This was part of his greater agenda for the general reform and renewal of the church.<sup>13</sup> As John L. Thompson writes, “Calvin was driven by a passion for application.”<sup>14</sup> In his biblical exegesis Calvin employed the best tools of his day in order to get right to what he thought was in the mind of the original writer of the biblical words. His goal was to understand the mind and the intention of the writer.<sup>15</sup> He believed that too many theological digressions would not be right and that is why he wrote his classic, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as a theological text-book which went into many editions and kept expanding in successive editions.<sup>16</sup>

Calvin had great regard for the Church Fathers (or Early Teachers of the Faith) though he often disagreed with them and would debate their exegesis in his commentaries. Thus, for him the Church Fathers offered ‘guidance in the meaning of Scripture, examples of and exhortation to moral uprightness and discipline,

and insight into the life and practices of the early church, which was better ordered and purer than the church of later centuries.’ Calvin thus sees the writings of the Early Teachers of Faith as a treasure that has been provided by God to assist with biblical interpretation and which are words that work hand in hand with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

Another fairly unique fact of Calvin’s biblical exegesis was the way that he treated the Old Testament. Though his theology was extremely Pauline and hence very Christo-centric, he refused to read the Old Testament as *always* pointing toward what became Christian doctrine. He was, in fact criticized, in his time for being too restrained in this respect and was even called a Judaizer for this. Thus, for example, though Calvin does read some psalms for their messianic content, they remain psalms about David.<sup>18</sup>

While Calvin’s biblical exegesis has been very influential, it has still been regularly targeted in recent years for ‘too close a tie to his theology or theological agenda, or for prizing practical application and theological exegesis over critical and technical insights.’<sup>19</sup> In that sense, Calvin’s commentaries are quite different from most commentaries that are produced today, which are mainly produced by biblical scholars and not necessarily pastors and therefore stress more the technical aspects of the text. They do this consciously as they want to ‘provide for the serious student of the Bible a new and up-to-date treatment of the text....’<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the editors of the Catholic, New Jerome Biblical Commentary write, ‘The goal and level of the NJBC [New Jerome Biblical Commentary], however, remain the same as those of the JBC [Jerome Biblical Commentary]: emphatically a *commentary* envisioning an audience of educated readers who wish to *study* the scriptures.’<sup>21</sup> However, Calvin’s commentaries are more than technical aids for the serious student of scripture: they are, I believe, an explanation of scripture which tries to point out the larger plan of God, ‘to save a fallen race of sinners through the death of Jesus who was the promised Messiah of the Old

Testament people of God and the full revelation of God for those in the New.’<sup>22</sup> There are thus, clear theological presuppositions and a straight-forward theological agenda behind the commentaries and it is precisely this part of Calvin’s biblical exegesis that is so similar to the exegetes of the Dalit Bible Commentary. Both have a theological agenda which they believe is visible in Scripture and which they are trying to bring out for the benefit of ordinary lay-Christians.

### 3. Dalit Bible Commentary

The Dalit Bible Commentary (henceforth DBC) has been an ecumenical project of the Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies (CDSS) and the brain-child of its Founder Director the late Revd. Dr. *habil.* James Massey.<sup>23</sup> Work on the New Testament section began in 2006 and was completed by 2009. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic writers contributed to this project.<sup>24</sup> As James Massey, the Chief Editor, writes,

The rationale behind the project is to bring out a commentary in which the primary focus is on the Dalits. Dalit Bible Commentary moves in that direction with due attention to scholarship, but at the same time remaining essentially relevant to the local level initiatives....Dalit Bible Commentary should enable Dalit sensibility to enter into dialogue with the Biblical word/text making the Scripture more meaningful to their lives.<sup>25</sup>

According to the Chairperson of the Editorial Board, the Jesuit Roman Catholic theologian, T.K. John, ‘the Dalit Bible Commentary is shouting aloud that the great majority of the Christian Community in the subcontinent of India, namely the Dalit Christians, are for the first time grasping and voicing their experience and understanding of the Word of God with pride.’<sup>26</sup> James Massey says that the approach taken in the DBC is a Dialogical-Contextual Approach to the biblical text.

The social sciences, (particularly sociology) and culture have been recognized as very important for the interpretation of the scripture.<sup>27</sup> The special effort by the DBC exegetes is to see how, ‘the royal consciousness, hierarchy, purity and pollution, etc. [can] be deconstructed and an alternate Dalit worldview in dialogue with the biblical worldview can be presented.’<sup>28</sup> The DBC seeks to ‘release the power of truth that should shake the terrain, and free and purify our contaminated Indian human community!’<sup>29</sup>

It is hoped that, through the DBC, the strength of the liberative power of the Word of God which so far was prevented from reaching the sinful structure of Caste, will now be able to reach it to bring it into judgment and thereby destroy it. The DBC seeks to redress the neglect of previous non-Dalit commentaries which ignored the issue of caste and did not question it. As T.K. John points out, ‘...how is it that this dismal picture was not looming large in the mental world of commentators of the Word of God? How is it that such a large Christian population figured only marginally in the minds of the traditional scholars? ...It [Caste] was taken for granted, not questioned.’<sup>30</sup>

#### **4. Commentary on Gospel of John 4: 1-42 by John Calvin**

John Calvin’s commentary on the Gospel of John was published in January, 1553, i.e., after quite a number of years of his stay in Geneva. It is thus the fruit of the very mature biblical exegete, John Calvin. It is interesting that Calvin chose to write his commentary on the Gospel of John before writing on the Synoptic gospels. There is a reason for this for when comparing the Synoptic Gospels to the Gospel according to John, Calvin states, ‘that the first three exhibit His [Christ’s] body, if I may be permitted to put it like that, but John shows His soul. For this reason I am accustomed to say that this Gospel is a key to open the door to the understanding of the others [the Synoptic gospels].’<sup>31</sup> Further he writes, ‘For whoever grasps the power of Christ as it is here graphically portrayed, will afterwards read with advantage what the others relate about the manifested Redeemer.’<sup>32</sup> As T.H.L. Parker states, ‘...for Calvin

the Jesus Christ of the Synoptic Gospels is understood in the light of the teaching of the Epistles and the Fourth Gospel.’<sup>33</sup>

However, when exegeting John 4: 1-42, John Calvin does at times show himself to be very much a man of his times. The patriarchal sensibilities, that Jesus was able to overcome, are certainly still very visible in Calvin. He tends to view the Samaritans as lower than the Jews and the Samaritan woman as someone who is of a questionable character. Calvin compares the Samaritans to Catholics (he calls them Papists) when he writes, ‘We must note that the Samaritans falsely boasted of being descended from the holy fathers. So today the Papists, though illegitimate and an adulterous seed, most arrogantly boast of the fathers and look down on the true children of God.’<sup>34</sup>

In his exegesis of John 4:9, Calvin partly supports the Jews against the Samaritans by stating, ‘They [the Samaritans] corrupted the worship of God and cultivated many perverse and false ceremonies and were deservedly detested by the Jews’. However, he also accuses the Jews when he writes, ‘Yet there is no doubt that the Jews for their part made zeal for the Law a pretext for carnal hatred. Many were moved more by ambition and envy and by indignation that the land given to them should be occupied by the Samaritans than by grief and sorrow that the worship of God had been so outraged.’<sup>35</sup> Further, in this verse he depicts the Samaritan woman as being aggressive and jeering at Jesus saying, ‘Oh! You’re sure that it’s all right to ask me for a drink, when you think we are so irreligious?’<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned earlier, when Calvin comes to describing the Samaritan woman he shows his anti-woman bias. Thus, in his commentary on 4:10, he writes, ‘Christ now takes the opportunity to preach about the grace and power of His Spirit, and that to a hussy who did not deserve Him to speak to her at all. A wonderful example of His goodness indeed! For what was there in this unhappy woman, that suddenly from a prostitute she became a disciple of the Son of God?’<sup>37</sup> Even when the woman asks Jesus to

give him the (living) water that he promises, Calvin does not seem to see the woman as asking an honest question. He writes, ‘There is no doubt that the woman knows perfectly well that Christ is speaking of spiritual water; but because she despises Him, she cares nothing for His promises. So long as we allow no authority to the one who speaks, we block the way of his teaching. Indirectly therefore the woman taunted Christ, as if to say, ‘You’ve got a lot to say for yourself, but I can’t see anything; put it into action if you can.’<sup>38</sup>

Calvin then states that Jesus, seeing that he is not making much headway with the woman who is aggressive, changes tack and attacks her by asking her a very personal question, “Go, call your husband”. He writes, ‘...for when He (Jesus) saw that His words were received with jeers, He applied an appropriate remedy to the disease. He struck the woman’s conscience with a conviction of her sin.’<sup>39</sup>

In his commentary on verses 17 & 18 Calvin writes, ‘... He (Jesus) openly accuses her of wickedness. I do not think He is referring to one act of adultery, for when He says that she has had five husbands, we may suppose it happened because she drove her husbands to divorce her with her wanton and stubborn ways.... your divorces cost you your reputation and you gave yourself up to prostitution.’<sup>40</sup>

In his commentary on verse 22, Calvin writes, ‘He (Jesus) condemns the form of worshipping God which the Samaritans used as superstitious and false, and declares that the acceptable and lawful form was with the Jews. And He put as the reason for the difference that the Jews received assurance from the Word of God about His worship, whereas the Samaritans had no certainty from God’s lips.’<sup>41</sup>

However, Calvin is very appreciative of the Samaritan woman when she goes to tell the rest of her community about Jesus. As he writes, ‘We should note the woman’s earnestness and eagerness all the more, in that it was only a small spark of

faith that kindled them. She had scarcely tasted Christ when she broadcast His fame though the whole city.’<sup>42</sup>

### **5. DBC Commentary on Gospel of John by Raj Irudaya SJ**

In his introductory essay on the relevance of the Gospel of John to Dalits, Raj Irudaya states, ‘the Gospel of John is basically the Gospel of the Oppressed and therefore can be deemed as the Gospel of Dalits.’<sup>43</sup> This is because the gospel is the collective faith expression of the oppressed and persecuted community led by the ‘beloved disciple’ of Jesus mentioned in John. Following the work of Raymond E. Brown, Raj Irudaya, sees the community of the ‘beloved disciple as being composed of the followers of John the Baptist, the followers of Jesus in Samaria and Gentile converts.’<sup>44</sup> The community was discriminated against and rejected from the mainstream of Jewish life.

In his commentary on John 4, Raj Irudaya states that, ‘the Samaritans who were treated as the Dalits of Palestine were forced to undergo the pangs of socio-cultural marginalization. The Jews held them as unclean and impure right from birth since the Samaritan women were considered to be perpetually in a state of ceremonial uncleanness.’<sup>45</sup> Jesus, according to Raj Irudaya, ‘reveals his freedom and courage to talk to women in public in spite of the dominant socio-cultural taboos. Jesus as a Jew dared to drink for the utensil of the Samaritan woman and thus defied a discriminatory social practice.’<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to Calvin speaking about the Samaritan woman in particular, Raj Irudaya writes, ‘...she [Samaritan woman] is not to be looked on as a sexual deviant because she is said to have had legally five husbands (v 18) and not just five men. Her chaotic marital life could have been the disastrous result of the prevalent Israelite custom of levirate marriage which had forced her to be married to the five brothers of the same family or of repeated divorces or of male supremacy. Thus she is the victim of the exploitative position of the men of Jesus’ times in marital life and divorce practices.’<sup>47</sup> Raj Irudaya sees the Samaritan woman

as representing Dalit women who become agents of liberation. As he writes, ‘The Dalit women by their God-experience and thirst for humanism, by their active participation in their struggle for humanizing themselves and society and by their resilience and determination to usher in a society of freedom, fellowship and equality become the co-partners in the project of building up a just and equitable society.’<sup>48</sup> The DBC commentary clearly shows how the passage from John Chapter 4 can be a powerful force for liberation of Dalits and Dalit women in particular.

### Conclusion

A study of the biblical exegesis undertaken by John Calvin and the DBC and Raj Irudaya show that God’s revelation is a universal one, but that its reception is dependent upon human ability to grasp that revelation. This is actually what Calvin also mentioned in his concept of accommodation where he stated that God ‘accommodates’ God’s revelation according to our understanding capacity. Thus, Calvin attempts in his time to bring out the meaning of the Word with simplicity and clarity. This does not, however, mean that he is free from the prejudices of his time, which is seen in his rather anti-women bias. The DBC too, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seeks to make the Word relevant to Dalits and make it a source of liberation for them from oppressive social structures and marginalization. Hence, the Word of God can and does speak to different times and different social contexts. Thus the task of the Church is to encourage students of the Bible to interpret the Word in different times and apply it to different cultural and social contexts for the Word of God never fails to speak relevantly to diverse times and situations. For this it is essential that the work of writing biblical commentaries should continue in different contexts.

### End Notes

- 1 Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, Downers Grove, IL, USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011, 46.
- 2 This resulted in Erasmus (a Dutch Renaissance scholar) pointing out mistakes in the official Latin Bible of the Catholic Church, the Vulgate. These mistakes were not necessarily due to errors in translation by Jerome, but due to copying errors down the centuries.
- 3 Richard C. Gamble, ‘*Brevitas et Facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin’s Hermeneutic’, *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 47 (1985), 17.
- 4 Quoted in T.H.L Parker, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, Second edition, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993, 9.
- 5 Alan J. Hauser, “Reformed Christian Interpretation,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Steven L. McKenzie, Vol. 2, Oxford: O.U.P., 2013: 255
- 6 Amit Thomas, *Basics of Christian Theology*, New Delhi: Christian World Imprints: 2016, 71
- 7 David L. Puckett, “John Calvin” , *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, edited by Donald K. McKim, Downers Grove, IL. USA: IVP, 2007.,289.
- 8 It is said that in the course of his ministry in Geneva, John Calvin preached some four thousand sermons. Most of the preaching was by preaching through a Biblical book, verse by verse which is, of course, the pattern that his commentaries also follow.
- 9 John Calvin wrote commentaries on all the books of the New Testament except 2, 3 John and the Book of Revelation [An interesting omission]. A large number of the Old Testament books were also covered.
- 10 Alan J. Hauser, “Reformed Christian Interpretation,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, 255
- 11 John L. Thompson, “Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter,” *Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, edited by Donald McKim, Cambridge, UK: C.U.P., 2004, .63.
- 12 Quoted in John L. Thompson, “Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter”, 60.
- 13 John L. Thompson, “Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter,” 63.
- 14 John L. Thompson, “Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter,” 71.
- 15 John L. Thompson, “Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter,” 61.
- 16 The first edition published in 1536 just had six chapters while the final edition of 1559 had eighty and was divided into four books!
- 17 John L. Thompson, “Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter.” 63.

- 18 John L. Thompson, "Calvin as a biblical interpreter." p.69. Another example of this is his treatment of Isaiah 7:14, traditionally seen in Christian circles as a prophecy about Jesus' virgin birth. Here, Calvin in his commentary on Isaiah *first* wants the reader to know that this was a word by the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz about how he will be saved from the King of Assyria if he trusts in God. He does not jump to Christology immediately.
- 19 John L. Thompson, "Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter." 71.
- 20 Preface to *The New Bible Commentary*, Third Edition, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970, v.
- 21 Preface to *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, [Edition for India], Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1990, xv. Italics given in the text.
- 22 John L. Thompson, "Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter." 68.
- 23 The Revd. Dr. James Massey passed away in March 2015.
- 24 This is an example of how far Protestant and Roman Catholic biblical scholarship and co-operation has progressed since the Second Vatican Council (1958-1965). This would have been unthinkable for John Calvin.
- 25 James Massey, "Preface" in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, edited by T.K. John SJ, New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2010, xvi.
- 26 T.K. John SJ, "And Why Dalit Bible Commentary Now?" in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, edited by T.K. John SJ, New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2010, 4.
- 27 James Massey, "Preface" in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, xvi.
- 28 James Massey, "Preface" in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, xvii.
- 29 T.K. John SJ, "And Why Dalit Bible Commentary Now?" 4.
- 30 T.K. John SJ, "And Why Dalit Bible Commentary Now?" 5.
- 31 John Calvin, *The Gospel according to St. John 1-10*, translated by T.H.L. Parker, Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995, 6.
- 32 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 6.
- 33 T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, Second Edition, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993, 35
- 34 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 93.
- 35 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 89.
- 36 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 90.
- 37 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 90.
- 38 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 93.
- 39 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 93f.
- 40 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 94.

- 41 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 98.
- 42 John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 104.
- 43 Raj Irudaya SJ, 'The Relevance of the Gospel of John to the Dalits', in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, 36
- 44 Raj Irudaya SJ, 'The Relevance of the Gospel of John to the Dalits', in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, 37.
- 45 Raj Irudaya SJ, 'John' in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, 281.
- 46 Raj Irudaya SJ, 'John' in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, 282.
- 47 Raj Irudaya SJ, 'John' in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, 281.
- 48 Raj Irudaya SJ, 'John' in *Dalit Bible Commentary*, 282.

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## The Unsung Reformers of Israel

*Alfred Lalruatfela\**

### Introduction

In the Old Testament time there were marginalized sections in the society, such as – the poor, widow, orphan, etc., that need special protection. Old Testament law codes<sup>1</sup> addressed their pathetic diverse socio-economic conditions of poverty, hunger and thirst, homelessness, economic exploitation, legal injustices, lack of sufficient farmland, etc. Law codes in the Old Testament are not the product of one particular historical context. Rather they were produced in different socio-historical contexts of the Israelite people. Group of writers in different period of history with different social issues and context revised, rewrote and revitalized their laws to meet the demands of the context. As a result, we find the same law recorded in different places with subtle modification. Laws were not only copied but modified wisely; the reformative outlook of these unsung reformers is evident behind the laws of the Old Testament.

There are many laws<sup>2</sup> to protect the marginalized section recorded in the Old Testament. Yet, to make the study more concrete the study is limited to *interest on loan* found in the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 22:25), Holiness code (Lev. 25:35-37) and Deuteronomic code (Deut. 23:29-20). As only J, D and P sources records *interest on loan*, background studies and contribution of E source will not be dealt. At the same time this article will limit

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itself to three law codes such as – Covenant code, Deuteronomic code and Holiness code that records *law against interest on loan*. Traditio-Historical Approach<sup>3</sup> and Sociological Approach<sup>4</sup> are used as the main method of study for this topic. Traditio-Historical approach is employed to study different literary tradition behind the law codes, and Sociological approach for studying the socio-economic and cultural condition behind the laws.

### 1. JEDP Theory

Traditionally, Moses was regarded as the author of the first five books of the Old Testament. However, no such claim is made in these books, though in few passages Moses is said to have made specific written records (Exod. 17: 14; 24:4; 34:27; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9,24), or to have ‘spoken’ certain passages (Deut. 1:55; 4:45; 31:30).<sup>5</sup> With a careful reading of Pentateuch one would realize that the same story, event and laws are being repeated, but with variations like – different usage of names, places and addition to the content or the text. Due to this, Jewish scholars like Ibn Ezra and Ben Jasos way back in the middle ages questioned the authorship of Moses. Later, during the reformation and Counter-Reformation periods people like Carlstadt, Spinoza, R.Simon also expressed their doubts on Moses authorship of the Pentateuch once again. However, the real credit on Pentateuchal criticism goes to Jean Astruc, who in 1753 argued that Moses had compared and arranged two chief sources and several auxiliary ones in four columns, which were transformed into one continuous text by later copyist.<sup>6</sup> In 1853 H. Hupfeld who developed this hypothesis, found the existence of three originally independent continuous sources in Genesis: two Elohist sources- E<sup>1</sup> (original Elohist) and E<sup>2</sup> (Later Elohist, which later known as P), and a Yahwistic source-J combined by a redactor.<sup>7</sup> A year later, E. Riehm propounded that Deuteronomy (D) is an independent work, distinct from the other books of the Pentateuch. Thus, this resulted in laying a foundation for literary criticism, which thought in terms of four primary components set in a specific chronological order – Priestly (P) –

Elohists (E) – J (Jaweh) – Deuteronomy (D). However, the thorough study of Graf, Kuenen and Wellhausen brought about revision of the assumed chronological sequence of the sources. The result of the sequence is J-E-D-P. This hypothesis is generally accepted by subsequent scholarships along with its suggested dating, such as J = 9<sup>th</sup> century, E = 8<sup>th</sup> century, D = 7<sup>th</sup> century and P = 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Hence, JEDP is an umbrella term for the four different sources which the redactors used for compiling Pentateuch.

### 1.1. The JEDP Reformers

Students of Old Testament must be well aware of the said JEDP theory, yet entitling the term ‘reformers’ to the JEDP writers may be a new thing. It is obvious that these groups of writer lived in different contexts having different theological outlook. Their variation in keeping the record is not simply to be taken as negligence. Rather it must be taken as their attempt in reforming theology as per the demands of their context. Especially in the case of law, to apply a century old law in its exact form may not be applicable to the context at hand. At this juncture it appears that the writers did make changes to meet the demands of the context but not losing its authentic theology. Therefore, the writers of JEDP were not simply the one who copied their sacred writing; rather they were the reformers who updated their theology based on context. They lived in a stage where copying and rewriting was necessary as the material for writing were not lasting in those days. It is therefore possible that they update their theology in due course of copying. It must have been that J the earliest source recorded their story orally transmitted through generations, which the E source made use in their writing, also by the D and P source.

### 1.2. Law codes and the JEDP Reformers

There are different collections of legal texts which are usually called law codes or codices, such as – the Decalogue, the Book of the Covenant, Laws of Leviticus (Priestly code and Holiness code) and Deuteronomic Law. Many laws to protect the marginalized

section in society found in the Pentateuch emerged out of the J, D and P sources. Unfortunately, there is no record of legal text in E source. The Hebrew word for ‘law’ is *torah* (תּוֹרָה). It is not simply law in general sense, rather, it originally means ‘direction,’ ‘guidance,’ or ‘instruction’. Its root *yrh* (הֵרָה) meaning is ‘to throw’ which means ‘to point out’ (as by pointing out by hand) so as to direct, guide or giving instruction.<sup>9</sup> Since, it is guidance for the people in their day to day lives it plays a vital role in Israelite society. Therefore, knowing its impact the JEDP Reformers make use of them by adding what they felt is left out when they examine their context in the process of rewriting. Their record of the ‘law against interest on loan’ may clearly highlight their variation. To understand their differences, let us look at *interest on loan* founded in the Covenant Code (Exod. 22:25) which belongs to J Source, Holiness code (Lev. 25:35-37) which belongs to P source and Deuteronomic code (Deut. 23:29-20) which belongs to D source.<sup>10</sup>

Exodus 22:25 (Covenant Code)

*If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not be to them as a creditor; you shall not charge interest from them.*

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 (Deuteronomic Code)

*You shall not charge interest on loans to your fellow Israelite whether interest on money or interest on food, or interest on anything that may earn interest. To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to Israelite you may not charge interest; so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to, in the Land<sup>11</sup> in which you are entering to possess.*

Leviticus 25:35-37 (Holiness Code)

*And when your fellow becomes poor, and become dependent on you, you shall strengthen them; as a sojourner or temporary resident they shall live with you. Do not take interest or increase, but fear your God; and*

*let your fellow live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest, or provide them food at a profit.*

## 2. Interest on Loan in its different context

Lending money with interest was a common practice in Ancient West Asia. In his studies of the different loans indicated in different parts of Ancient West Asia, David L. Baker concludes that making loans without either interest or alternative remuneration to the creditor was quite rare in the Ancient West Asia. He added that, “it was standard practice to charge interest in the Ancient West Asia, at rates which would be considered quite high compared with many modern societies.”<sup>12</sup> Laws regarding loans that are found in Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 23:19-20 and Leviticus 25:35-37 shows that Israel people also practice the same. However, Israelite law differentiate loan between constructive loan and interest loan which makes it unique from their Ancient West Asian counterparts. Constructive loan forbids charging interest on loans to the poor among the Israelite, whereas it permits to charge interest on loans to foreigner.

### 2.1. Covenant Code

Exodus 22:25 (Hebrew 22:24)

If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not be to them as a creditor; you shall not charge interest from them.

The name ‘Covenant Code’ or ‘Book of Covenant’ is given to the section of laws found in Exod. 20:22-22:33. It is widely agreed that the Covenant Code was an independent collection of laws and was the earliest of the law collections. It is generally dated to the period after the entrance of the Israelites in Canaan.<sup>13</sup> This approach is based on an assumption that each law collection represents the outlook and practice of a distinct social and legal context. Since, it does not mention any royal administration of law; it is usually placed in the pre-monarchical period.<sup>14</sup> There are

several reasons for supporting pre-monarchical dating such as – (1) the legal material reflects actual practices and presupposes a settled lifestyle; (2) there is no mention of the monarchy; and (3) the material predates the composition of the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>15</sup> In the light of all these, it is probable that the book of covenant originated during the period between Israel’s entry into Canaan and before the emergence of monarchy. The authorship of J is plausible. The language and theology of Covenant code is very similar to J writings. It could be that J depending on the earlier orally transmitted material documented the law in their linguistic style and outlook.

In that pre-monarchic Israel, being in the cross roads of trade routes Israel was introduced individualistic thinking with the goods and ideas of the entire West Asian practices.<sup>16</sup> Hence, there was a danger that the rich might demands heavy interest like their surrounding nations which will increase the plight of the poor. By documenting the law which their leader Moses received, the J reformers reaffirm the Israelite that they are the covenant community, different from their Canaanite counterpart, and they must practice differently. The poor are called ‘my people’ which shows their nearness to the heart of God. If the plight of the poverty forces a person to borrow money from the rich, interest should not be charged to gain profit; rather it must dealt with brotherly care as a fellow member of Yahweh’s family.<sup>17</sup> Charging interest would never suffice the problem of the poor but increase. Loans are to be given on grounds of community’s fighting against poverty. Hence, through this law J Reformers insists the Israelites who are in a position of lending, to lend loans without interest to their fellows. Loans were to be used as an attempt to alleviate poverty.<sup>18</sup> In its root meaning the term ‘interest’ (רִשְׁתָּהּ) implies ‘bites off.’ It is an interest on capital and it describes according to S. Stein, “the action of the creditor who ‘bites off’ a certain sum he/she expects to receive at the end of a fixed period”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, to charge interest on loans would mean biting off their fellow

brothers and sisters. Interest free loans alone would enable the poor to restart their life because with the interest they don't have chance for survival.

## 2.2. Deuteronomic Code

Deuteronomy 23:19-20

You shall not charge interest on loans to your fellow Israelite whether interest on money or interest on food, or interest on anything that may earn interest. To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to Israelite you may not charge interest; so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to, in the Land<sup>20</sup> in which you are entering to possess.

Here we encounter that Israelites are prohibited to charge interest on any loans to their fellow Israelites. The development on the substance and inclusion of permission to charge interest on loans to the foreigner (נָכְרִי) makes it clear that the society in which the law is reframed is different from that of the previous one. Concerning the substance of the loan, we find that Covenant Code includes only 'money' whereas Deuteronomic law adds 'food' and 'anything else' (money, food, and anything else).

Chapter 12-16 of the book of Deuteronomy is known as Deuteronomic Code. The authorship and Date of the book of Deuteronomy is one of the most controversial issues in the study of the Old Testament since the time of Wilhelm Martin Labrecht de Wette,<sup>21</sup> way back in 1805 C.E. till today.<sup>22</sup> There is no general consensus among scholars with regards to the author. The Book has been ascribed to Moses, Samuel or judges, priests, prophets, scribes and wisemen. It has been dated in various periods from the time of Moses to the time of the exile.<sup>23</sup> However, with the subtle modification of the law from previous ones and it's religious, socio-economic and humanistic concerns the most probable date<sup>24</sup> would be 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE by the D Reformers. The identification of the Deuteronomic law with the book discovered in the

eighteenth year of Josiah's reign is highly likely, but taken this as a basis for the date of compilation of the book of Deuteronomy as propounded by De Wette, Graf and Jullius Wellhausen is somewhat doubtful. Hezekiah had attempted reformation before Josiah. Since there was no record that Hezekiah's reformation was inspired by a book, and Josiahnic reformation seems to have been the outcome of the discovery of the book, it appears that the book was written shortly after King Hezekiah's reign before Josiah by the D Reformers. When it was found in the temple Josiah used it as a basis for his reformation.

Into that 7<sup>th</sup> century Israelites society, the economy of the land was in the hands of small Israelite elite groups, poor Israelites depended their lives on ruling class of their society who squeezed all they could out of the peasant economic base in order to survive and prosper marginally.<sup>25</sup> Their good traditional brotherhood and sisterhood, and care for their fellows declined; the capable people of society concern themselves by neglecting the poor around them who are their fellow brothers and sisters.

The term 'fellow Israelite'<sup>26</sup> is used instead of poor. The reference to the Israelite as a fellow clearly shows that all members of the covenant community are one big family and that each member, particularly the poor and needy should be treated so.<sup>27</sup> This is a wise counter method of the D Reformers to the prevailing social classes in the society. Unlike the previous law (Covenant code) the D Reformers include permission to charge interest on a loan to the foreigners (נָכְרִי). Foreigners 'nokri' (נָכְרִי) are not part of the covenant community and non-members are not subjected to the law.<sup>28</sup> They are mostly businessmen visiting the country for purposes of trade. Israel was in the middle of flourishing trade between Egypt and Babylon. Businessmen borrow in order to invest in merchandise and make profit,<sup>29</sup> not for subsistence living.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, D Reformers updated their law and legalized interest on loan to the foreigners.

### 2.3. Holiness Code

Leviticus 25:35-37

And when your fellow becomes poor, and become dependent on you, you shall strengthen them; as a sojourner or temporary resident they shall live with you. Do not take interest or increase, but fear your God; and let your fellow live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest, or provide them food at a profit.

Here we find addition like ‘sojourner’ instead of ‘foreigner,’ and ‘fear your God’ which were absent in the previous laws. We also find an inclusion of ‘food’ as in the Deuteronomic Code. The outlook of Holiness Code is priestly in nature. The addition of ‘fear your God’ clearly depicts this priestly theological outlook.

The book of Leviticus consists almost entirely of laws and regulations.<sup>31</sup> Leviticus 17 to 26 has been regarded as the ‘Holiness Code’ because of its repeated reference to, and demand for, holiness. In the Old Testament critical studies from the nineteenth century onward, particularly in those represented by Wellhausen hypothesis, scholars have viewed Leviticus as belonging to what is considered to the Priestly stratum (P). P was thought to have been produced after the Babylonian exile. In later pentateuchal study, P itself was further divided into multiple sources. Leviticus 17-26 in particular was thought to constitute a document separate from P and therefore, named it ‘Holiness Code.’<sup>32</sup> However, it has been the scholarly consensus that Holiness Code was edited by P based on the earlier edition. Why would P Reformers in the post-exilic period include ‘Holiness Code’ in their writing? This calls for a contextual based study of the law.

The task of national reconstruction was not without difficulties. When all the leaders and prominent figure were taken away into Babylonian captivity, people from the northern part of Israel and foreigners migrated and settled in Judah. Even when they return there was a tension between the returnees and those who had remained in Judah, the returnees repelling the attempt

of the "peoples of the land."<sup>33</sup> Among those who remained in the land there were people who adopted Samaritan form of Jewish religion. For Jewish the Samaritan are considered as outcaste. This creates an ongoing socio-economic and political rivalry between the two parties. Moreover, there was class division between the wealthy, who were largely returned exiles advantaged by Persian-backed privileges, and a more impoverished populace of small landholders who were sliding into debt and losing their properties by foreclosure and their children by debt servitude.<sup>34</sup> Hence, at this point of friction the Priestly Reformers revitalized their old laws to settle the issue.

The word for ‘poor’ (מוֹדָד) is explained by the idiom ‘and become dependent on you’ (וּמִקְשָׁה יָדוּ עִמָּךְ). It literally means “if his hand stumbles, buckles.” This image is usually applied to stumbling feet. Here, the sense is not physically graphic, but rather situational.<sup>36</sup> It express the idea that a poor, who may have already mortgaged part of his land to release funds, but cannot make ends meet and turns to another more wealthy Israelite for help. To ‘strengthen’ in this context is not just to give moral and spiritual support but to provide practical help, such as making an interest-free loan or selling food on credit without increasing the price.<sup>37</sup> To this beneficiary the sojourner (גֵּר or תּוֹשֵׁב) are included<sup>38</sup> Extraction of interest is the main prohibition because it forbids the poor to grow in economy. Agriculture, the backbone of their economy time and again faced disaster due to landslide, earthquake, floods, etc. In such situation the only option left for the poor people was taking of loan from the rich.

The drive to produce commercial crops for the market with a view to gain maximum economic advantage hardens the lives of poor people who owned no lands of their own while the rich are benefited. At the same time, it prompt the wealthy classes to take advantage of the plight of the poor who do not even have adequate food to eat.<sup>39</sup> Individualistic thinking drives away the concern for their fellow Israelite. Through this law the J Reformers made it

clear that their fellow poor must be cared for, and no one should take advantage of another person's calamity to profit from it.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, there was a practice of debt slavery in their society; a practice of lending money to the poor and make them slaves if they could not return their debts. The process of loans were made in such a way that the poor must not be able to repay due to its heavy interest. Indeed, the poor were indirectly pushed to take loan and become debt slave. In order to counter this pathetic social practice, the J Reformers insist free interest loan based on their traditional law with a new look.

### Conclusion

From the above discussion it is obvious that the JEDP writers were mindful of the social well-being of the poor in their different context. They were the one who revisit their traditional law and writings, playing the role of reformer in their days. The addition of new substances to the law which they rewrote clearly shows their inclusive approach. For the sake of developing an inclusive community they dare to update their traditional law. They protect the weaker group through their revitalized law, aiming to provide space for them where they would enjoy fullness of life. This is a challenge for theologian and the churches today.

### End Notes

- 1 In the Old Testament there are different collections of legal text which are usually called law codes or codices found in the first five books called Pentateuch, such as - the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2-17; Deut. 5:6-21), the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22-23:33), Laws of Leviticus comprising-Priestly Code (Lev. 1-7) and Holiness Code (11-15), and the Deuteronomic Law (Deut. 12-16).
- 2 For instance *release laws-for land* (Exod. 23:10-12, Lev. 25:1-7) and for *poor people* (Lev. 25:8-13), *law concerning right measurement* (Lev. 19:35-36, Deut 25:13-16), *law concerning participation of the poor in festivals* (Deut 16:11 cf. Exod. 23:14f, Lev. 23:15-21) and *the gleaning law* (Deut. 24:20-21, Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22) etc.
- 3 Traditio-Historical Approach is derived from the Latin words '*traditio*' which means 'process of transmission' and '*traditum*' which means 'the materials that are transmitted from one person, group or generation to

another through verbal transmission'. Von Rad and Martin Noth developed Traditio-Historical research in its modern sense. Von Rad (in his monographs of 1938) began with assumption that the final stage is a long process of development and that it must be possible to recover some of the earlier stages and circumstances of its composition. Noth, in 1948, expanded on Von Rad's work by shifting the emphasis to the stages of tradition growth and by demonstrating the importance of critical analysis of all details of this growth process. Hence, in its approach Traditio-Historical Approach is strongly related with previous approaches like Source Criticism and Form Criticism of Biblical world. All cultures have different traditions that are passed down in the form of stories, songs, poems, confessions, creeds and so on. Tradition criticism is concerned both with the nature of these traditions and how they are employed and modified in the course of community's history. It inquires not only how the textual units come to their final form but also seek to trace the entire process by which the units came into being. In so doing, the socio-economic and religious environments that shape and give significance to traditions are the focus of the study. See - Douglas A. Knight, "Tradition History" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol 6, edited by David Noel Freedman, New York: Double Day, 1992, 634; John H. Hayes & R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987, 92.

- 4 The publication of George Mendenhall's seminal essay on '*The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine*' in 1962 is usually regarded as providing the stimulus to sociological approach to biblical studies. However, the most formidable and influential work of Norman K. Gottwald has brought through the sociological method a radical change in biblical interpretation. Gottwald understood the 'sociological method,' as he termed it, as providing the tools for reconstructing the whole social system of ancient Israel, including functions, roles, institutions, customs, norms, judicial and religious organization, military and political structures, and the material aspect of culture. He saw this as complementing historical-critical studies in order to 'reconstruct ancient Israel as a lived totality.' It is an objective of sociological method to identify patterns of social life within the Bible that has a bearing in one way or the other for the contemporary religious or secular life. Moreover, the sociological method does tend to pay more attention to the economic aspect of human life rather than to its personal and religious dimensions. See - Keith W. Whitelam, "The social world of the Bible" in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by John Barton, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 36; George Mendenhall '*The Tribes of Yahweh: Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E*' which was published in 1979 brought into being sociological approach into Old Testament studies; Daniel Jones Muthunayagom, "Contemporary Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation" in *Interweaving Methodology and Praxis-Exploring Disciplinary Option in*

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- 5 George W. Anderson, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1994, 19-22.
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  - 28 L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 263.
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  - 30 L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 263.
  - 31 It contains two codes of law- 'Holiness Code' and 'Priestly Code'. Laws that contain regulations for various sacrificial offerings founded in chapter 1-7 and list of clean and unclean foods, and detailed instruction on hygiene and cleanliness from chapter 11- 15 is entitled 'Priestly Code'. However, this code would not be the focus here for the passage that are selected for this thesis are from the entitled 'Holiness Code' found in Leviticus chapter 17 -26.
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## **A Call for Reformation in Indian Ecclesial Context by Affirming Belongingness of People with Same-Sex Orientation: Re-Interpreting Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13**

***B. Silpa Rani\****

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### **Introduction**

The commemoration of 500<sup>th</sup> year of Protestant Reformation in 2017 is not only an occasion for a mere remembrance of the event of Reformation but a call to participate in the process of reformation of the church. It involves embracing our own grassroots, hearing the voices that are unheard, standing for the so-called human-made odds by affirming belongingness for all in the ecclesia that influence both the church and the society. The attempt in this essay is discussing the issue of homosexuality which is being stigmatized by the church and society and calls for reformation that would affirm the belongingness of the people of same sex orientation in Indian church, by re-interpreting the biblical texts of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that are used to condemn homosexuality.

On Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2016, in Vatican City, Pope Francis said, "the Church should seek forgiveness from homosexuals for the way they had treated them." He recalled the Church's teachings: "homosexuals should not be discriminated against. They should be respected,

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accompanied pastorally.” He added, “I think that the Church not only should apologize ... to a gay/lesbian person whom it offended but it must also apologize to the poor as well, to the women who have been exploited, to children who have been exploited by (being forced to) work.” He is of the view, “if a person who has that condition, who has good will, and who looks for God, who are we to judge?”<sup>1</sup>

This statement of Pope Francis has challenged the church and institutions in a global context as church has been generally homophobic and unsteady to affirm the belongingness of the people with same-sex orientations. As the church has become a model of wider social context, her foremost task is to understand that belongingness<sup>2</sup> is a fundamental aspect of what it is to be human.<sup>3</sup> But in global context it has been usually observed that the church inhabits the aspects of homophobia by excluding and marginalizing the people with same-sex orientation. The sixteenth century ‘*ecclesia reformata*’: the church that experiences of ‘having been reformed’ was highly significant for its historic identity that it should be ‘*semper reformanda*’: ever open to further reform.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, there is a need for the church to understand the scriptural basis with its proper contextual derivations which are often ambiguous and sometimes veiled to the outer world. Especially in the Old Testament in the Holiness Code prescribed in the book of Leviticus which deals about the sexual orientation of homosexuals in chapter 18 and chapter 20 which have been always used as the key verses to consider homosexuality as sin and thus needs to be averted. However with the emergence of hermeneutical approaches during the past decades provided avenues to understand the scriptural basis on homosexuality in a broader way. This study aims at investigating the law codes regarding homosexuality from the aforesaid portions of the book of Leviticus in order to understand the nature of homosexual orientation and to seek a space for the people of same-sex

orientation to affirm their belongingness in Indian Church at the larger inclusive community, steeping towards reformation.

### **1. *Sola Scriptura*: A Challenge to Re-Interpret Biblical Texts**

Jerry Pillay, the president of World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in his address at the General Council 2017 held at Leipzig, Germany, stress on the following<sup>5</sup>: At the heart of the Reformation was the quest to return to the Bible. The Reformation saw a new importance being attached to Scripture or the importance of Scripture being recovered. The idea of *sola scriptura*, “by Scripture alone,” became one of the great slogans of the Reformers. The Reformers enthroned the Scripture by dethroning the dogmas of the church. The difference between the Reformers and medieval theology at this point concerns how Scripture is *re-defined* and *re-interpreted*, rather than the *status* that it is given. It is this interpretation of Scripture in a changing world that becomes a crucial element for renewal and transformation. It is a stark reminder that the Reformation cannot only be discussed in terms of its ecclesial meaning but also in its relation to culture as a whole. The issue of context and biblical interpretation and re-interpretation becomes a serious matter of importance. The above points establish the need for Reformed theology to seek renewal and transformation in the area of further understanding *sola scriptura*, the focus is not only on what the interpretation is but, more significantly, on “who” is interpreting, by protecting the texts from being co-opted by the powerful and elite by giving expression to the voices of marginalized, neglected and stigmatized.

Accordingly, the study of the Leviticus texts is focused on the sociological approach of the holiness code regarding homosexuality in understanding the texts of Leviticus 18:20, 20:13. The sociological approach seeks to understand the forces through which the communities and societies order their lives through arrangements of power and symbols in the society. Biblical interpretation is significantly rooted in the reading of

the ancient recent texts and ancient texts were inherently related with ancient society.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the social units of life supply an indispensable ground for biblical studies.<sup>7</sup> It is the sociological approach that makes the people active to get the fresh meaning of the texts with a greater clarity and that makes the biblical world alive.<sup>8</sup> Brueggemann's social reading of the text takes place into consideration every aspect of the social dimension of the text.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the major interest of the biblical scholars is to make known the social structure and social-cultural life of ancient Israel.<sup>10</sup> Hence, in this essay, the sociological approach has been applied to have a broader understanding of the selected texts in relation to homosexuality to bring out the connection between the biblical texts and the present day context.

## 2. General Understanding of Homosexuality in Ancient Israel

The message of the Hebrew Bible on homosexuality is neither clear nor conclusive, hence the biblical passages on homosexuality is always been debated historically. The Bible was written over a long period of time in the ancient Israelite world in the context of the Canaanite, Babylonian, Greek, and Roman worlds that surrounded the Israelites. Moreover, the development of biblical ideas on homosexuality evolved through a number of stages in Israelite and Christian history.<sup>11</sup> Heterosexual orientation was given prominence in the biblical world for natural order of procreation and it has become a norm for the church and society to understand sexuality and thus the concept of homosexuality was condemned and not accepted widely. As the Bible is written and shaped by the narratives and traditions of the cultures,<sup>12</sup> a good, honest, and complete evaluation of what the Bible has to say about homosexuality clearly requires interpreting the biblical texts in terms of what they were originally intended to say to their ancient audiences. Doing that requires an understanding of what was the cultural and social perspective and authentic theological picture of how those ancient words to that ancient audience speak to our

world today.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the biblical passages and interpretation that have been used to sustain the heterosexist and other oppressive conclusions must be examined critically to reveal the social factors and power interests both in their original formulation of texts as well as in their subsequent interpretations<sup>14</sup> in the context of the church.

## 3. An Analysis of Leviticus Texts on Homosexuality

Among the chapters of holiness code,<sup>15</sup> 18-20 chapters are concerned about the various sexual intercourses. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 read:

*“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female. It is an abomination.”*

*“A man who sleeps with another man is an abomination and should be executed.”<sup>16</sup>*

The most significant scholar in the Pentateuchal sources, J. Wellhausen opines that these chapters i.e. Leviticus 17-26, are from priestly writers who lived in the last years of exile, and moreover occupied with sacrifice and ritual.<sup>17</sup> Historically and till now selected verses of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 have been used as primary justification for the exclusion and repression of the community who expressed homoerotic affection. But the same community is always hopeful of the biblical message and feels that they have a call from a God who sides the marginalized and the excluded ones who are judged out of their sexual orientations. Coming up with the critical hermeneutics to root out the sources of oppression, they re-claim the authoritative biblical sources of power and liberation.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the homosexual belongingness is always controlled by the heterosexual community of the society. These two verses, Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 that are used to condemn homosexual orientations have become the base of controversy throughout the debates on homosexuality and have been used as a proof-text by those attempting to prove homosexuality is an abomination. But it is quite clear that the

Hebrews condemned homosexuality but not clearly mentioned, why?<sup>19</sup>

Leviticus 18 is a veritable catalogue of Egyptian and Canaanite ritual practices involving behaviour. In terms of Yahweh's religious prescriptions for Israel's distinctive life and worship, those were the perversion of the worship liturgies devoted to Yahweh. Chapter 18 of Leviticus opens with a repetitious declaration to Israel that she shall not walk in the statutes (regulations) of the Canaanites but in the statutes of the Yahweh. There follows the list of practices that the Egyptians and Canaanites employed in their worship liturgies and other related cultic activity: sexually consorting with relatives, sexually consorting with women during their "menstrual uncleanness," adultery, child sacrifice, homosexual behaviour, and bestiality.<sup>20</sup> In Leviticus 20 we have virtual repetitions of Leviticus 18 and add that all the forbidden behaviour is described metaphorically as whoredom with Molech,<sup>21</sup> specifically with that Canaanite form of religious worship. The death penalty is added to all of the forbidden conduct including homosexual behaviour. Leviticus 20, therefore, contributes to reinforce the link between homosexual behaviour and worship misbehaviour. Worshipping false gods or worshipping Yahweh in a false way is whoredom, according to these ancient scriptures and they were put to death.<sup>22</sup> In Mesopotamian scene homosexual practice was widely known. This practice was done without violence and without compulsion. Moreover, Sex between men in that worldview would thus violate male privilege and disrupt the patriarchal ordering of society.<sup>23</sup>

The concept of abomination was predominant in the texts of Leviticus and thus the Hebrew word for abomination, *הבעות* (*toevah*) is crucially significant here. It is a word derived from the sphere of the religious rituals of the cultures of the Ancient West Asia. It means "to abhor" something for religious reasons. Idolatry is the chief reference to such abomination in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>24</sup> Usually the verb *toebah* has to do with the idolatrous actions, sexual prohibition, and food and diet restriction; and false weights

and measures. It also connotes an offence in the sense of being an offence against both God and humankind.<sup>25</sup> Alex Markels remarks upon the meaning of this key word, *toevah*, in the Hebrew Bible. He points out that *toevah* includes the rules of dietary regulations, planting seeds discreetly in a field, trimming human beards, and various kinds of prohibited sex. Incest and sex during menstruation both common fertility rites among Canaanites of the time are prohibited. And before homosexual intercourse, *toevah* proscribes offering one's children to Molech, a Canaanite/ Ammonite deity.<sup>26</sup> The term *toevah* had also connected with the concept of "holiness" and thus the most of the texts in the Leviticus could be found with the notion of purity and pollution.

Samuel E. Balentine argues that the priestly emphasis on holiness exemplifies on the moral and social aspects of life, not only responds to the prophetic concern of social justice but also it offers concrete measures to resolve them. The use of the term *toevah* throughout the Leviticus passages is the clue to the essentially cultic nature of their forbidding homosexual behaviour.<sup>27</sup> A person might enter the sanctuary to worship Yahweh only in a state of ritual purity. A person might become unclean for a day, a week, a span of some weeks, or an indefinite period, depending upon the intensity of the uncleanness. Contact with an unclean animal's carcass and normal sexual bodily emissions and other sexual orientations including homosexuality were regarded as impure. Whenever a person became unclean in the course of daily routine, that person had to pursue the prescribed rituals for becoming clean in order to continue to live in the camp.<sup>28</sup>

In the entire Leviticus texts, cult played an important role. The entire thrust of Leviticus is the emphasis upon Israel's cultic or religious worship and cultural distinctiveness. Though these verses do not connect directly with pagan worship but simply refer to Canaanite pagan practices.<sup>29</sup> In such a context, "homosexual intercourse was just one of a list of cultic practices that should not be imitated," says Rabbi Gershon Steinberg-Caudill, who

has searched the Babylonian Talmud for how the ancient rabbis viewed homosexual practice. He says that, "The point wasn't narrowly about condemning homosexuality but rather about not engaging in the practices of other religions, which were considered ritually unclean."<sup>30</sup> Scholars like, Keil and Delitzsch relate the passages to the Egyptian goat cult. Canaanite literature has a Baal priest enacting Baal's ritual of intercourse with a heifer. Primitive temple prostitution of both sexes was common in the Ancient West Asia. Leviticus 18 and 20 are against every form of behaviour that represents a loss of cultic identity in Israel, as distinctive in the worship of Yahweh, resulting from emulating or copying pagan worship behaviour.<sup>31</sup> Thus these verses addressed in Leviticus are the forbidden nature of cultic or religious sexual behaviour in worship.

#### **4. A Scholarly Evaluation of the Leviticus Texts on Homosexuality**

B. S. Childs offers a prophetic criticism against Israel's cult. The prophetic messages emerge as the proclamation of sovereignty of Yahweh and subordination of all human institutions to the exercise of Yahweh's Justice (Isa. 1:10). Thus Isaiah condemns an excessive cultic activity which combines iniquity and solemn assemblies and calls for Israel to seek justice and to correct oppression. (Isa. 58:6) and again Amos testifies that Yahweh hates sacrifices which do not do justice. (Amos: 5:21). These ritual and purity laws which were practised excessively during the post exilic period receive a criticism those are devoid of justice.<sup>32</sup> Scholars like Knohl and Milgrom argue for Holiness school which is evidently comes from 8th century and persistence concern was social justice (Isa. 1:10-17; Amos 2:6-16; Mic. 3:9-12).<sup>33</sup> Bernard S. Jackson is of the view that "Irrespective of the origins of the legal materials, the biblical authors have provided us with a wealth of material which informs us of their views about law and legal administration."<sup>34</sup> It can be apprehended to a larger extent of their character by comparing with the surrounding

materials. Richard B. Hays opines that, quoting a law from Leviticus, does not necessarily settle the question of social ethics. Since the first century, the prohibitions and commandments that have ever generally been disregarded or deemed absolutely by the church, mostly the laws concerning the holiness code. Some scholars argue that the prohibition of homosexuality is similarly superseded for Christians and thus the laws regarding ritual purity rules becomes morally irrelevant today.<sup>35</sup> By and large we need to see this prohibition of homosexuality is not a real concern to the contemporary context when we understand the social setting of text.<sup>36</sup> All these arguments offer enough ground to re-interpret the texts from a perspective of present contexts of struggles of people with homosexual orientations that would reform the church as a whole to embrace them with dignity and justice.

#### **5. Homosexuality in and through the Context in India**

When we take a look at this issue in the Indian context, we can see how India's ancient time was much evident of homosexuality. The ancient literature on sex, Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* has one whole chapter '*Auparishtaka*' dedicated to homosexual relationships.<sup>37</sup> India is that place where homosexuality has often been sanctioned and accepted by literature and religion, yet in other instances been condemned with utter distaste. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata also make mention of women loving women.<sup>38</sup> Numerous temples all over the country are seen having similar themes depicting homosexuality on their walls. Still there are discriminative views on homosexuality like: In their book *Same-Sex Love in India*, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai state that homosexuality is perceived as a sinful, it is a phenomenon of the West.<sup>39</sup>

Legal discrimination against sexuality minorities operates through the criminal and civil law system. Legal discrimination against the sexuality minorities takes many forms, the most notorious being section 377 of Indian Penal Code. According to Section 377, whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the

order of with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years and also be liable to fine. Though the homosexual has been practiced in India from time immemorial, it was never condemned or criminalized till the arrival of the British. The sodomy laws enforced by the colonial administration canonized heterosexuality as the normative sexual practice. Section 377 of Indian Penal Code thus came into being in 1860, criminalizing deviant sexual behaviors.<sup>40</sup> It is important to remember that the colonial jurisprudence of homophobia was significantly influenced and inform by Judeo-Christian doctrines. Conservative networks such as Christians against Homosexuality celebrated the recent (12<sup>th</sup> December, 2013) Supreme Court verdict re-criminalizing homosexuality as the victory of God over sin and evil.<sup>41</sup> In such context, Sonali, a lesbian Indian poet says that, “Divided by abusive demons but multiplied by a will to survive sums me up.”<sup>42</sup> Thus it is seen that the belongingness of the homosexuals in the Indian society and culture has been challenging for the sexual minority communities in India.

## 6. A Call for Reformation in Indian Homophobic Church

Under such circumstances of Indian Social contexts, the Indian church needs to be under ‘*semper reformanda*’ where reformation stands against the homophobic nature of the Church. The literal meaning of *homophobia* “fear of sameness” is an ill-fitting term for the prejudice, discrimination, and violence against the same sex orients. Queer community as sexual minorities are oppressed by the heterosexuals, but if we place heterosexism with other models of oppression like classism, racism and sexism, we find out that the homophobia is ruled by the dominant culture.<sup>43</sup> There are three common and phobic attitudes in our churches today. They are “1. *Repulsion*: Homosexuality is perceived as a crime against nature. They are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful and wicked. All attempts to change or cure them, irrespective of the means used (imprisonment, shock therapy, and hospitalization) are

hence justifiable. 2. *Pity*: Heterosexuality is natural and more mature, and hence normative. Any possibility to become normal straight should be reinforced. Those who seem to be born that way should be treated with pity. 3. *Tolerance*: Homosexuality is just an adolescent phase and hence it is possible to grow out of it. They are less mature and hence they need our help and tolerance is needed to help them gradually get out of it.”<sup>44</sup> Thus the spiritual, social and pastoral problem of our churches and society is not that the divine life is not treated seriously and thus the church is failed to discern the continuous presence of the spirit of love and justice<sup>45</sup> amidst struggles for belongingness and acceptance in a wider cultural context for the people with same-sex orientation.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2016, in the daily news paper, *Times of India*, an article “Yes they are Gay and Pious too”<sup>46</sup> it is reported that after the announcement of Pope Benedict regarding asking forgiveness to the homosexual communities by the church, the Protestant churches in India did one better, and a lot earlier. Since Delhi high court’s 2009 verdict decriminalized Section 377 - the ban was reinstated in 2013 – they’ve been organizing interfaith workshops and conferences with a view to re-evaluate scripture and build a new queer-friendly Biblical interpretation. In other words, they’re bringing the sheep back to the fold (although it should be pointed out that the sheep themselves didn’t stray, but were chased away from the flock, their sexual conduct considered deviant and sinful).

When the NCCI (National Council of Churches in India) issued a statement in support of the queer community in 2009, several member churches threatened to exit the umbrella. But unlike a decade ago, when the conservative voice was shrill and majoritarian, now there’s wider progressive push-back. For groups like the ‘Christians against Homosexuality’ which exhort queer people to ‘Come to Jesus to get corrected’, there is a counter-movement such as “Christians against Homophobia” in Chennai. Mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik says, “It is colonialism and later,

politics that interpreted homosexuality as aberrant,” he says. “Just as consecutive translations of the Bible were interpreted with the translators’ own prejudices and social mores cast into the original text. But here’s the question to ask: Is religion responding to society or society to religion?” The LGBTIQA faithful are ahead of the curve on this one. Several faith-based gay groups have started to gather privately in safe fellowship and prayer. One of these groups in India, tentatively called Queer in Christ, was established in Bengaluru three weeks ago by Romal Laisram, a gay activist and son of a pastor. Most queer faithful - particularly when they are raised religious - are beset with guilt when they become aware of their sexuality. But Laisram felt a closer kinship with Christ, he says. “My personal faith in Christ helped me come out and feel accepted for who I was.” In the same Newspaper article George Zachariah opines, “More people from theological institutions and queer groups are reviewing homosexuality’s place in religion.” This statement of him seems appropriate somehow in the theological and intellectual circles but when an issue arises in the church regarding the acceptance of the of the homosexuals in the church regarding their membership, participation in sacraments like baptism, communion and marriage the churches it becomes difficult to deal with this issue. To affirm their belongingness seems a challenges as churches are pre-occupied with the stigmatized notion and condemn homosexuality in both narrower and larger contexts. In this context, the question that challenges the scenario, is the church open to reform?

### **Conclusion**

Reformation in 21<sup>st</sup> century demands transformation against sexual hierarchy and discriminations. Today’s society and church supports and privileges “the normal and good” forms of sexuality and aims to punish the abnormal, odds and bad ones through violence, ridicule or stigma. This sexual hierarchy creates a series of outsider sexualities. Gayle Rubin opines that all societies and within the churches create sexual hierarchies that

establish boundaries between good and bad or legitimate or illicit sexualities. Society values specific desires, acts and identities as normal, respectable, good, healthy and moral. Other forms of sexuality are classified as unhealthy, abnormal, sinful, and immoral.<sup>47</sup> Gays and lesbians are defined as people outside of the culture including culture who are deserving of all the rights and privileges that come with heterosexuality and they are termed as ‘others’ and not the part of ‘us’ or ‘all.’<sup>48</sup> Affirming belongingness in the Indian church for the homosexual community is the need of the hour. Our calling as Christian Church is for reforming ourselves by not excluding but to practice the spirit of love and peace for all including the sexual minorities. Inclusiveness is not a choice but the church ought to make inclusiveness as the basic characteristic of the church. Thus the homophobic nature is a sin against God and a homophobic church is a betrayal of calling of the church as body of Christ.<sup>49</sup> Russell Chandran writes that “if a person has in-born homosexual tendencies and homosexuality is the only meaningful basis for sexual relationship, it is not right to condemn the person.”<sup>50</sup> Hence, church’s doctrines and dogmas which are based on the scriptural standpoints need to be reformed with a proper hermeneutical approach so that the context to avoid the misinterpretation that causes exclusion, violence and division especially in the context of homosexuals. Thus a reformation in Indian church would strives for an approach toward the homosexual orients by re-imagining and re-reading the stated scriptural texts and at the same time church has to come out of the notion of stigmatization of the people with homosexual orientations. Thus in this regard, reformation in Indian church is essential, as Martin Luther says: “I cannot choose but adhere to the word of God which has possession of my conscience, since it is neither safe nor honest to act contrary to conscience! Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God! Amen.”

**End Notes**

- 1 Ganesh Kumar Radha Udayakumar, "Pope Francis, most liberal Catholic leader ever?" *The Times of India*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017.
- 2 The notion of belonging, or social identity, is a central aspect of how we define who we are. We consider ourselves to be individuals but it is our inclusiveness of particular community which is one of the most important aspects of life.
- 3 The Social Issues Research Centre -2007 <http://www.sirc.org/publik/Belonging.pdf>, accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017.
- 4 David Write, "The Homosexuality Debate and the Reform of the Church," in *An Anglican Evangelical Journal for Theology and Mission*, 15/1 (1998), 22-33.
- 5 Jerry Pillay, "Introduction," in *Exploring the General Council Theme*, (Germany: WCRC, 2017), 1.
- 6 Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 49.
- 7 N. K. Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 26.
- 8 Daniel Jones Muthunayagam, "Contemporary Approaches to the Old Testament Interpretation" in *Methodological Issues in Theological Research an Exploration* edited by H. Vanlalauva, West Bengal: SATHRI, 2013), 141.
- 9 Patrick D. Miller, "Introduction to Walter Brueggemann," in *A Social Rewording of the Old Testament: Prophet's Approaches to Israel's Communal Life*, edited by P.D. Miller, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 1-2.
- 10 G. A. Harion, "The Role of Historical Narrative in Biblical Thought: The Tendency Underlying the Old Testament Historiography," *JSOT*, 21 (1981), 25-57.
- 11 Each stage reflected the outlook of its own cultural moment in history. Each such moment bears the influence of important cultural forces and notions from outside the Bible itself. J. Harold Ellens, *Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration* (London: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 103.
- 12 Ian S. Markham, *A Theology of Engagement* (Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 8.
- 13 J. Harold Ellens, *Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration*, 104.
- 14 Daniel T. Spencer, *Gay and Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, and the Erotic* (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1996), 31-32.
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- 24 J. Harold Ellens, *Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration...* 109.
- 25 N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers...* 126-139.
- 26 This statement forbidding homosexuality as an abomination intends to convey the meaning that such behaviour, when practiced as the Canaanites practiced it, namely by heterosexual persons in worship liturgies, was, like idolatry, a bad mode of worship, which is an abomination.
- 27 Samuel E. Balentine, *Interpretation Leviticus* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 142.
- 28 Hartley, J. E. "Leviticus," *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 4, (Dallas: Word, 2002),
- 29 Alllen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 347.
- 30 J. Harold Ellens, *Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration...* 110.
- 31 Kosnik, respectively makes the telling point that, it is an "abomination" because of its connection with the fertility rites of the Canaanites. The condemnation of homosexual activity in Leviticus is not an ethical judgment

- quoting from Noth (1965, p. 16 and 1967, p. 49), Snaith (1967, p. 126), Schoeps (1962, p. 371), and Cole (1959, pp. 350-351).
- 32 B. S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 90.
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- 45 Daniel T. Spencer, *Gay and Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, and the Erotic* (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1996), 20.
- 46 "Yes they are Gay and Pious too", *Times of India*, (Pune edition), 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2016.
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- 49 Zachariah, George "Church and homophobia: Envisioning an Inclusive Church," 11.
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## Exploration of Pioneering Indian Christian Pneumatology and a Conversation with Reformation Pneumatology

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### Introduction

There was a time when it was a cliché that the ‘Holy Spirit is the Cinderella of theology’ pointing to the neglect of the theology of the Spirit in Christian discourse. This does not seem to be the case anymore, as evidently, a Finnish systematic theologian, a prominent scholar on pneumatology, Veli- Matti Kärkkäinen, states that ‘A pneumatological renaissance concerning the doctrine and spirituality of the Holy Spirit has in these days stirred much interest and even enthusiasm from all theological corners.’<sup>1</sup> Kärkkäinen states two main reasons for such a renaissance: the entrance of the Eastern Orthodox churches into the WCC with their pneumatological emphasis, and the dramatic spread of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement across the world.<sup>2</sup> This is proving true the affirmation of one of the most prominent modern theologians, Karl Barth, who realised at the end of his life, that the future of theology would be ‘predominantly and decisively of the Holy Spirit.’<sup>3</sup> Of course, a similar ‘prophecy’ appears in Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959), one of the Madras *Rethinking Christianity* group, much earlier, though this issue has not received weightage among Indian theologians so far. Chenchiah affirmed that:

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The ‘Holy Spirit’-the doctrine and personality-if my instincts are sound, will play a decisive role in Indian theology. They may receive a new interpretation and become the corner-stone of Indian Christian Theology.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, while we have the strength of these affirmations at the background, let us explore the beginnings of Christian pneumatological discourse in Indian thinking.

Indian Christian theology has fairly repeated the Western trend, as Christology continues to occupy the centre-stage of theological reflection, while giving little space to the Spirit. Recently, however, some valuable works have been attempted. One of the prominent contributions among them is Kirsteen Kim's *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* (2003),<sup>5</sup> where she deals with the pneumatologies of Stanley J. Samartha, Vandana Mataji and Samuel Rayan, charting general trends in the theology of the Holy Spirit in India. Understanding the Holy Spirit from the Indian perspective continues in works like, *Indian Interpretation of the Holy Spirit: An Appraisal of the Pneumatology of Appasamy, Chakkarai and Chenchiah*<sup>6</sup> which seeks to draw out the pneumatological theologies of these thinkers. Reflections on specific aspects of pneumatology have also featured in recent Indian theological discussions. For example, *Spirit Christology: An Indian Christian Perspective* (2009)<sup>7</sup> starting from Western theologians, subsequently draws insights from Pandipeddi Chenchiah and Swami Abhishiktananda, to develop an Indian understanding of Spirit Christology.<sup>8</sup> An Indian feminist assessment of the Holy Spirit, has been done in a brief non-formal work entitled *Assailants of the Spirit and the Upholders of 'Sakti' an Indian Feminist Assessment of the Holy Spirit* (2003).<sup>9</sup> This work includes among others, reflections upon Chenchiah and Chakkarai's use of Sakti for the Holy Spirit.

The above works are no doubt valuable contributions to the pneumatological discourse in India. However, in this present

paper, I argue that they have missed the ‘pioneer pneumatological moment’ in Indian Christian theology and have failed to emphasise the contributions of prominent Brahma Samajists in this field; who were among the first who sought to understand Christianity from their own Hindu background.<sup>10</sup> By the pioneer pneumatological moment, I point to the beginnings of a pneumatological debate or controversy in Indian theology. This credit arguably goes to the most unlikely person in Indian theological discourse from a pneumatological point of view, i.e. Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833). Unlikely because he was a Hindu Unitarian, who rejected the Trinitarian doctrine and one who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit, while of course accepting the Spirit as mere influence. Yet I will show that Rammohan, the founder of Brahma Samaj, perhaps unwittingly, helped generate the Christian pneumatological discourse in India, while Keshub from a very different angle sought to build up a living community through his theology of the Spirit. Thus, it will be evident that the early prominent Brahma Samajists (without confessing to being Christians) were the first group of people who sowed the seeds of Christian pneumatological thinking in India.

### **1. The Pneumatological Moment for Indian Christian Theology with Rammohan Roy**

The seeds of a pneumatological discourse were sown when Rammohan Roy expressed his theological objections about Trinity. Robin Boyd points out that Rammohan was perhaps the first known Indian to raise serious theological objections to Christian Trinitarianism and sought to emphasise rationalistic and ethical understandings of Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it is in the context of the Trinitarian debate with the Serampore missionaries that the pneumatological debate ensues. Most theologians, reflecting on Rammohan’s objections to Trinitarianism understandably make a brief passing comment about his idea of the Holy Spirit as a mere influence and his denial of the deity or divinity of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> They point out that Rammohan was most reluctant to accept a

bodily image (i.e. dove) or so for the Holy Spirit and one who denied that primitive apostolic sermons make any mention of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

Any apparent consideration of Rammohan’s position on the Holy Spirit would understandably dismiss any pneumatological potential for a Christian theological reflection for today. But I argue that at a deeper level, in the denial and the controversy that ensued between Rammohan and the Serampore missionaries, seeds of the first Indian Christian pneumatological discourse were sown. Rammohan came up with his responses and counter-appeals following Marshman’s objections to his *Precepts of Jesus*.<sup>14</sup> Marshman objected that Rammohan in this work projected only part of the gospels and expressed concern that it might injure the cause of truth because of its truncated treatment. In subsequent counter responses to Marshman, Rammohan brought out the first, the second and the final<sup>15</sup> appeals in defence of the *Precepts of Jesus*. In the *Second Appeal*, Rammohan has a chapter entitled ‘The Impersonality of the Holy Spirit’ where he sets out his objections regarding the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit. Let us now turn to that chapter and find out its significance for arriving at the pioneer pneumatological moment in Indian Christian theology.

The first objection that Rammohan brought was regarding the divinity of the Holy Spirit. In the said chapter, Rammohan counteracted the claim by Marshman that the baptismal rite which includes the names of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit could be sufficient ground for arguing about the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Surveying various passages of Scripture, both Old Testament and the New, he denies that such an argument from association was anything but rational. He argues that,

The kind of evidence on which the Editor relies in this instance, would besides suit admirably the purpose of those who might seek in the sacred Scriptures, grounds for justifying idolatry. Fire worshippers, for instance,

insisting on the literal sense of the words, might refer to the text, in the 3rd chapter of Matthew, repeated in Luke ch. iii. Ver.16, in which it is announced that Jesus Christ will baptise you with Holy Spirit and with fire. If the association in the rite of Baptism of names of the Son and the Holy Ghost, with that of the Father, proves their divinity; it is clear, that fire also being associated with the Holy Ghost in the same rite, must likewise be considered as a part of the Godhead.<sup>16</sup>

Rammohan here bases his arguments on somewhat unconventional Biblical reasoning and sought to fortify them through his Unitarian beliefs and disavowal of polytheism and idolatry. He makes it clear that "...if we believe that Spirit, in the form of a dove, or in any other bodily shape, was really the third person of the Godhead, how can we justly charge with absurdity the Hindoo legends of Divinity having the form of a fish or of any other animal?" Regarding the deity of the Spirit he admits that there are hardly any Scripture passages that speak directly of the Holy Spirit as God. He argues that,

...with respect to the Holy Ghost, I must confess my inability to find a single passage in the whole Scriptures, in which the Spirit is addressed as God, or as a person of God, so as to afford to believers of the Trinity an excuse for their profession of the Godhead of the Holy Ghost.<sup>17</sup>

Again, citing various passages of Scriptures, Rammohan denies any personality to the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> Rammohan writes,

I am indeed sorry I cannot, without overlooking a great many Scriptural authorities and defying reason totally, join the Editor (Marshman) in the opinion, that the association of the name of the Holy Spirit with that of the Father of the Universe, in the rite of Baptism,

is "decisive" of, or even allusive to, the separate personality of the Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

Again, he argues that it is untenable to infer the personality of the Holy Spirit from the metaphors applied to the Spirit because other attributes of God like truth, mercy and anger are not in the same way personified.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to accepting the personality, divinity or deity of the Holy Spirit, Rammohan argues that the Spirit is the influence and guide who leads into all truth. Concluding from various Scripture passages he affirms that,

...it is proper that those who receive it (Christianity) should be baptised in the name of the Father, who is the object of worship: of the Son, who is the mediator; and of that influence by which spiritual blessings are conveyed to mankind (humans), designated in the Scriptures as the Comforter, Spirit of Truth, or Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

Considering the above arguments, one cannot but be tempted to draw a parallel between them and the Patristic debates regarding the personality, deity and divinity of the Holy Spirit surrounding the pneumatological heresies in the first few Christian centuries. Especially, worth mentioning in this connection is the heresy generated by Macedonius and the *Pneumatomachoi* ('enemies of the Spirit') who denied the deity of the Holy Spirit. They believed that the Spirit was just a creature and worked as a power in our lives but denied any status to the Spirit as per God's inner trinitarian relationship is concerned.<sup>22</sup> In response to this, Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers made every effort to prove the divinity and the deity of the Holy Spirit; although it was only Gregory of Nazianzus who ultimately mustered the courage to address Holy Spirit as God. There is no doubt that Marshman in his debate with Rammohan simply reproduced the arguments in favour of the divinity and status of the Holy Spirit that was forwarded by Athanasius and Basil, primarily based on the baptismal formula.

And this eventually elicited the response of Rammohan who argued against the rationality of such a proposition.

The patristic debates surrounding the pneumatological heresies ultimately proved helpful to some extent as in Constantinople (381) something positive was asserted of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit was regarded as the 'Lord and giver of life' and one 'who is worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son.' However, in spite of the labours of the Cappadocian Fathers, the Council refused to sanction the use of *homoousios* with reference to the Spirit as they did for the Son.<sup>23</sup>

I believe that the pioneer pneumatological moment for theology during the Patristic period came when the church was forced to develop clarity regarding the theology of the Holy Spirit. This happened only because the idea of the Holy Spirit as divine was both challenged (Macedonians) and its vitality and influence contrasted with its supposed lack in the church (Montanism). Though from the standpoint of pneumatology, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was not very effective due to the reasons cited earlier, yet the church went a step forward in the direction of affirming some dignified status for the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, I argue that the pioneer pneumatological moment in Indian Christian pneumatology was launched when in the broader context of the Trinitarian-Unitarian debate between Marshman and Rammohan, the debate about the Holy Spirit took place. Rammohan's position, while reminiscent of the pneumatological heresies cited earlier, cannot be discarded as a passing commentary on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. This is because his positions were from a different background than the protagonists of the earlier heresies. Rammohan arrived at the understanding of the Spirit from the perspective of Unitarian thinking, rationalism and a disavowal of polytheism and idolatry, and from a Hindu background. Rammohan, of course failed to deduce the deity of the Holy Spirit from Scriptural passages that he considered. However, the point to be noted here as far as

Christian pneumatological thinking in India is concerned is that, Rammohan, while denying either personality or divinity of the Holy Spirit, never for once denied the presence or the efficacy or the influence or power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In effect, he brings to the fore some of the most prevalent alternative understandings of the Spirit from the Indian point of view. Of course, we must remember that understanding the Holy Spirit as power or energy were not something new. Gregory of Nazianzus relates to the diverse ways in which the Holy Spirit was understood in the first few centuries as either energy or influence, a creature or an angelic being.<sup>24</sup> Rammohan cannot be blamed for his denial of the deity or personality of the Holy Spirit while the Creed of 381 itself continued to be unclear about the status of the Holy Spirit.

Rammohan's contribution to the pioneer pneumatological moment in Indian Christian theology is that he blazed a trail of some alternative understandings of the Holy Spirit which other Indian theologians later followed. In spite of his non-orthodox positions regarding Christian pneumatology, Rammohan could point out that understanding the Holy Spirit as energy or influence or power are equally valid for Indian thinking. The significance of the Spirit in Indian religions is a matter that is often taken for granted.<sup>25</sup> I do not need to reaffirm the same here. Yet in India the Spirit is understood in different ways. The *advaitic* (non-dual) understanding of the *Parabrahman* or *Brahman Atman* (God/Spirit) pervading human beings and creation as One, is a dominant understanding in Hinduism, which fits very well with Rammohan's Unitarianism.<sup>26</sup> However, Rammohan failed to develop on this tradition with regards to the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the tradition of the power or the energy of the Spirit understood as feminine Shakti is also relevant for India.

For Indian Christians, while not denying the deity or divinity of the Holy Spirit as Rammohan did, it is equally important to contemplate the Spirit in terms of the One Spirit (*advaitic*) that

pervades human beings and creation or on the other hand the creative power, or the energy or influence of God that transforms our lives and the feminine *Shakti*. Evidently, later theologians like Chenchiah of the *Rethinking* group and Samuel Rayan, the liberation theologian with a pneumatological bent particularly used the *Shakti* tradition to arrive at Indian understandings of the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> Thus, as far as the pioneer pneumatological moment in Indian Christian theology is concerned, I contend that Rammohan Roy, in spite of his Hindu and Unitarian background, was amongst the first who inaugurated the moment; in the sense of bringing these alternative understandings of the Holy Spirit to the vocabulary of Indian Christian theology.

Rammohan, however, could never have arrived at a substantial understanding of the Holy Spirit as his broader interest was on outlining the ethical understanding of Jesus' teachings in his *Precepts of Jesus*. However, the work of developing on pneumatological concepts into a broad movement fell on one of the most illustrious leaders of the Brahma Samaj, i.e., Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884). In the following, let us proceed towards discussing the pneumatology of Keshub and see how even Keshub was one among the pioneers who brought forth newer paradigms regarding the relationship between the Spirit and the Trinity, Spirit and Christ and humanity, and the Spirit and the Church.

## **2. Building Indian Christian Pneumatological foundations with Keshub Chunder Sen**

While Rammohan with his Unitarian background and rejection of polytheism sought to understand the Holy Spirit in terms of influence and power; Keshub made the Spirit the working principle of his life and thoughts. I shall show shortly how this is so. While Rammohan's Unitarianism prevents him from accepting Trinity and made him a serious opponent of the Trinitarian understanding of God; Keshub's Unitarianism does not stand as a barrier to his confession of God as Trinity, although he understood it in his own pioneering Indian terms of *Sat Chit Ananda*.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless,

Keshub's Unitarian leanings prepared him to accept the Trinity in modalistic terms, treating the Trinitarian Persons as modes of God.<sup>29</sup> Keshub was however very clear in expressing that Trinity is a very Eastern and Asiatic concept and therefore not to be discarded. He claims to have grown up in faith naturally in the light of the Trinitarian truth of God.<sup>30</sup> In the following, I primarily draw his pneumatological concepts from one of his well-known lectures entitled *That Marvellous Mystery: The Trinity* and other similar lectures of pneumatological import given during different periods.

In these lectures, one can find rudiments of a pneumatology for Indian Christian theology that were later taken up by other Indian thinkers and theologians. Here, a rough systematisation is done classifying his pneumatological thoughts in terms of the Holy Spirit and Trinity, Holy Spirit and the Son/Christ/Logos and Humans and Holy Spirit and the Church. As I discuss these sections, I believe a rough pneumatology in terms of the Person and Work / Role of the Holy Spirit will emerge. It will be seen that some of these pneumatological concepts were novel in that age as far as Indian pneumatological thinking with Christian implications are concerned.

### **2.1. The Holy Spirit and the Trinity**

Keshub's acceptance of the Trinity prevents him from rejecting the divinity or deity of the Spirit as the rationalistic and Unitarian Rammohan had done. Although Unitarian strains were still in Keshub, as becomes explicit in his modalism, he could accept the Trinity because he could accommodate it within Indian traditions. Keshub used the *advaita* tradition to accomplish this, which Rammohan failed. Here the Holy Spirit is accommodated within the *advaitic-vedantic* structure of the Trinity- *Sat Chit Ananda*, thus saving the Spirit from being a victim of subordinationist tendencies as found in Rammohan. Keshub writes, 'Here the Supreme Brahma (Brahman) of the Veda and the Vedanta dwells hid in Himself. Yet here, they say, the Eternal Spirit dwelleth.'<sup>31</sup>

Here he equates the *Brahman Atman* (Supreme Spirit) with the Holy Spirit. The Deity or divinity of the Holy Spirit therefore is not a problem for him. In Keshub's Trinitarian framework, the Spirit is equated with the Father. The difficulty for him is the conception of the Son. He writes, 'The identity of the Father and the Holy Ghost few will question, but the position of the Son is subject to controversy.'<sup>32</sup> I will deal with the relationship of the Spirit and the Son/Christ soon. But let me return once more to the Spirit's relationship with the Trinity. In Keshub's explication of the Trinity, he affirms that,

The Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost; the Creator, the Exemplar, and the Sanctifier; I am, I love, I save; the Still God, the Journeying God, the Returning God; Force, Wisdom, Holiness; the True, the Good, the Beautiful; Sat, Chit, Ananda; "Truth, Intelligence and Joy." Has not the Holy Ghost been described as the "Comforter". Truly He is the heart's joy. Thus, the Trinity of Christian theology corresponds strikingly with the *Sachchidananda* of Hinduism.<sup>33</sup>

Here it is clear that for Keshub, the Holy Spirit occupies a prominent position in the Trinity. The concept of the Holy Spirit involves holiness and sanctification because one of the Spirit's most prominent works are these. Keshub also understood the Spirit as the *returning God* as elsewhere he affirms that the 'power of the Holy Spirit drags up degenerated humanity to Himself.'<sup>34</sup> The importance of the Holy Spirit to Keshub is such that he designates the Spirit as Saviour too. At one point, he says that Christ cannot save apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, and it is the Spirit who is responsible to save us. Of course, here he equals sanctification to our salvation. He claims: 'There is no salvation without the Holy Ghost. Even Christ, prince of glory though he be, is absolutely powerless. Can Christ save the world? "Can he break the fetters of sin and iniquity?" Sanctification belongs to the Holy Spirit alone.'<sup>35</sup> Keshub's interpretation of the Trinity as

*Sachchidananda*<sup>36</sup> brings forward other aspects of the Holy Spirit, as noted that of its aesthetic and profound sensibilities, the beauty and the joy respectively, which are definitely pioneer Indian contributions to the concept of the Trinity. Later, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay makes full use of this concept and elaborates and brings it to maturity in his writings.<sup>37</sup> I shall now turn to the Holy Spirit's relationship to the Son/ Christ/Logos and human beings in Keshub's understanding.

## 2.2. The Holy Spirit and the Son/Christ/Logos and Humans:

Keshub's modalistic understanding of the Trinity has been pointed out. From this background, a close relationship between Christ/Son/Logos and the Spirit is detected beginning with the Son's begetting by the Father. Here he almost equates Christ and the Spirit:

Begotten of "volition" of Almighty God, as Tertullian says, the Spirit-Christ spread forth in the universe as an emanation from the Divine Reason, and you can see him with the eye of faith underlying the endless varieties of truth and goodness in ancient and modern times. He is the *Chit*-Christ, pure intelligence, the Word of God, mighty Logos.<sup>38</sup>

As noted earlier that Keshub equates the Father and the Spirit; the *Brahman Atman* and the Holy Spirit, it was easy for him to experience Christ as the Spirit for he claims that this is the way Christ is viewed in India. He notes that,

He (Christ) is to us a living and moving spirit. We see him and commune with him. He permeates society as a vital force, and imbues our daily life and is mixed with our thoughts, speculations, and pursuits.<sup>39</sup>

The equation of Christ and the Spirit recurs later in the thoughts of Vengal Chakkarai, belonging to the *Rethinking Christianity* group, who understands the Holy Spirit as Jesus Christ. Here the

Holy Spirit is taken to be a continuous incarnation of Christ.<sup>40</sup> It must be pointed out that while Keshub does not negate the status of the Holy Spirit within Trinity, he fails to maintain adequate distinction between the Trinitarian persons, while of course maintaining unity and oneness among them. This is a recurring problem in the Indian understanding of Trinity which is also found in the works of Pandipeddi Chenchiah and others too.<sup>41</sup>

Keshub expresses the role of the Spirit in Christ's life from baptism onwards which essentially constitutes the concept of *Spirit Christology*. He contends, 'Was not Christ himself baptized by the Holy Spirit? The dove was not born in him, but came down from above'<sup>42</sup> Roy Pape observes that in this, Keshub touches on a very ancient Christology promulgated by the Church Fathers right through the 3rd century, i.e., a Spirit Christology which proclaims Christ as fully and perfectly indwelt by the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup> This is an acknowledgement that recurs in the Indian theologians like Chenchiah and Swami Abhishiktananda and thus it is significant we find this approach in Keshub as a pioneer.<sup>44</sup>

Roy Pape further observes that in Keshub's pneumatology, the Spirit's role is twofold: his relation to Christ and his relationship to humanity.<sup>45</sup> While the Spirit's relation to the Son has been discussed, the role of the Spirit in humans is to bring the life of Christ unto us and to work in us as leaven establishing the logos within us. To Keshub, the Spirit is the force that subjectifies the Christ of history unto us.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Keshub affirms that both the Father and the Son are active through the Spirit in our lives. He writes, 'Behold the Father and the Son living and moving in us through the Holy Spirit, and daily quickening our lives, and by spirit-movements acting and interacting through each other, making a very heaven within us.'<sup>47</sup> Keshub also points out that the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to provide us inspiration for living. He contends: '...Then you must invoke the very same Spirit by whom the Son of God was baptized eighteen centuries ago, and draw your inspiration from the very same source from

which Christ drew his.<sup>48</sup> He also expresses the role of the Holy Spirit somewhat in terms of the Orthodox concept of *deification*. He says that it is the Holy Spirit who is responsible for convicting us of our sins and dragging us into Christ-life upwards making us partakers of divinity.<sup>49</sup> While the role of the Spirit is outlined with regards to humans, it takes a concrete shape with regard to a community. Thus, in the following the issue of the relationship of the Spirit and the Church in Keshub's thought is discussed.

### **2.3. Holy Spirit and the Church: Spirit Ecclesiology**

Keshub can be said to be one of those pioneers in India whose Church of the New Dispensation bears the seeds of a Spirit ecclesiology. Keshub believed very sincerely that India is in the dispensation of the Spirit-that this is the Kairos moment-the opportune time for India to come to such a realisation. He claims that 'The God of Heaven has in the plenitude of His mercy vouchsafed unto us, Indians, an altogether New Dispensation, which makes our hearts rejoice exceedingly.'<sup>50</sup> The conception of this church is permeated with the Holy Spirit, though heavily underlined with a dispensational theology. He argues:

Where is the scripture that sings the name of the Holy Spirit? Seek it, my friends, in the Church of the New Dispensation, which is in India. Judaism has taught us the Father; Christianity has taught us the Son; the New Church will teach us the Holy Ghost.<sup>51</sup>

Again, his Church of the New Dispensation is one which is constituted by the Spirit and is sustained in every way by the Holy Spirit. He writes,

This Church of the New Dispensation, which you see in India, is altogether an institution of the Holy Spirit. Its morality is the command of the Spirit, its prayer is a direct address to the Spirit, its heaven is a tranquil abiding in the Spirit, its wisdom is the inspiration of

the Spirit, its Church is brotherhood in the Spirit, its apostles are the ordained of the Spirit. Verily, verily ours is the Church of the Holy Ghost, and the Comforter acknowledges it as His own.<sup>52</sup>

This Spirit ecclesiology is however eclectic and seeks to draw from various traditions into forming a broad church or community. He claims to reject every form of sectarianism attached with the concept of this church. In his Lecture entitled, *Asia's Message to Europe*, he argues that,

As an Asiatic I cannot, I dare not be a sectarian...so many types and aspects of faith and character which claim my sympathy, that I must take a broad and eclectic position, and disclaim even the semblance of narrow sectarianism.<sup>53</sup>

Keshub argues that sectarianism and divisions in the Church is baneful and maintains that this greatly hinders the acceptance of Christ by the people of India.<sup>54</sup> This is ironic as Keshub's Church itself was rocked with unfortunate divisions. However, it is important to note here that Keshub sought to reject caste divisions in the society which Rammohan and Devendranath, who led the Brahma Samaj after Rammohan, failed and for which Keshub was criticised by other Brahmos who wanted to hold on to their caste.<sup>55</sup> Keshub's community which is a broad church of the Spirit is also Christocentric, but that which acknowledges the truth of various religions. Keshub contends that 'Nay, I would go further and declare Christ to be the centre of this Broad Church.'<sup>56</sup> Again, he explains that 'our position is not that truths are to be found in all religions...but that the glorious mission of the New Dispensation is to harmonize religions and revelations and to establish the truth of every particular dispensation.'<sup>57</sup> Of course, in this kind of Church, Keshub saw the dream of building of a future church which is thoroughly Indian.<sup>58</sup> Keshub has been criticised due to his eclectic ideas of the church and inconsistency regarding his

religious beliefs and practices.<sup>59</sup> He started with the Brahma Samaj where he sought to do away with all ritual practices following his predecessors but later reintroduced a some ritualistic practices back into his church. He was also criticised regarding his doctrine of *adesha* which claimed that his actions are justified because it is almost always done through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup> Here, Keshub resembles the Montanist heresy where Montanus claimed prophetic knowledge directly from the Holy Spirit. These criticisms are valid but M.M. Thomas saw in Keshub's idea of the Church much that generates promise. Thomas contented that 'the idea of a Christ-centred integration of the Indian and Western religious and cultural heritages, expressing itself in an indigenous Christianity, is highly relevant to the future of the Christian Church in India.'<sup>61</sup> The potential of Keshub's Christ-centred community of the Spirit, the church, or a Spirit ecclesiology derived from this however remains to be fully explored.

In conclusion, it can be said that both Rammohan and Keshub's contribution towards Indian pneumatology are pioneering. While Rammohan inaugurated the pneumatological moment through the controversy that he helped generate along with the alternative understandings of the Holy Spirit relevant for India; Keshub brought out Indian paradigms regarding the relationships of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, Christ, Humanity and the Church in India. Keshub moreover sought to actualise his convictions about Christ and the Holy Spirit through his Church of the New Dispensation. Instead of dwelling on how successful Keshub's ecclesiological project was, it is worthwhile to consider his ecclesiological and pneumatological concepts for future reflections in India. I believe that the significance of Keshub's pneumatological-ecclesiological insights can only be judged by a consideration of how many Indian thinkers have later built upon him. Thus, I could show from the preceding discussions how both Rammohan and Keshub can be considered as pioneers regarding Indian pneumatological discourse in Christian theology.

Having made an attempt at establishing the pioneering significance of the Brahma Samaj in Indian pneumatological discourse, the conclusion here is further stretched to have a conversation with Reformation pneumatology in the context of the 500th year of the Protestant Reformation this year. We have seen that both Rammohan and Keshub have theologised within the context of the Brahma Samaj, which represents in itself a reformed tradition of Hinduism. These pioneers have understood the significance of the Spirit within the context of renewal, being influenced by Christianity and Western education. As such their reflections have focussed on those aspects of the Christian discourse that aid in their reconceptualization of Hindu religion and society. Thus, the Brahma Samaj represented a movement that sought to move away from dogmatism and idolatry to the renewal of life and faith in a theistic movement and reorganisation of the community around it. Thus, the basic goal and motivation of renewal lies at the heart of the Brahma doctrine and practice, which is remarkably similar to that of the Reformation. The Reformation primarily sought to challenge the 'idolatries' built around the concept and practice of the Christian church and help restore the Word of God to be the true foundation for renewal and restoration of believers.

As we have seen, while Rammohan's reflection on the Holy Spirit centred on the person, Keshub dwelt both on the person and work of the Spirit. Rammohan brings reminiscences of the early pneumatological controversies, while Keshub's pneumatology moves forward to a constructive engagement with Christology and ecclesiology. Scripture becomes an important foundation for Rammohan to argue for his denial of the deity of the Spirit or to his alternative understandings of the same. Rammohan was not willing to put the Christian tradition at the same pedestal with Scripture, and thus was unable to find enough significance in the classical Fathers' arguments about the divinity or deity of the Spirit. This brings us to a major issue that the Reformation

controversy centred on: whether the church tradition is to have the same significance as the Word of God? - the magisterial reformers voted for the latter!

Rammohan's concept of the Holy Spirit built on his personal reading and interpretation of the Bible, however unconventional, brings to the fore two aspects which were also part of the Reformation controversy. The first one regarding the right of an individual to personally read and discover the meaning of Scripture by faith, apart from the dictates of the ecclesiastical tradition; and the second regarding the relationship between the Word and the Spirit. On the first one, both the Brahma Samaj and the Reformation sought to unchain the Scriptures from the oppressive institutional and ecclesial interpretations of the same so that liberative elements could aid the reform of religion and society. The second issue, i.e., regarding the relationship between the Word and the Spirit is the most important to consider here. Gary Badcock notes that 'the intrinsic connection of the work of the Spirit in the church with the doctrine of the Word of God as written and preached constitutes the distinctive emphasis of the pneumatology of the Reformation.'<sup>62</sup> The basic issue here was the struggle of the so-called magisterial reformers, like Luther and Calvin to uphold the dialectics of the Word and Spirit in the face of radical reformers who stressed on the inner Word of the Spirit while neglecting its outer forms and the Roman Catholic teaching of the authority of the church tradition in interpreting the Word of God. In both Rammohan and Keshub, and especially in the latter, the idea could be found that the reform of Hindu religion and society and building up of a theistic church are only possible through the guidance and presence of the Spirit. It was especially the conviction of Keshub that a community of the Spirit (which he calls the Church of the New Dispensation) could be possible by rejecting the dogmatism of Scripture, while embracing the Scriptures and people of other religions and ordering our lives accordingly. Both Luther and Calvin maintained the Word-Spirit

relationship in their reformation understanding. While Calvin points to the written Word as witness which is accepted only by the inward testimony of the Spirit; Luther emphasised the witness of the Spirit through the outward ordinances of God, through sacraments and preaching of the Word.<sup>63</sup> While it is affirmed here that the Brahma pioneers have been able to maintain some relationality between the Word and the Spirit, it is to be noted that Keshub could not prevent himself from giving undue stress on the inner witness of the Spirit leading to a privatised interpretation of the same, exactly what Luther and Calvin wanted to avoid. The controversy about the dichotomy between faith and work, a prominent one among the reformers however did not bother the Brahma Samajists, since for the latter the two went together.

Before I draw this discussion to a close, let me reiterate the fact that while Brahma Samajists did make significant contributions as pioneers of Indian Christian pneumatology, Reformation pneumatology can help correct some of its drawbacks to establish Indian pneumatology on a surer footing. On the other hand, reformation pneumatology can be enriched with contributions from early Indian pneumatology. The corrective from Reformation pneumatology is in the significance of upholding the Word-Spirit dialectics in any pneumatological discourse in India, so that any pneumatological movement avoids the danger of radicalism or extremism on both sides. From the magisterial reformers, Indian pneumatology has to take note that the witness of the Spirit is not only in our hearts or in our inner being only but in and through the Word of God and the sacraments. On the other hand, the contribution of Indian pneumatology, through the Brahma Samajists to Christian theology in general would be to encourage new conceptions of the Church in the Spirit as is evident in the concept of the non-sectarian and interfaith community built around Christ and the Spirit which Keshub sought to build. Indian Christian pneumatology continues to face this challenge of a relevant Spirit ecclesiology with an adequate Christology, while

inviting the greater theological arena to respond and contribute substantially.

### End Notes

- 1 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspective*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 11.
- 2 Ibid, 12.
- 3 Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1997) 6. See Karl Barth, 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher,' in Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 277-78.
- 4 See the quote in Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (Madras: CLS, 1969), 156.
- 5 Kirsteen Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003).
- 6 P.V. Joseph, *Indian Interpretation of the Holy Spirit: An Appraisal of the Pneumatology of Appasamy, Chakkarai and Chenchiah* (Dehradun/Delhi: New Theological College/ISPCK, 2007).
- 7 Cristina Manohar, *Spirit Christology: An Indian Christian Perspective*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009).
- 8 Another book by the same author is *Spirit, Time and Eternity: East-West Reflections*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2015)
- 9 Mercy T. Rani, *Assailants of the Spirit and the Upholders of 'Sakti' an Indian Feminist Assessment of the Holy Spirit*, (Bangalore: SATHRI, 2003).
- 10 P.V. Joseph's book mentioned earlier of course briefly highlights contributions of Rammohan Roy, Keshub Chunder Sen and Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, while highlighting a bit on Mozoomdar's emphasis on the Holy Spirit. But this work does not deal with his pneumatology at length. M.M.Thomas, while discussing the Christological and Trinitarian understandings of the Brahma Samaj has dealt with both Keshub and Mozoomdar, particularly some aspects of the pneumatology of the latter. See M.M.Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance, Confessing the Faith in India Series- No. 5*, (Madras: CLS, 1970), 58-102.
- 11 Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (Madras: CLS, 1969) 25.
- 12 Ibid., 24, See M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, (Madras: CLS, 1969) 29.

- 13 M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, (Madras: CLS, 1969) 28-29. Rammohan drawing from the *Ecclesiastical History of Mosheim* points out that until the fourth century, there were no mention of the Holy Spirit even as a secondary article of the Christian faith.
- 14 Rammohan Roy, *The Precepts of Jesus: A Guide to Peace and Happiness- Extracted from the Books of Four Evangelists to which are added the First and the Second Appeal to Christian Public in reply to observations of Dr. Marshman of Serampore*, (London Edition, Broadway: New York, 1825).
- 15 Rammohan Roy, *Final Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus*, (Calcutta: Unitarian Press, 1823)
- 16 *Second Appeal*, 229.
- 17 *Second Appeal*, 239.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 230-231.
- 19 Roy, *The Precepts of Jesus: A Guide to Peace and Happiness: The Second Appeal to Christian Public in reply to observations of Dr. Marshman of Serampore*, (London Edition, Broadway: New York, 1825). (Henceforth: Second Appeal) 228.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, 230.
- 22 Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspective*, 43.
- 23 Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 59.
- 24 Rani, *Assailants of the Spirit and the Upholders of 'Sakti' an Indian Feminist Assessment of the Holy Spirit*, 2.
- 25 Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies*, 235.
- 26 The influence of *Advaita Vedanta* on Rammohan is attested when he lived in Benaras for three years learning Sanskrit. See Ian Brooks Reed, 'Rammohan and the Unitarians', *M.A.Thesis*, (Florida State University, 2015), 9.
- 27 Rani, *Assailants of the Spirit and the Upholders of 'Sakti' an Indian Feminist Assessment of the Holy Spirit*, 54-55.
- 28 *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India*, The Brahma Samaj, (London: Cassell and Company, 1904), 16. (Henceforth, *Lectures*).
- 29 *Lectures*, 18.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 3
- 31 *Lectures*, 10.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 18.

- 33 *Ibid.*, 16,17.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 40.
- 36 Various expressions/spellings are in use by authors meaning the same thing- *Sat Chit Ananda, Saccidananda* etc.
- 37 See Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 69-71.
- 38 *Lectures*, 33.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 40 Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 173.
- 41 See D.A.Thangasamy, *The Theology of Chenchiah with Selection from his Writings*, (Bangalore: CISRS/ The Literature Department of the National Council of Y.M.C.A's of India, 1966), 108.
- 42 *Lectures*, 41.42
- 43 W. Roy Pape, "Keshub Chunder Sen's Doctrine of Christ and the Trinity: A Rehabilitation", 65, [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/25-2\\_055.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/25-2_055.pdf), accessed on 23rd July, 2017.
- 44 See Christina Manohar, *Spirit Christology: An Indian Christian Perspective*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009) regarding the Spirit Christologies of Chenchiah and Abhishiktananda.
- 45 Pape, "Keshub Chunder Sen's Doctrine of Christ and the Trinity: A Rehabilitation", 64,65.
- 46 *Lectures*, 40-43.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 4,5.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 41,42
- 49 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 51 *Lectures*, 43.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 54 Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, 75.
- 55 Keshub's friend and disciple Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar in his biography of Keshub Chunder Sen describes the conflicts arising out of renunciation of the sacred thread (*Upavita*) by the Brahmins, inter-caste marriages and widow re-marriages which Keshub strongly supported while Devendranath Tagore and some other senior Brahmos had objected. See P.C. Mozoomdar, *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen*, First Edition, (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1887), 100-101. See also Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 26.

- 56 See Manilal Parekh, *Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen*, (Oriental Christ House: Rajkot, 1926), 189.
- 57 See J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movement in India*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1915), 57. This is a quotation which Farquhar refers to which originally was published in the *Indian Mirror* of 15th October, 1896 called *Prof. Max Muller on the Paramhansa*.
- 58 See Mozoomdar, *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen*, 222.
- 59 Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, 73.
- 60 Keshub got into trouble when he justified his giving away of his minor daughter in marriage- a practice that he himself denounced as part of the Brahmo reform, following this *adesha* of the Spirit.
- 61 Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, 73.
- 62 Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love*, 86.
- 63 Badcock, 88.

## Revisiting 16th Century Reformers' View on Women and Women's Education

*Limatula Longkumer\**

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### Introduction

This year is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and the churches around the world are celebrating this great event in history. October 31, 2017 is marked as the birth of reformation in which Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses in the churches of Wittenberg against the Catholic Church. It is very appropriate for us to revisit and reflect upon on this important historic moment in our times. 16<sup>th</sup> century protestant reformation brought tremendous changes not only in ecclesial world but also in many spheres of life. Reformation can be looked at from different angles and here I want to examine reformers' view and contributions on women and their education process. Education is one area where tremendous development took place because reformers recognized that education was the key if reformation is to be successful. They gave importance to educational reforms, emphasised on compulsory education for all and urged the States, Institutions and churches to establish schools for boys and girls in every Towns and cities. On the other hand, though reformers emphasized on elementary education for both boys and girls, their focus on girls' education seems to be little different than the boys. Presumably, the patriarchal mindset and the existing worldview system might have blindfolded them to see women beyond patriarchy during

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that time. This male biased attitude towards women could be one of the black spots in the reformation process? Of course, we do not blame them outrightly because feminist consciousness was not there yet in those days like today. This paper attempts to look at 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant reformers' view on understanding of women and women's education in particular. Many reformers had contributed for the upliftment of women and education of women but in this paper I have limited mostly to Martin Luther and John Calvin's views on women and their efforts on educating the women.

### **1. Three Principles of Protestant Reformers Necessitate Education for All**

The three cardinal principles of reformers – *Sola fide, sola scriptura, sola gratia* and along with it *priesthood of all believers* were the driving forces to emphasize on educating the masses. During the reformation era, opportunity to educate was found mostly for high class children, aristocratic and affluent families and much of the educational activities were carried out in the private homes, which is popularly called today as home schooling with private tutors or coaches. Of course, there were few public and convent schools but only privileged children could get education from those institutions too. This created a gap between the high class and common ordinary people that majority of the poor masses were remained illiterate in 16<sup>th</sup> century. In such a time like this, the reformers recognised the importance of educating the masses and the sole intention was to read the scriptures and understand it for themselves. They also realised that education is the basic step for bringing change and transformation in the church and society. Hence, awareness through education they had taken very seriously.

*Justification by faith alone:* The reformers were fighting for justification by faith alone through grace contrary to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church who taught salvation through good works. Luther and other reformers emphasized

salvation through personal faith. Faith is the deciding factor, not Pope nor church, "The just shall live by faith," was the slogan of the reformers. Therefore, to achieve this notion humanization and conscientization through education was a radical conception about humans and their relation to God. Educating the masses on this issue was essential step to reform the church.

*Bible is the supreme authority in matters of faith:* The reformers put the Bible as the supreme authority in Christian living and guidance, and not the Pope or the Councils. Reformers argued that no church doctrine was valid unless proven by the scriptures and uphold that Bible is the final authority for faith and so people should have access to the Bible or Bible should be in the hands of common people. Thus, the importance of translating the Bible into common peoples' language and teaching the people basic literacy skill of how to read and write became an important step in reformation. Hence, education became essential for the people in order to read the Bible and so reformers emphasized on education of the public.

*Priesthood of all believers:* According to common practice during the time of reformation believers received grace through the sacraments of the church. Priests were the mediators between God and the people and they interpreted the Bible to them and did everything on faith matters on behalf of the people. Against this understanding, the reformers asserted that each believer enjoys direct access to God. Hence, priesthood is no longer in the hands of clergies alone but all Christians are priests in the sight of God. Each Christian as a member of Christ's body had no authority over the conscience of other Christians. Having equal access, each person could approach God directly without a priest. Reformers did not reject the priestly tradition in the church but believers' access to God directly in matters of individual faith and spirituality. Moreover, the Church governance should be in the hands of congregations which demanded educating the people

for church governance because the congregation members should participate actively in the church by distributing responsibilities.

Affirming that education of the masses is a necessity; the reformers formulated the following purpose and goals of Christian education:

1. Holistic education for all – physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions of the people.
2. Educating for service to God and humanity.
3. Developing Christian character.
4. Compulsory elementary education for all.

The notions of *justification by faith alone*, *Scripture alone* and *priesthood of all believers* had no gender specific aspect. It is general and applies to all people. “All Christian men are priests, even as all Christian women are priestesses.”<sup>1</sup> In principle, the reformers accepted the equality of both men and women but they were negative about women’s roles and status in the church. Reformers questioned in principle the purpose of women’s education, the role and place of women in church and society because they were measuring women’s ability with patriarchal scale or yardstick. As a result, their perspective on women is not very pleasing to look at. Hence, in the next section we will look into reformers’ view on women.

## 2. Reformers’ View on Women

No doubt, all the great 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers were not free from the worldviews of their time, that is, patriarchal mindset and ideologies. They viewed women with the patriarchal lenses and gendered roles’ perspective. The sad part is that the reformers did not critique on the evils of patriarchy but simply accommodated in the process of reformation. Patriarchy is a social and cultural system of control and domination of men over women. It articulates structural and institutional relations of dominations. It refers to power relations between women and men as “structural,” social practices of society; it is a pyramidal system

of domination, subordination and exploitation. The term “gender” refers to culturally transmitted differences between men and women. It refers to all the socially ascribed attributes, roles, and responsibilities connected to being a male or a female in a given society. It also determines how the power is distributed between the sexes. Gender identity determines how we are perceived, and how we are expected to think and act as women and men, because of the way society is organized. In this gender role division women’s world is at homes and the men’s world is in the public.

From these perspectives of patriarchal worldviews, ideologies and gender roles reformers articulated about women’s role and status in the church and society. They held biased attitude towards women and this had been reflected in education of women. The reformers regarded women as inferior in mind and body and subjected to the male as superior due to the Fall in which she lost her original equality. This subjugation is the expression of divine justice for her sin but not a sin against her. Any revolt against it by woman is a cavilling refusal to accept the judgment of God. The rule remains with the husband, and the wife is compelled to obey him by God’s command.<sup>2</sup>

Martin Luther based his view on women in his interpretation of the Bible. In his commentaries on Genesis and the Pauline Epistles, Luther argued that women are less intelligent than men and have an inferior place because of the fall as recorded in Genesis. In 1519 he preached his *Sermon on the Estate of Marriage* and a section of *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, concerns on marriage that “a woman is created to be a companionable helpmate to the man in everything in everything, particularly to bear children.”<sup>3</sup> Consistently in his writings, Luther placed women on primary importance on the development of a Christian home.<sup>4</sup> His thinking was very much in line with patriarchal roles of women that women’s world is in home affairs - a private domain; and the men’s world is the public space. According to Luther, his wife primary task as a protestant wife was to care for her husband and

family.<sup>5</sup> This was the view of Martin Luther's understanding of women which was purely from patriarchal perspective and so very biased.

When it comes to church ministry, Luther argued that due to two reasons women were debarred from the church: (a) physical weakness, and (b) their limitations outside the household affairs. He affirmed that women's keep silence in the churches not in terms of a commandment, but rather in terms of women's physical inability to perform the responsibilities of the ministerial office. Women were said not to have the vigorous voice needed for proper preaching, as their physiology revealed.<sup>6</sup> Luther said that a woman's soft voice and dull memory disqualified her from such ministries. Hence, women lacked biblical qualifications to preach and teach in the church. Men are by nature more fit for this task because they have better memories and voices. For the proponents of the medieval understanding of the church, this public role of women (in the church) was truly the abomination of abominations.<sup>7</sup> Hence, Luther curtailed women from the role of the congregation and the pulpit ministry. In addition, he upheld that women were destined by God for the care of the home. However, in some cases where no suitable man was available, Luther allowed a temporary exception.<sup>8</sup> He also permitted to continue the Catholic practice of midwives to baptize babies on the verge of death.<sup>9</sup> His concern was for a structured society, in which everyone had an assigned place and order, for women, that was the place of wife and mother. The above statements show that Luther generalised women's role in the church and society on the basis of patriarchy and gendered roles perspective. His arguments are baseless and ridiculous and need to be dismissed because they are no longer valid today.

Like Luther, according to Calvin, woman's subjection originated because Eve was created as Adam's 'helper.' She was made *after* him and *for* him. For Calvin, this account was fundamental for all thoughts about women. This original subjection was simply aggravated by her sin. Calvin said that

the subordination of women to men is not an expression of an inferiority rather it reflects the divinely created social order by which God has ordained the rule of some and the subjugation of others: rulers over subjects, masters over servants, husbands over wives, parents over children. This hierarchical order is not a reflection of differences of human nature, but rather of differences of appointed social office. God assigned a woman to obey and the man to rule.<sup>10</sup> The woman's vocation is for kitchen and children; inferiority means difference in function - the men outside of the home and the women within the home.

The above arguments show that reformers did not challenge patriarchal worldviews during that time but rather incorporated and accommodated it in their theology and ecclesiastical ministry. In other words, they were negative and biased to women's concerns and rather upheld patriarchal tradition when it comes to women's issue. This patriarchal ideology has found a stronghold in the process of making theology, biblical interpretation which shaped Christianity's thinking about women, silencing, and excluding from the academic and ministry. This Reformers' theology and biblical interpretation impacted women and their status in the churches badly. Today, the situation has been changing for women but still patriarchy and gendered roles curtailed women from full participation in the church and society, and this patriarchal mindset is a root cause of discrimination of women in the society.

### **3. Reformers' View on Women's Education**

Reformers' view on women's education has to be looked at from the patriarchal mindset. We acknowledge that one great contribution of 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers was giving importance to educating the girls. Reformers promoted education for all boys and girls, which was very remarkable for that time because education was available only for boys of higher social or economic status. There were some women who joined convents as nuns, but this was often their parents' choice rather than their own. For example, 12<sup>th</sup> century mystic Hildegard of Bingen was the 10<sup>th</sup> child in

her family and her well-to-do parents gave her to the convent as a tithe (10 percent of their assets given to God). Katharina von Bora, Luther's wife, was sent to a convent at age 5 when her father remarried after her mother's death. There were also few boarding schools for high class women but for common poor people there was no privilege for education. For high-born and for convent-situated women, a certain amount of advanced religious and advanced secular learning was also available.<sup>11</sup>

Reformers purpose of women's education was learning basic literacy of how to read the Bible, to become a good wife and mother and bring up their children in faith. Luther emphasised on the importance of reading Scriptures for oneself and to participate fully in religious life for oneself sparked an emphasis on literacy for everyone. He encouraged communities to establish and support schools and urged parents to send their children — both boys and girls to school rather than keeping them at homes. This resulted in the establishment of local schools for boys and girls in many parts of Germany, and the publication of appropriate texts such as Catechisms to be used both in the church and at homes. In *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Respecting the Reformation of the Christian Estate*, and other writings, Luther wrote, "Would to God each town had also a girls' school, in which girls might be taught the gospel for **an hour daily**, either in German or Latin."<sup>12</sup> There seems to be no detail information about the duration of school or what girls were taught. Bowden said, "the girls did not stay long enough to be taught how to write."<sup>13</sup> This indicates that girls attended school fewer hours a day than boys and for fewer years. This also gives us a clear picture that girls' education was intended only for basic literacy where as education for boys aimed at higher level of learning with longer durations. Along with basic skills of how to read and write, girls learnt Catechism. Johann Agricola's book, *One Hundred-and-Thirty Questions for the Young Children in the German Girls' School at Eisleben* (1527), a catechetical work for religious instruction,

is considered the earliest book published explicitly for use in a school for girls,<sup>14</sup> which is a good example.

Luther was concerned for education of the young, but he clearly did not envision education as a means to allow women to obtain the qualifications needed to stand in the pulpit. His chief concern for educating women was not so much for the woman's welfare or attaining womanhood but for posterity. A woman's personal development remained less important than her role in the home. Women's role was at home, to be a companion and helpmate of her husband, an amazing degree of freedom in a marriage relationship, wife of a minister.<sup>15</sup> In a traditional structured society, everyone had assigned place. For women, that was the place of wife and mother at homes. The theological presupposition which supported reformers was that God has instituted social orders or structures so as to allow all humans to live in peace and harmony.<sup>16</sup> For women housekeeping and childbearing were spiritually meaningful place. According to Luther, the mother was to teach the Bible to the children and instruct them in the catechism and reformed doctrines. This learning at home would provide the child with a foundation for the work of the schoolmaster. I certainly agree with Luther emphasizing on importance of home education and the role of parents in upbringing the children, but limiting women's potentialities only to home affairs is not right to uphold today. Moreover, planning education system on the basis of gender was not a right thing, both boys and girls should be encouraged to pursue education for their lives.

Parents' attitude towards their daughters' education during reformation era is interesting to note. For many parents, the purpose of educating their daughters was intended to fit them for their future role as wives and mothers. In other words, getting education was a preparatory for good marriage. Hence, education of girls would reach a higher standard of motherhood, develop a more companion relationship with their husband and be active Christians themselves. Therefore, the purpose of sending the

girls to school was to function more effectively as wives and mothers. At the same time, education enabled women to extend their activities and assume a more prominent role in family affairs. That's the reason why girls' education was focused more on the family and did not aim for higher studies. Girls were taught good manners, obedience, honesty, virtue and humility and skills necessary for the them in adult life appropriate to her social status, that is, homes. Parents expected their daughters to learn modesty, dutifulness, chastity, respect and obedience or desirable feminine characteristics<sup>17</sup> like humbleness, patience, hardwork, etc. Of course there were very few parents considered a different future for their daughters, not only acquisition of basic reading skills but aimed for higher education even upto the ability to compose original prose and plays,<sup>18</sup> even music. But most of the parents aimed to see their daughters married of and settled down a good household, so it is within the context of the family that most evidence of women's activities is to be found. So, we can see that parents never dreamed for their daughters beyond traditional home affairs even though they receive education.

On the whole, the reformers initiative in establishing education for girls in 16<sup>th</sup> century is highly appreciated. There were some female boarding schools for a limited number of the well-to-do, but their curricula, with rare exceptions, were aimed at developing socially acceptable rather than learned women. For women's higher education, the possibilities were even more closed off.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the reformers understood the importance of educating a woman which is equivalent to educating a nation. Women are powerful agents of change; therefore empowerment of women through education has tremendous impact in the lives of the families, church and society. But on the other hand, reformers never attempted to educate women for life because their understanding of women's education was certainly from males' perspective. So their perspective of education was gendered education, to function effectively the gender role divisions in the

church and society. Therefore, they had a very narrow minded, one sided and conservative idea about promoting a woman through education because women's destiny is home only. In the 16th century, women's life choices were limited. Living as a single, independent woman was simply not acceptable in the society. Most women transitioned from being under the authority of their fathers to that of their husbands and then, if they outlived their spouses, that of their eldest son. Hence, reformers' aim of women's education was only for acquiring basic knowledge to manage their families.

On the other hand, Reformers like Luther and John Calvin promoted a new understanding of marriage as loving, faithful companionship. The reformers reacted to the traditional understanding of marriage and women, especially on the issue of clerical celibacy. They reacted to the idea of virginity as the highest morality which is superior to marriage. Reformers affirmed that marriage is ordained by God; and sex is a divine gift.<sup>20</sup> They denounced the monastic life and asked the monks and nuns to get married and find a position as a pastor.<sup>21</sup> This new view resulted in the decline of arranged marriages, where the daughter was often merely a part of a familial bargaining process, and never based on personal choice and commitment.<sup>22</sup> For centuries the church had taught that the primary purposes of marriage were reproduction and providing an acceptable outlet for sexual desire. The good news in this is that the Reformation recognized and celebrated the value of women's status as wives and mothers as well as marriage as companionship.

In spite of limited education facilities for women, and restriction in public life, there were some distinguish women who played an important public role in the reformation period. Women became involved in public debate about the new faith because they, like men, had to make a decision either for or against the new gospel. Some women became ardent and even public partisans of the new faith. Some did so through personal activism, exhibiting

qualities not frequently found in women in that male-oriented age. Women like Katherina Zell, Argula von Grumbach, or Ursula von Münsterberg, were literary advocates for the reform and impressed all with their biblical literacy.<sup>23</sup> Katherine Von Bora, Luther's wife, Marguerite of Navarre, French noble women, Jeanne d' Albret, and Renee of France<sup>24</sup> were outstanding women leaders during that time.

John Calvin influenced the religion and politics of France and other countries, partly by his correspondence and friendships with aristocratic women.<sup>25</sup> Like Marguerite of Navarree, Jenne d' Albret, Renne of France. George Huntston Williams in the radical Reformation has stated that a near equality existed between the Anabaptist "sisters" and "brethren", these women's missionary efforts and martyrdom showed that the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer applied to male and female alike.<sup>26</sup> Anabaptist women were martyred by both Catholics and Protestants. They survived persecution due to women writers and artists. Hence, we can see some outstanding women in spite of suppression of women's role in the public.

From the patriarchal mindset and gender role divisions the reformers looked at women's education that it should be merely for basic literacy and never aimed for higher education for women. Yet, we can see some progressive movement for women in the Reformation of the 16th century, even though there were very few of them. By the second generation of the Reformation, more than 90 percent of pastors' wives were literate. In fact, the modern feminist movement has a root to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century where feminist consciousness started from there by the women leaders. We can say that the simple and basic education which women received during reformation germinated feminist consciousness in later generations.

#### **4. Reflection**

Today the status of women and women's education system has changed tremendously than 16<sup>th</sup> century. Women have

come a long way and there are very progressive elements and achievements by women everywhere. We find women in every sectors and workstations along with men. Even in the churches and theological institutions we find many women, though fewer in number than men. Both the churches and civil societies are engaged with empowerment of women. In fact, compulsory elementary education for all which was launched after India's independence and "right to education" is ongoing struggle to achieve education for all; and special privileges to girl child in education promises are being made by the governments are amazing.

But when we look critically at the present scenario of our society today, there is gender injustices and discrimination of women and girl child everywhere due to very gender. In spite of modernization and globalization processes patriarchal mindset and attitudes have not changed. The development paradigms and technologies are still guided by patriarchal ideologies and worldviews. There is still a long way to achieve equality and justice for women because patriarchal ideologies and gendered roles are very much present in our midst. Patriarchal ideologies are existed in the family norms and practices, in education system in the schools, in cultural practices, and in religions perpetuate patriarchal ideologies. Patriarchy is also deeply rooted in our church structures and theological education, and educational theories. In many churches women priests and theologians are not fully recognise or accepted like male pastors. Women are viewed from gender and patriarchal lenses as 'object' to be used and manipulated. Every day, somewhere in India there is news about rape of women and girl, molestation, sexual harassment and trafficking. Women are being discriminated and struggling for gender justice is a serious issue that demands our serious attention to take up.

As we look back 500 years of reformation history, which brought tremendous changes in the churches and society in the past and the impact is still going on in many aspects. We live in

a postmodern and globalized world with the fast explosion of information technology, advancement of science and education and global market economy. In this competing world both men and women equally take part in every stream of life activities. To remain in the old traditional thinking and practices of rigid patriarchal attitudes and gender roles system in the society in this modern age is no longer relevant. In fact, changes in secular society are more progressive than in the churches. Churches are still rigid when it comes to women's issues and partnership in ministry. This calls to transform our theology, Christian education and theological education, pulpit ministry and liturgies. There is a need to nurture women and men in partnership through education. We need to de-construct the gender conditioning and the dualistic mentality that are inherent in our ways of thinking and relating with one another. By doing so there will be gender justice in the society, at homes and in the church where leadership is shared equally between men and women, equality is practiced and appreciated and responsibilities are shared equally. We should take forward women's concerns to a higher level to achieve a greater justice in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, so that partnership of women and men can be achieved in every sphere of life.

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## **Reimagining and Reforming Pastoral Care in the Light of Contemporary Contextual Challenges: Healing Potency of Hope**

*James Wesly S\**

### **Introduction**

People, families and communities are vulnerable to problems and sufferings in the form of political unrest, natural disaster, volatile economy, racial/caste/gender/communal violence, war, family problems, unemployment, poverty, interpersonal conflicts, etc., resulting in loss of meaning and a sense of hopelessness. Problems bring people face to face with deeply troubling and emotionally painful experiences; thus making them susceptible to crises and trauma in their life. Each new era of history and each new context brings new and diverse challenges to human health and wholeness. It is important to find new ways of helping and creatively engaging in activities that would instil health and enable growth and wholeness in people. The paper makes an attempt to discuss the importance of reimagining and reforming pastoral care practice in response to the unique and diverse contextual needs and challenges of today. Secondly, an attempt is made to understand as to what should be the main focal point of Pastoral Care in contemporary context of war, violence, instability and insecurity often resulting in a sense of helplessness and hopelessness? In other words, what can bring healing and wholeness in lives of people in the midst of local as well as global challenges today?

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### **1. The Context: Stories of Hopelessness and Helplessness**

In our contemporary context some people experience situations and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness more than others as they constantly face threat of violence and discrimination because of their gender, sexual orientation, faith belief, cultural and food habits, racial, cultural and caste background, etc. For example, sexual minorities in the midst of transphobia and homophobia and religious minorities in the midst of religious fundamentalism and majoritarianism live in constant fear of violence and discrimination. Children in the midst of poverty, human trafficking, child labour and women in the midst of androcentrism and patriarchy experience discrimination, abuse and human rights violations as a normative experience. The elderly and the aged in the midst of profit driven economy face loneliness, rejection, abuse and neglect. Farmers in the midst of problems of climate change, globalisation and debt crisis have become more vulnerable to suicide. Young adults amidst plenty of gadgets and social media contacts but poverty of in-depth interpersonal supportive relationship from the family and friends coupled by stress of unhealthy working conditions are often left with a deeper sense of hopelessness and helplessness. Losing hope or shattering of hopeful future stories is an essential ingredient for death through suicide. According to Gabriel Marcel "Hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism. Where hope is lacking the soul dries up and withers."<sup>1</sup> India has the highest rate of suicide among the youth between the 15 and 29 year age group. The Hindustan Times May 2017 report states that every hour at least one student commits suicide.<sup>2</sup> People often commit suicide when their present reality is deeply painful and the future looks bleak, uncertain and hopeless. 17<sup>th</sup> August News Report by NDTV reports that 34 farmers have committed suicide within a span of 8 days in Marathawada region of Maharashtra.<sup>3</sup> Many farmers commit suicide because in the midst of repeated crop failure and increasing debt their hopeful future story is completely destroyed and replaced by hopelessness.

Even with regard to recent deaths by the online game “Blue Whale Challenge” many Psychiatrist after studying different cases observe that not all adolescent children are vulnerable but children who are “unhappy, directionless, lacking goals and those that are feeling inadequate or incompetent” are more vulnerable to such games.<sup>4</sup> In other words these are children who lack a sense of self-worth and who do not have a hopeful future story and who do not see their future as hopeful. To hope is to look forward to the future with lots of expectation and joy. Lack of hope often denotes the absence or the destruction of hopeful future story and the presence of shattered, gloomy and broken future story.

## 2. Need for Reimagining and Reforming Pastoral Care

Pastoral Care has gone through lots of refinement and reformation and has transformed and modified itself so as to address various contextual challenges and needs. Down the centuries the ministry of pastoral care has evolved and developed distinctive functions and has undertaken diverse tasks in order to help people in facing life’s challenges and crises and to live a fuller life. Efforts have often been made in reimagining, renewing and reforming pastoral care practice according to the needs of each context.<sup>5</sup> We can find considerable number of literature written about Pastoral Ministry and Pastoral care during the time of Church Fathers for example Chrysostom, Augustine and others. However between 500 and 1500 AD for about ten centuries until the time of reformation due to the problem of corruption within the Church there was a gross neglect of Pastoral Care. After the dark medieval period Reformation was required in order to revitalise pastoral care of the church. Thus Martin Luther, John Wesley, Richard Baxter and others contributed to the revival and reformation of the Pastoral Care practices.<sup>6</sup>

Even today practice of pastoral care is often neglected and also stagnant completely dependent on archaic traditional methods of care which are often irrelevant, incompatible and unsuitable to the contemporary needs and challenges that people face in their

life. So re-imagination and reformation of pastoral care at every period of history is very pertinent in order to stay relevant to the needs of the people. One of the most important need of today’s context is to instil hope in midst of hopelessness, fatalism and conformism. Pastoral Care and Counselling has largely depended on either past or the present experience thus neglecting the dynamic role that future (hope) plays in human beings. Viktor Frankl’s Logo therapy has pushed the therapeutic boundary to include the future stories of the human persons. In hoping, one mobilises the potency in bringing or hastening healing but in hopelessness, one simply gives up and gives in to despair and destruction.

### 2.1. Meaning of Hope

‘Hope,’ though a familiar word, its meaning and significance is greatly watered-down and the role that it plays in an individual’s life is largely ignored. In fact, hope plays a central role in the psychosomatic realm of human life yet its potency to instigate healing is not recognised well in the spheres of psychology and pastoral theology. For Erik Erikson “hope is powerful but often neglected dynamic for change in us human beings.”<sup>7</sup> Further Erikson states, “Hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive, if life is to be sustained hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded trust impaired.”<sup>8</sup> The earliest virtue that a new born child can acquire is either a sense of hope or mistrust. According to Robert L. Carrigan hope goes far beyond the individual, as hope is not experienced alone apart from the hoping community.<sup>9</sup> In order to understand the healing potency of hope from a pastoral care perspective it is pertinent to have a broader understanding of what is health and healing. Abigail Rian Evans in her book “Redeeming Market Place Medicine: A theology of Health Care,” states

‘Interpreting health and disease primarily in organic terms results in an emphasis on the physical body rather than the whole person- body, mind and spirit.

The patient is viewed as a collection of organs, not an integrated whole.<sup>10</sup> ‘The Restoration of health becomes the elimination of disease rather than the treatment of the whole person in her or his setting... furthermore, this disease orientation may narrow treatment only to symptoms rather than to their underlying causes.’<sup>11</sup> ‘Health is a dynamic state of well-being of the individual and the society; of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social well-being, in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God.’<sup>12</sup>

Health being the dynamic state of well-being is not just the absence of disease. Thus even at the point of Death people with terminal illness can also become hopeful as they experience not physical but mental, spiritual and social healing. To hope is the look forward and not giving-in to the forces of destruction and lack of hope seem to accelerate the arrival of death for a patient.<sup>13</sup> Thus, hope plays a very important role in the dynamic state of well-being and the healing potency of hope though may not be readily visible, is broader and influences the human person as a whole and not in parts. Further, healing potency of hope goes beyond the individual and is sustained by the society, for hope is realized by individuals within a community.<sup>14</sup>

Hope is not wishful thinking but it is an **attitude** characterised by an expectation of a favourable outcome of an event.<sup>15</sup> For Ernst Bloch hope is a stance of **openness to the not-yet**.<sup>16</sup> Further Andrew D. Lester states, ‘‘Hope is **rooted in reality**. Hoppers relate to ‘what is’ and have little need to pretend... People who **hope do not need to dodge** the facts or obscure the objective data. Hope does not function as an opiate that causes people to deny reality. In fact, hope provides the courage to face whatever chaos and trauma life throws to us. Hope does not try to avoid the pain of finite existence nor is it naïve about suffering.’<sup>17</sup>

### **Paul W. Pruyser,**

gives the example of hope in the situation of a person suffering from a serious disease who has been given to understand that his disease is terminal no one can effect a cure and the downhill course cannot be forestalled by any means. One reaction of such a patient may be to give up hope and give into the forces of destruction. Physicians know that such reaction, which may be described as realistic from one point of view, is likely to hasten the arrival of death, *for the organism no longer mobilizes the resources that could prolong life*. Another reaction is *to accept the gloomy prognosis and to see its implications clearly and yet to hope*. Physicians know that in such cases life may be prolonged, and on occasion life may even prove to be victorious.<sup>18</sup>

Hopelessness, however, often attaches itself to unreality. People become vulnerable to despair to the degree they separate themselves from reality by attaching their hoping process to fantasy and illusion rather than to reality. Superficially, these fantasies resemble the dynamic nature and processes of functional hope. In fact, as Lynch accuses, ‘they are a brilliant and exuberant counterfeit of hope,’ and upon close examination we discover they are ‘the very reverse of hope.’<sup>19</sup>

### **3. Biblical Understanding of Hope**

Hope is one of the important aspects of Bible found both in the Old Testament and New Testament. In the Psalms hope is an important theme which is aimed at helping people to overcome the gloomy and painful past stories and present reality. The aim of hope is to help people cope ‘‘with defeat, discouragement, and danger (psalm 119: 116; 146:5).’’<sup>20</sup> Hope that is seen in the Old Testament

is an “foreshadow” to hope in the New Testament and the ultimate “hope found in Jesus Christ (I Timothy 1:1; Colossians 1:27). Hope is also a very important theme in the books of the New Testament like Acts, Epistles and the book of Revelation.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.1. Old Testament

In the Old Testament hope is closely related to the character of God. Those who hope in God trust God and God’s promises.<sup>22</sup> As S. C. Barton states, “in the Old Testament hope in God is predicated on the mighty acts he (sic) has done for Israel. God has acted on behalf of his(sic) people in the past, and thus the faithful can be certain that he (sic) will exercise his righteousness on their behalf.”<sup>23</sup> Further, “this hope was directed to a future in history of which the horizon was constantly broadening.” “Hope is the bridge between the Old and the New Covenants since hope does not determine how God will show himself (sic) but remains open for all new and astonishing manifestations of love.”<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2. New Testament

In the New Testament the ground of hope was in the work of God in Christ.<sup>25</sup> “Hope rests on God’s eschatological act of salvation in Christ and this provided the framework for Paul’s thinking. Christ’s resurrection marks the beginning of the Messianic age, the presence of the Spirit is evidence that the end has begun and Christian hope waits for the complete manifestation of the Kingdom of God at the second coming.”<sup>26</sup>

J. R. Beck denotes that Bible emphasises the strategic role of hope in the human personality. Faith seems to answer to the human need for spiritual meaning, love relates to the intrapersonal and interpersonal needs of humans to relate to self and others, and *hope reflects the motivational needs of humans to find meaning and purpose in the future.* Hope is clearly portrayed as a significant motivator of human endeavour (Titus 2:11-14; I John 3:3).<sup>27</sup> In the words of J. M. Everts, “Christian hope only finds meaning as a foretaste of something greater and more glorious... Hope is an

encouragement to believers in the midst of suffering, but it also prevents believers from being content with present circumstances. Hope insists that Christians wait with eager longing for the great day when all God’s promises are fulfilled.”<sup>28</sup> This waiting should not be taken as a flight from the present realities but the promised future hope challenges to affirm life in the midst of all life denying realities. From the biblical perspective hope has the ability to sustain people in the midst of their present problem situation by showing them a future whose horizon is open and not limited by present circumstances.

### 4. Hope, Theological Foundation

Theologically hope serves the function of linking the believer to the future promised by Christ. As the follower of Christ experiences a new spiritual life, there is a keen awareness that the earthly enjoyments of faith in Christ are incomplete. What has begun on earth will continue to eternity. Hope links the believer’s present with a glorious future.<sup>29</sup> For Thomas Aquinas, *hope is directed to a future good* which is hard but not impossible to attain, but the diluted understanding of hope as merely consoling oneself with the promise of better life elsewhere is what occasioned the reproach of Karl Marx that religion is the opium of the masses.<sup>30</sup> According to Moltmann hope is central to Christianity, omit hope and the Christian Gospel is not Gospel.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, *Christian hope is grounded in the memory and the making present of Christ.* As Moltmann states, ‘*it is hope of Christ; otherwise it is not Christian.*’ “By virtue of the resurrection of Christ, Christian hope arises from this twofold ‘zero point,’ the crucified future hope of the disciples and the women’s destroyed trust in death.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus from the theological view point Christian hope as it is centred on the life, death and resurrection of Christ is fundamental to Christian faith. For Moltmann this hope brought by Christ’s resurrection, challenges to live life against those powers of death by means of loving, sharing life, establishing life, making life

once again worth living by working for justice against violence and protection of creation against annihilation.<sup>33</sup>

## 5. Psychological View on Hope

J.R. Beck states the psychological view of hope in the following words:

Hope is a desire accompanied by the expectation that the desire will be obtained. It is partly cognitive (it is a thought), partly emotional (it involves anticipation and other positive affects), and partly volitional (it contains belief). Hope has traditionally had spiritual or religious connotations. For this reason hope has not been a major focus of psychological study in spite of its obvious emotional components.<sup>34</sup>

### 5.1. The Role of Hope in Human Motivation

J. R. Beck denotes, “Hopelessness, or the lack of hope, is a prominent feature of the various depressive syndromes and of suicidal persons... further hopelessness is a clinical feature of moderate and severe depressions and is present in about one-half of mild cases.”<sup>35</sup> “Viktor Frankl’s remarkable book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, confirms the assumption that the loss of hope has a deadly effect. He observed his Jewish comrades die one after another in Nazi concentration camps, not only by way of the gas chamber but from having given up hope. He makes a convincing point that when a man (sic) no longer possesses a motive for living, no future to look toward, he (sic) curls up in a corner and dies.”<sup>36</sup> According to Frankl to hope is to find meaning in present realities by looking forward to some future goal and it is this hopeful future goal which motivates individuals not to give up but to strive forward.

### 5.2. The Importance of Hope in Human Personality

Erikson identifies hope as the earliest and most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive.<sup>37</sup> “In his delineation of

whole life cycle he places the quality of hope as the first requisite in Childhood. The development of hope within the child is the necessary foundation upon which the other virtues of will, purpose; competence, fidelity, love, care and wisdom finally rest. If there is no experience of hope in the child’s life, he (she) is hurt, made ill, and thereby functions on a lower level.”<sup>38</sup> “Hope, once established as a basic quality of experience, remains independent of the verifiability of ‘hopes’... The gradual widening of the infant’s horizon of activity experience provides, at each step, verification so rewarding that they inspire new hopefulness. At the same time, the infant develops a greater capacity for renunciation, together with the ability to transfer disappointed hopes to better prospects; and he (she) learns to dream what is imaginable and to train his (her) expectations on what promises to prove possible.”<sup>39</sup> Thus hope, right from birth and throughout each stage of development plays a significant role in personality development.

### 5.3. The Curative Power of Hope in the Recovery of Severely Disturbed Persons

“Scientists have long recognised the power of hopeful feelings in physical health. In controlled experiments, patients who received placebos frequently reported better and at times, have unaccountable improvement.”<sup>40</sup> “Re-visioning the future has significant power to change the present. Reshaping the future by projecting the self in creative new stories is important to regaining hope. By developing hopeful images of the future, people can regain excitement, motivation, purpose and the deep joy that enables them to transcend the tribulations of the present moment.”<sup>41</sup> According to Engel and his associates, “helplessness and hopelessness reflect a necessary if not a sufficient condition for the development of organic disease... and further loss of hope seemed to accelerate the arrival of death for a patient.”<sup>42</sup>

## 6. Place of Hope in Pastoral Care and Counselling

In counselling hope comes not from trying to reassure the client but from the relationship itself, which engenders hope.<sup>43</sup> According to Roy W. Fairchild, “Hope, even in terminal illness can be enlarged.” Even if the medical diagnosis might be undesirable and adverse but the role of the Christian minister is minister and care in a way that the terminally ill person is enabled to live a complete and happy life till the moment of death. By giving up hope people can become severely ill, disabled and die early than usual. In addition to that they may become negative, grumbling and wretched as they face the end of their life or they can be enabled to live the rest of life with the sense of purpose and fulfilment. “Helping people come to this realization is an expression of sustaining ministry.”<sup>44</sup> According to Fairchild in Pastoral care and counselling hope constitutes not in specific objects or circumstance but in relationship. Hope is a shared experience and hope is not pragmatic tranquilliser or glossing over tragic doubts. Hope is not accomplished in making demands or offering promises about future. However, Christian hope is ultimately rooted and grounded in God’s love as revealed in Jesus Christ. Christian hope is a shared experience, hoping with or for others, which transcends the lone individual and his/her ego needs. Community is the vehicle of hoping.<sup>45</sup>

### 6.1. Creating/Instilling Hope in Pastoral Care and Counselling

The question is how to find hope or rather how to instil or create hope in a person who is in need of hope.

**6.1.1. For Royal J. Synwolt**, pastor can be a Harbinger of hope by following some practical things. First, offering his/her valuable *Time*, secondly, taking the *Initiative* to meet people in need and not to wait for the needy to approach and this is followed by meeting in a *Place* where the surroundings lend themselves a positive and therapeutic atmosphere. Moreover, the *Role*, the

character of the minister, his/her stance toward life, his/her love for life, and communicating hope on others depends upon the pastoral counsellor as a person.<sup>46</sup> These are some of the practical ways by which hope can be communicated or rather instilled but the pastoral counsellor can communicate hope in verbal manner too. According to Synwolt “*communicating hope in a verbal way* can be very constructive. The purpose is to help people in distress to change their attitudes about themselves, to help them begin to believe in themselves, and to start in motion those resources within their lives which have been obscured.”<sup>47</sup> For this the pastoral counsellor could depend on some meaningful religious resources to instil hope verbally. This approach is suitable to people whose present experience is an experience of pain, suffering and deeper stress and whose vision is blurred because of their present problems and crises.

**6.1.2. Andrew D. Lester** uses the narrative theory and describes that each individual dimensions of temporality is structured in the form of narrative stories of past, present and future. The future stories play an important role as crises results from either a real or a perceived threat to the future dimension of our life stories. According to Lester in order to understand the human crises, one must ask has the future story been affected. Past events and present circumstances, certainly makes one vulnerable but it is the threat to one’s future story that makes one vulnerable to despair. So creating a positive future story is necessary for healing.<sup>48</sup> In order to construct a hopeful future story Lester points to the following methods.

1. First is encountering the unconscious dysfunctional future story.<sup>49</sup>
2. Secondly, envisioning, constructing future stories that are functional by
  - Identifying future stories by storytelling.<sup>50</sup>
  - Through guided imagining exploring alternative future stories.<sup>51</sup>

- Going into “as if” conversation with future stories.<sup>52</sup>
  - Deleting the problem for problem block’s one’s journey towards the future.<sup>53</sup>
  - Imagining a Miracle.<sup>54</sup>
3. Spiritual Revisioning<sup>55</sup> can not only help in transcending the present reality and future possibilities but also transcend life’s limitations.<sup>56</sup>

## 7. Healing Potency of Hope

The kind of hope that brings healing to the depressed person enables him/her to say yes to life, to accept and to believe that it is always possible to imagine another way to go. Such hope sees reality as open-ended and having resources as yet undiscovered and untapped. Certainty may be lacking but he/she has the courage to act as if it existed.<sup>57</sup> The role of hope in bringing healing and in giving the most needed lifeline in the form of motivation in the midst of hopelessness is clearly evident from the above discussions. Hoping or to hope is to look towards the future and this is not to deny the present reality. Viktor Frankl in his book “Man’s search for meaning” denotes that the death rate between Christmas 1944 and New Year 1945 was huge beyond previous years in camp. The reason was neither hard working condition nor deterioration of food supplies but the prisoners lost courage and disappointment overcame them as their naïve hope of going home for Christmas was shattered. Further, Frankl states, “any attempt to restore a man’s (sic) inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him (her) some future goal.”<sup>58</sup> According to Gabriel Marcel in hope, something goes infinitely further than mere acceptance of the present reality like the men who gave up hope in the concentration camp. As Marcel states, by hoping the temptation to despair is actively and victoriously overcome.<sup>59</sup> As the example of placebo experiments reveal, hope does hasten, instigate and mobilise the resources needed for healing.

## 7.1. Healing and Hope in the Midst of Terminal Illness

In the case of people who are terminally ill and are at the brim of death, the question of hopeful future story does not arise at all. But still quite a number of people living with HIV/AIDS experience hope not by the promise of healing from their physical ailment rather they experience hope through holistic healing. For example even though physical healing is not possible people living HIV/AIDS and other terminal illness are made hopeful and whole as they are enabled to find healing from self-blame, guilt through self-acceptance (intrapersonal healing), acceptance by others especially by family and friends (interpersonal healing) and realizing their worth before God (Spiritual Healing). Secondly they are enabled to find hope when they discover a future story or purpose to live for. The stories and testimonies in the book “Living and not just existing” points to the fact that these people living with HIV/AIDS become hopeful when they discover that they can become agents of change by giving awareness education to others with high-risk behaviour and save them from the deadly disease.<sup>60</sup> Finding hope in the midst of terminal illness is very essential because being hopeful gives the individual the strength not to give up but to fight and to live a fuller life till the very end.

## 7.2. Daring to Dream: Hope an Essential Antidote Against Structural and Social Evil

Problems faced by individuals and families today are not just because of intrapersonal or interpersonal conflicts but an outcome of the impact of larger structural and social evils such as caste, patriarchy, poverty, corruption, child labour, domestic violence, farmers’ suicide, etc. When traumatized by structural and social evils individuals and families might lose the will to fight for their rights because their vision tunnels down as their future story becomes painful and uncertain. When the present is deeply painful and nothing is there to look forward to, people can become fatalistic accepting their unjust realities as their fate. In such

context daring to dream a future, a life established on the principles of justice and equality for all gives the essential oxygen to fight against structural and social evil. The speech by Martin Luther King Jr. titled “I have a Dream,” delivered on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963, at Lincoln Memorial; Washington D.C. is but a speech of hope. It is a speech that dared to dream and hope for a just future for all; a future where there would be no apartheid and where each and every human person will live in unity, equal rights and dignity.<sup>61</sup> By daring to dream about a future built on Justice and equality we can empower people to fight for their rights as humans. The prophets in the Bible also often prophesied a future of peace and happiness in the midst of pain and suffering as slaves in exile. Even the visions found in the book of Revelation acted as an antidote for the despairing people and gave them the strength and hope not to give up but to preserve even in the midst of hopelessness. Thus by daring to dream or by daring to envision a just future, a future built on values of justice, peace and equality of all we can become harbingers of hope. By daring to dream we can instill hope in people in the midst of their disparity and hopelessness. This hope can then become an essential antidote in challenging the structural and social evil in the society by empowering people to look beyond their present problems, fight against the evils in the society and also empower them to fight for a just future for all.

## Conclusion

Understanding the past experiences and the present reality and its impact on an individual’s life is very important but we should not forget how our perception of the future or our future story affects us. Thus in our present context it is important to understand how our future story affects our present life. Healing the future story and instilling hope is one of the important pastoral care functions in our present day context. When people face various kinds of problem and challenges their future becomes uncertain and painful and thus they lose hope and will to face life’s challenges. Such a fatalistic approach can have a deadly impact. Thus in this

context the task of a Christian Minister is to instil hope by healing the broken, gloomy and painful future stories so that each human person would be enabled to face life’s challenges with courage, hope and determination. In other words the task of pastoral care is to help people find hope in the midst of hopelessness by discovering a good and meaningful reason to live for and fight for. Hope has a remarkable potential to motivate as well as instigate healing in a person’s life.

## End Notes

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- 3 <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/34-farmer-suicides-reported-in-maharashtras-marathwada-in-last-8-days-1738569> (21st August 2017)
- 4 <http://www.hindustantimes.com/health/blue-whale-challenge-why-teenagers-are-vulnerable-to-the-game-and-what-you-can-do-about-it/story-Yc91FxDuGBinBJj3LVBq4J.html> (21st August 2017)
- 5 Joseph George, *HIV and AIDS: Challenges to Creating Innovative Pastoral Care Practices*, edited by Alphinus Kambodji, Erlinda N. Senturias and Wati Longchar in “HIV and Inclusive Community; Asian Theological and Biblical Perspectives”, Kolkata: SCEPTRE, 2013, 180.
- 6 Herald Taylor, *Tend My Sheep*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2011, 20-24.
- 7 Howard Clinebell, *Growth Counselling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982, 48.
- 8 Erik Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1964, 115, 118.
- 9 Robert L. Carrigan, “Where has Hope Gone? Towards an Understanding of Hope in Pastoral Care,” in *Pastoral Psychology*, edited by Liston O. Mills, et al., 25 (1976): 43.
- 10 Abigail Rian Evans, *Redeeming Market Place Medicine: A Theology of Health Care*, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1999, 24.
- 11 Abigail Rian Evans, *Redeeming Market Place Medicine*, 31.
- 12 Within the Judeo-Christian frame work the ‘journey towards wholeness may entail some brokenness.’ ‘In the Biblical language wholeness is shalom, not only inner unity but also outer social harmony.’ Abigail Rian Evans, *Redeeming Market Place Medicine*, 63.

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- 14 Robert L. Carrigan, "Where Has Hope Gone?", 42, 43.
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- 24 "The structure of hope is determined in the Old Testament by a wide range of concepts: to be confident, to feel secure, to wait for, to expect, hope, to take refuge in, to wait for longingly, to trust and to be firm and consoled." Ferdinand Kerstiens, "Hope," in *Sacramentum Mundi*, edited by AbolfDarlap, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1975, 61, 62.
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- 39 Erik Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility*, 117.
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- 42 Karl Menninger, "Hope", 14.
- 43 "Hope," in *A-Z of Counselling Theory and Practice*, edited by William Stewart, United Kingdom: Nelson Thornes, 2001, 186.
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- 45 Robert L. Carrigan, *Where Has Hope Gone?*, 49-51.
- 46 Royal J. Synwolt, "Pastoral Counsellor-Harbinger of Hope", 11, 12.
- 47 Royal J. Synwolt, "Pastoral Counsellor-Harbinger of Hope", 13.
- 48 Roy W. Fair Child, *Finding Hope Again A Pastor's Guide to Counselling Depressed Persons*, 43-45.
- 49 The unconscious dysfunctional future stories can be identified by the resistance shown in creating new functional future stories. In this case the dysfunctional future story has be brought to light, thoroughly explored, deconstructed and then reconstructed with hopeful future story.
- 50 "If your life was made into a wonderful movie with a happy ending, tell me what that last part of the movie would look like."
- 51 "After leading a person into a meditative physical and mental posture, he or she can be asked to form a mental picture as the pastoral care specialist describes possibilities for the future."
- 52 "This strategy allows the pastoral caregiver to dis-empower threatening realities by leading the person to create a future story on the basis of additional data and factual and imaginative... the person can then review her or his future projections, reframing the stories by adding new characters, bringing a different twist to the plot, and arriving at different interpretations of the meaning of the event."
- 53 "Ben Furman and Tapani Ahola have developed a process in which they ask clients to imagine a future time when their problems no longer exist. Then these therapists lead a dialogue (much like the 'as if' conversations described earlier) about that imaginary future time."

- 54 “Furman and Ahola point out that these processes of fantasizing or imagining a miracle can be used to expand, or go beyond, a despairing future story... then they work with those possibilities to begin to construct a future story that is more workable in the present.”
- 55 “When a pastoral caregiver introduces, interjects, or invites sacred story into the pastoral conversation with a person whose narrative is regressive, a clash of narratives occurs. This progressive, hopeful sacred story has the power to overcome a dysfunctional, regressive story and bring transformation into a person’s faith narrative. The future is opened and a person’s horizons are expanded. The God who calls us into an open-ended future, who grants grace for the present moment and energy of the journey, is ‘discovered.’”
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- 58 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, New York: Washington Square Press, 1984, 97.
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## Book Review

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***Paul’s Theology of Mission to the Nations in Romans*** by Subhro Sekhar Sircar. New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2017, pp. xxiv+214, Rs. 795.00, ISBN: 978-93-5148-137-9 (HB).

Rev. Dr. Subhro Sekhar Sircar, an associate professor of New Testament at the Serampore College, West Bengal. In his book, *Paul’s Theology of Mission to the Nations in Romans*, he provides a new direction with an in-depth exegetical treatment and careful theological analysis which exegetes hardly given attention in Paul’s important letter of Romans. His proposal steps beyond the existing works on the main purpose of Romans like dogmatic/doctrinal documents or theological treatise. He convincingly proposes that mission as a main thrust of Paul in writing the letter to Romans. Sircar begins his study with an assumption and aims to prove that “Paul had a missionary purpose behind the writing of the epistle to the Romans and his [Paul’s] mission was proclaiming the “gospel of God” to all the nations of the world, which was central to his mission” (p. 2). This statement is based on how “Paul starts and ends his letter to the Romans with the theme of the gospel” (p. 4) addressed to all nations. The explication in the main body of the letter shows good reason to consider the proclamation of the gospel as the central purpose in Romans. In the light of that, Sircar delves into three key areas to validate his hypothesis of Paul’s theology of mission to the nations in Romans. Firstly, he brought out the factors that points on how Paul had missionary purpose in writing Romans. Secondly, he highlights the basis of Paul for mission to the nations, or the main message of Paul in the letter to Romans. Thirdly, he examines the task of Paul’s mission and how Paul understood and carried out his mission.

Sircar proceeds his inquiry by exploring the evidence of mission from an epistolary framework of the letter. He vividly pointed out that the opening of Romans 1:1-17 is not just a redundant introduction, but tells the entire purpose of Romans, which is repeated in reverse order in 15:14-16:27. These two parts of the letter constitute the epistolary framework which shaped the whole letter with a common theme, 'gospel.' Besides that, Sircar emphasizes on how Paul affirms his call and obligation to proclaim the same gospel to the nations which God promised to fulfill in OT, and other related themes that connect the letter's opening, body, and closing. All these were carefully examined to prove Paul's missiological intentions behind writing the letter.

In the subsequent section, Sircar examines the identity of God - One who acts in salvation history is the only basis and starting point of Paul's mission. Sircar lucidly highlights how Paul stressed on God's nature in relation to the role played in his mission. Paul placed God at the centre, as well as the goal of his mission. In other words, Paul claimed that he was called to proclaim the 'gospel of God' which comes from God, who is God's son - Jesus Christ, and to bring 'about the obedience of faith among the nations.' In Romans, God's action played a major role in revealing the identity of God. The atoning work of Jesus defined the 'gospel' which is God's righteousness for salvation of all nations both Jews and Gentiles. These acts of God through Christ reveal the gospel which Paul was called to preach to the nations. This identification of God's acts forms the core foundation for Paul's mission in Romans.

Another feature Sircar examines to substantiate his proposal is, the task of Paul's mission as preaching the gospel of God to the nations for which he was called and commissioned. For Paul, the gospel is about God's son which has the power of salvation for all nations. This gospel was promised by God in the Old Testament and fulfilled in God's saving work in and through Jesus' redemptive work. Hence, this gospel is solely originated from God and owned

by Him. The gospel is not Paul's invention nor his own message, but came through revelation of Jesus Christ. To this, an Apostle Paul was called and set apart as a missionary basically to preach among the gentiles and also bringing about the obedience of faith among the nations and to worship God together.

The study also slightly switched the importance and relevance of missional significance identifying its present pluralistic context which would be an important area to furtherance of the book. The study would have been weightier if a sociological optic of the letter to Romans could be raised. The letter does not address a particular occasion or causative problem, nor concerns on specific issues within Romans Church per se, it's loaded with Paul's articulation of his own gospel. However, context is imperative in any study. Therefore, it could have been asked how the setting/history of period can shed light on the situation the author is addressing? The work through appears evangelical in perspective but delineated decently. It is a brain-storming and resourceful work where the author has documented and substantiated his findings with support of renowned New Testament scholars, and this definitely proves the credibility of the book. The book is accessible for both the academicians and the lay peoples. Indeed, for any serious study on 'mission' in Pauline letters, particularly that of Romans, this is a very helpful book for all levels.

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***Christian Education for Transformation: Foundations, Approaches and Effective Teaching*** by Limatula Longkumer. Kolkata: Author, 2017, pp. x+246; Rs. 450.

Dr. Limatula Longkumer at present teaches at Bishops College, Kolkata in the Department of Christian Ministry. She is one of the prominent Christian educationists in India. Many of her articles appeared in reputed national and international journals. She has authored four books: *Christian Education for Adults in Tribal Context* (1998), *Commentary on Epistle to the Hebrews* (1999), *Christian Ministry in Context* (2004), *Women in Theological Education: Pedagogical Issues* (2012) and edited or co-edited many books.

This book, *Christian Education for Transformation: Foundations, Approaches and Effective Teaching*, is the outcome of her long years of interactions in the classrooms with students in various theological institutions as well as seminars. The purpose of this book is to provide a guide to readers and theological students in the field of education, particularly Christian education.

The book contains eleven chapters besides introduction. It deals with the foundational issues in Christian education, has done a good survey on historical development of Christian education in different centuries. It also highlighted the paradigm shifts in Christian education, approaches, methods, effective teaching and also brought out contemporary trends in educational ministry to help and provide basis for educators in developing a relevant Christian education in their context. The book stresses that the goal of Christian education is for critical information, formation and transformation of faith community. And its purpose is to achieve holistic and total development of the person in the community and wholeness in the whole of creations.

The first chapter deals on the definition of Christian education where the author defines Christian education as a life-long process of church activity educating deliberately, intentionally and unintentionally the whole community of the people of God

in faith, to live out the meaning of Christian faith in their lives and to transform the individuals and communities and thereby bringing wholeness and transformation in the society and in the whole creation (p. 5). It also highlights the aims and objectives, and the nature and purpose of Christian education which must be derived from the context of the people. She is critical about the traditional aims and objective of Christian education which is a mere transmission of the content lesson to the learners. This, she stresses the aims and objective as “an act of knowing and believing, learning is not conditioning or memorization but bringing changes in perception or developing critical consciousness.” (p. 6).

The second chapter explored the various foundational issues in Christian education. The author’s concern here is that Christian education is integrated and interdisciplinary approach to learning. Therefore, Christian education draws insights from many disciplines like theological, psychological, philosophical and sociological fields. All the theories developed by different branches of both secular and theology are integrated in Christian education to make education holistic and relevant for all.

The third chapter gives a brief survey of the development of Christian education in the history starting from the Jewish education to the modern period and the Sunday school movement. The main purpose of this survey is to see the development of Christian education with the passage of time in different historical settings.

The fourth chapter introduces the different approaches to Christian education. The author talks about Christian education as an interdisciplinary subject and different approaches have developed in different context while responding to different issues. Though approaches are presented separately for the sake of describing it, yet no single approach is perfect and so we should integrate all the approaches in education process.

The fifth chapter highlights the four agencies; namely, Indian Sunday School Union (ISSU), Christian Education department

of Evangelical Fellowship of India (CEEFI), All India Sunday School Association (AISSA) and Vacation Bible School (VBS), of Christian education in India and their contributions. Although, these agencies have contributed a lot in the development of Christian education by concentrating on Sunday school ministry as well as leadership in pastoral ministry yet the author also critique that the agencies have its own limitations like too much content-oriented learning, improper integration of the curricula in relation to the life realities and context of the people. Moreover, India being a pluralistic country with diverse religions parochial and exclusive ministry hampers our relationship with people of other faith.

Chapter six explores the factors influencing learning and the stages of growth in relation to learning. The author identified five developmental theories: Cognitive development by Jean Piaget, Moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg, Psycho-Social development by Erik H. Erikson, Faith development by James Fowler and Religious Thinking by Ronald R. Goldman. The basic principles on human development pointed out by theorists are important for educators to know and apply in education process. The author opines that understanding of these developmental perspectives will allow us to be deliberate in our planning of educational curriculum and teaching ministry.

The author emphasized the importance of the use and teaching of Bible in seventh chapter. The author believes that teaching the Bible to the child in the right moment is important. She believed that Bible must be taught diligently for information, formation and transformation. The main focus in this chapter is on the use of Bible in Christian education, keeping in mind the stages of development and the contextual realities of the people. The author first explains the place of scripture in Christian education and the types of literature in the Bible. Then she continues by saying that Bible need to be applied to the life situation of the learner according to the different stages of development. The author expresses that using the Bible with children needs special attention as the Bible

is not a children book but an adult book written for adults. So she suggests a variety of methods that can be used according to the context, content and age-groups like story-telling, drama, films, visual arts, discussion, questions and answers, role play and other participatory methods.

In chapter eight the author highlights the effective methods of teaching such as process of teaching, methods in relation to developmental stages of learners and types of methods. The ultimate goal of teaching is to help the learners to know and be transformed. And so the author gives importance to participatory and interactive methods to learning where both the teacher and the learner can involved actively and creatively in the learning process.

In chapter nine, the author attempts to explain the meaning, historical development, philosophical/educational foundations, principles and methods of critical pedagogy. She opines that critical pedagogical movement has contributed a lot in reshaping our current understanding of education in general, Christian education and theological education process. It has brought a paradigm shift in understanding of education as liberative, transformative and holistic. And to achieve this, there is a need to critique the present existing model of education, its approaches and methods. The process of teaching-learning should focus on transformative and liberative education and so interactive participatory classroom dynamics, dialogue, issue-based discussion, experience-based and problem solving methods, and learner-centered approach must be adopted to make learning relevant and effective.

Chapter ten dwells on the role of Christian education in multifaith context. In a multifaith context, there is a need to broaden our perspectives of Christian education aims, content and methods. In other words, the role of Christian education must be defined from a contextual and inclusive perspective, where one needs to learn how to live together in harmonious relationship, have an open mind which not only affirms the difference and diversity but

also leaves room for inter-religious dialogue and collaboration. And for this the author suggests that there is a need to train church leaders, theologians and laity who are willing to share a vital interest in this issue.

The last chapter brings to a closure that the existing Christian education has not dealt adequately on the issues of gender justice in educational ministry which needs a special attention. The author points out four factors which contribute to gender injustice in education ministry in the church. They are- theology, patriarchal culture, educational theories and structure of the church. The author believes that patriarchal ideologies have created different gender roles in the church and society which result in injustices and discrimination upon women. Therefore, the author suggested that through deconstruction, reconstruction, asserting our rights, inclusive language and society, promoting gender justice, restructuring Christian education and envisioning the church in the original term of *Ekklesia* we can bring mutual partnership and justice among men and women in the church and society.

In summation, it can be rightly said that *Christian Education for Transformation: Foundations, Approaches and Effective Teaching* is an important book that introduces what Christian education exactly is by surveying the foundational issues, approaches and effective principles of teaching. It calls forth the educators and the learners to engage in liberative and interactive praxis of education rather than to be mere passive receptors. The author has taken much effort in bringing out her long fruitful years of experiences in teaching in book form which is highly commendable. I hope that both educators and students in theological field as well as lay people will find this book useful and insightful.

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***Missionary Christianity and Local Religion: American Evangelicalism Interacts with Bhakti Religion*** by Arun W. Jones, (Studies in World Christianity), Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas, 2017, pp. 321.

The religion of Jesus, the Christ, known as Christianity among world religious traditions, arrived on the South Western shores of India between first and fourth centuries bearing the stamp of Syrian or Mesopotamian orthodoxy. At the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century the Roman Catholic form of Christianity arrived in Goa with Vasco de Gama. The Protestant form of Christianity arrived first with Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, a German Lutheran missionary who arrived in Tranquabar, Tamil Nadu in 1706, and with William Cary, a British Baptist who lived in Serampore, Bengal in 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was only in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Evangelical form of Christianity got introduced in India through American Protestant Missionaries of the Presbyterian and Methodist denominations. By that time the East India Company had already established itself in India as a Trading Company. The Company was more interested in economic gains and political activities than in missionary or mission work.

The book under review is a serious and courageous attempt by Arun W. Jones, the Dan William Hankey Associate Professor of World Evangelism at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, to situate the work of American Presbyterian and Methodist Evangelical missionaries in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century in the religious, social and political environment in Hindi North India, the territories of Oudh and Rohilkhand. The Hindu religious traditions had not yet encountered Christian religious tradition in the North as it had the Muslim religious tradition with the coming of Mughals in 1555 until 1857 CE. Arun Jones had done marvellously well in applying historical, sociological and theological approaches in studying and analysing the subject of his study. The work not only shows author's keen interest in

the history of Missions but his honesty and erudition of *bhakti* religious traditions.

In analysing and understanding the religious and social context of Hindi North India where the evangelical missionaries were engaged in preaching the Christian faith, Arun Jones has profusely applied the concept of 'Thirdspace' borrowed by Edward Soja following the work of Henry Lefevre (p. 3). To Soja, the study of Space is important while studying "human activity" along with "history and society." All 'Spaces' are human productions opines Soja. These Spaces are categorised as 1) physical space, 2) imagined or conceived space, and 3) lived space. Soja points out that the "Thirdspace is of intellectual, behavioural, and social openness, where new ideas, practices, and (political) allegiances are conceived and tried out." (p. 5) The concept of "Thirdspace", adroitly applied by Jones, does help to understand the interaction between missionary Christianity and local religions specially the *bhakti* religions. The author contends that the American Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries found themselves in a religious environment which was receptive to their form of devotional theology, worship style and spirituality. The *Bhakti* sects like Kabirpanthies, the Nanakpanthies and Parnamis had already raised their voices against orthodox Hindu tradition dominated and controlled by brahmins who also controlled the social, economic, political and cultural lives of Hindus dividing them into four *varnas*, the caste system, a kind of stratified social hierarchy.

The *Bhakti* sects were basically protestant movements within the Hindu religious tradition always challenging the discriminative and oppressive ideology and theology of the dominant religious class. *Bhakti* being a reforming, open and accommodative movement did not have difficulty in associating with evangelicalism. Interestingly, it is these *bhakti* movements which created the ideological, theological and sociological spaces for the American Evangelical missionary work assisting them in

creating a 'social and theological thirdspace'. The author points out that there are "significant similarities" between "American Evangelical Protestantism" and the "Socially marginalised Hindu *Bhakti* sects" which, in effect, paved the way for the formation and establishment of Christian communities (Preface pp. xx). Thus, the missions could respond to the needs, hopes and aspirations of the marginalised, the discriminated, the despised and the forsaken by opening orphanages, boarding schools, educational institutions, hospitals and Christian villages and compounds. The converts to Christian faith from the poor and powerless and marginalised groups found their voices, freedom, identity and power that were systematically denied to them in the name of religion.

The impact of creative interaction between the *Bhakti* religious traditions and the American Evangelical missionary work is still present and alive. The singing of *bhajans* and *kirtans* using local instruments and clapping of hands in congregational worship services and house prayer meetings are a proof of that interaction.

The book is well researched, documented and argued work. The subject of study is challenging specially when seen through the lens of history, religious pluralism and western evangelicalism. Written with grace and clarity the book is readable and enjoyable. Students of religion and society and those interested in missionary work and its history in Hindi North India must find time to read it.

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## Documentation

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**North India Institute of Post-Graduate Theological Studies (NIIPGTS)** (Jointly Sponsored by Bishop's College, Kolkata and Serampore College, Serampore)

**D.Th. Dissertation Submitted to the Senate of Serampore College (University)**

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