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Book Review

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1. *Money and Possessions* by Walter Brueggemann
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Editorial

Injustice, discrimination and exclusion have been on the rise in human relationships at all levels in more recent times. People are discriminated against and basic rights trampled upon on the pretext of varying reasons; whether caste, gender, sexual orientation language, religious faith, or even church denominational affiliation. Barriers are being raised to exclude people and migrants and refugees are kept at bay. It is in such a context of feeling of increased alienation that the theme of a “Just and Inclusive Community” became the focus of reflection in the current issue. The annual inter-disciplinary seminar held at Bishop’s College in September 2018 focused on the issue as did the National Council of Churches in India and the World Council of Churches. Some of the presentations made in the seminar are incorporated here for the benefit of the wider reflection.

Of the six essays two focus on the Bible. While V.J. John looks at the kingdom message proclaimed by Jesus and the people befriended by him as paradigm of inclusiveness for others to follow. Priscilla Suresh Rawade sees the need to have a re-look at God’s speaking to Job from the whirlwind. It beckons humans to carefully listen to the voices from the world of nature and the cry of the marginal communities if we were in any way to contribute towards a just and inclusive community formation. The next two essays are theological reflections on an inclusive community from the perspective of tribal theology and plurality of religions. Solomon Khyouchi Veino argues for a new way of doing tribal theology. He considers contextual tribal theology though based on specific tribal contexts formulates theology for the entire tribal community. He advocates the need for developing tribal theology taking seriously the situation of each tribal community and offers

some suggestions in this regard. Swarup Bar argues for looking at seriously the whole idea of a multiple religious belonging in the context of religious plurality in the Indian context. Looking at some of the examples already available: such as, Khristbhaktas of Varanasi and tribal and dalit experiences, he proposes this as a possible way forward for churches in India.

Nukshijungla Longkumer is concerned with the challenges faced by single parents with specific focus on a study conducted at the Dimapur Ao Baptist Arogo (DABA) Church, Nagaland. She looks at the problems encountered by single parents at multiple levels and argues for serious efforts on the part of the pastoral ministry of the church to care for the single parents and proposes a plan of action. Rodinmawia Ralte looks at the diverse influences on Islam in the process of developing its philosophy and theology which is a positive example of openness and inclusiveness. This has helped them to integrate with other thought forms and philosophies, thereby protecting their own religion from heresies and making Quran more meaningful and interesting.

This would be the last of the issues that the present editor edit. It was an honour and a challenge to serve as an editor of one of the issues of *IJT* for the last nearly two decades. As the current editors take leave and a new team assumes responsibility, the editorial team wish them well and to all readers a time of meaningful and critical reflections!

V.J. John
Editor

Kingdom of God and the People around Jesus: Glimpses into a Just and Inclusive Community

*V.J. John**

Introduction

The message that Jesus proclaimed during the over three year period of his ministry centred on the rule of God (Mk. 1:15). His announcement concerning the arrival of the Kingdom of God had drawn many people towards Jesus. No wonder then that Jesus was always surrounded by people who followed him while others sought after him. We shall draw attention to some of those people who were around Jesus highlighting some examples of the Gospel stories that concern the Kingdom message of Jesus and the people who chose to appropriate that message, thereby becoming his followers. But before doing so, briefly we shall consider the present socio-political-cultural context of India where the question of inclusivity and justice are urgent concerns. This shall be followed by a brief analysis of the social setting of the people around Jesus which is central to our understanding of the contours of his ministry and the kind of people drawn towards him. It is hoped that our endeavour will provide a glimpse into the biblical and theological base for our engagement and the urge in working towards creating just and inclusive communities within our churches neighbourhoods and within the wider Indian society.

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1. The Community Context of the Current Indian Scene

India as an ancient culture had a history of people of diverse religious faith and cultural traditions, distinct political ideologies and differing social and ethical value systems all living together under one umbrella despite occasional aberrations. Even when they have not always agreed with each other, at least they tolerated each other so that they could live without fear of threat or elimination by those who differed from them. But the situation has dramatically changed in recent years. Some people have arrogated to themselves the right to determine who is a nationalist, a patriot and a traitor. Many citizens whose ancestors have lived for generations in Assam and contributed immensely to his/her motherland are now being questioned and labelled as foreigners as their names are missing from the National Register for Citizens. Any dissent against the dominant political and religious ideology promoted by the ruling dispensation and their party affiliates is considered anti-national. People are easily branded traitors, naxals, and terrorists. Recent arrest of five human rights activists on the basis of seemingly concocted charges is a case in point. Free speech is under threat, democracy and the pillars that support democracy are under attack. Lynch mobs are on the prowl. Cow vigilantes are creating havoc in society by executing instant justice despite Supreme Court's calls for action. While people are burdened with loss of jobs, farmers' distress, a dwindling rupee, and increased costs of fuel with cascading effect on prices of essential commodities; these don't serve as important issues that demand urgent action. The current situation that we face in the country may be described in the following five words: Suspicion, Exclusion, Hatred, Violence, and Fear/Insecurity.

1.1. Suspicion

Diversity and differences have been the hallmark of Indian setting. People lived, dressed, ate, spoke, celebrated and practised their faith in myriad ways. All had their freedom to do so as provided

by the Indian Constitution. However, in the present time this is no longer the case. Being different, particularly from the dominant narrative, generates doubt. The 'other' is always looked upon with suspicion and as a threat. Differences in thoughts, expressions and actions are not tolerated any longer. Mere dissent is good enough reason for distrust. People are suspected on all grounds: the food they consume, the attire they wear, the political ideology they hold, and the religious faith they practice. Mere suspicion of possessing beef was the cause of death of many an innocent people. If you are suspected to have voted for another party than those in power your life may be in danger. No respect for a different point of view. It appears that no serious enquiry is conducted into allegations or conclusively established or legal processes duly followed before action is taken. Rule of law comes to the aid of only those who can afford it.

1.2. Exclusion

People suspected as not 'with us' are excluded from the mainstream. While on many ground people are excluded, religious identity seem to have played a dominant role towards exclusion. If one's faith is different from that of the dominant community, one is liable to be suspected. It is very telling the position taken by government spokespersons that the citizenship of the alleged Bengladeshi infiltrators in Assam is to be determined by their religion. People are excluded from educational scholarships, job opportunities, government benefits, etc., on the basis of unjust criteria used. Then there are marginal communities including sexual minorities who have been excluded from the mainstream. The recent Supreme Court judgement decriminalising homosexuality has opened up a possibility for their eventual inclusion in the hitherto resistant communities.

1.3. Hatred

Hatred towards the other seems to be the 'normal' under the present circumstances. The foulest of languages is used against

one's political opponents by political leaders and spokespersons generating hatred towards them among their own followers. Trolling people whose ideas one might disagree with is frequent in the social media. Hate speeches are the order of the day which will be on ascendance as the general elections approach. Tensions and communal riots are caused within local communities who lived harmoniously for generations by inciting hatred towards the other on one pretext or other. Social media is constantly filled with such hate messages and even fake news that are often taken as gospel truth.

1.4. Violence

With tacit encouragement of the political leadership who keep a studied silence on such incidents and law enforcing authorities looking the other way, mob violence has almost become the order of the day in many a places. The pent up hatred is unleashed with violence on unsuspecting people. In the name of 'cow protection' many dalits and minorities are mercilessly beaten up and lynched. Mere provocation, real or imaginary, gives rise to violence. Recent violence against farmers, dalits, rights activists and minority communities are some disturbing examples. Despite Supreme Court's strictures against the government for inaction, the process of redress has been slow and in the meantime "cow vigilantes" and "love jihads" continue to flourish.

1.5. Fear and Insecurity

Fear of what might happen disturbs many a common people. This gives rise to insecurity of various kinds. Many people lost jobs on account of demonetisation. Agricultural distress affects many a rural households. The unbridled rise of petrol and diesel prices coupled with free fall of rupee contributes towards further price rise of essential commodities. All these have only compounded the fear of the ordinary and vulnerable people, intensifying their feeling of insecurity. Political opponents are sought to be silenced by foisting trumped up charges against them. NGOs

and Rights activists are looked upon with much suspicion and intimidated through false accusations and arrests. Even the well-informed, including academics and mainstream media, with some exceptions, are circumspect in their reporting, indicating certain measure of fear and insecurity that they are under.

2. The Community Setting of the People around Jesus

The community setting of Jesus and the people around him was characterized by Roman domination. Political power was vested with the Romans or client kings appointed by Rome. The elites consisting of the ruling class and those closely associated with them including the priests in Jerusalem enjoyed certain measure of power and privilege. However, the common people including peasants and artisans as well as the vulnerable groups bore the burn of the foreign rule. Jesus and people around him were under similar pressure. The life for them was characterized by Political Subjection and Cultural Imperialism, Poverty and Indebtedness, Sickness and Suffering, Purity and Pollution, as well as Protests and Violence.

2.1. Political & Cultural Imperialism

The Romans who conquered Palestine in 63 B.C.E. continued the imperial policies set in motion by the Hellenistic ruler, Alexander the Great. People continued to suffer the burden of heavy taxation which in many instances was leading to the loss of their patrimony, little piece of farm land they owned making it that much harder to make a living. The Roman oppression led to a series of revolts and popular protests causing general social turmoil. Hellenistic cultural practices were followed and promoted by building amphitheatres, fortified palaces, gymnasiums and stadiums for games and cultural festivals, and the practice of emperor cults. Masses of peasantry who had to bear the burden of such lavishness through heavy taxation resented and were dissatisfied. The ruling class failed to heed and the state was kept under tight "police control."¹ Disorder and disruption was the experience of the common people.²

2.2. Poverty & Indebtedness

Increased levy of taxes to meet the construction expenses along with other burdens of temple taxation and rent on cultivated land have all contributed to the increasing indebtedness of the peasants. People had to even mortgage their farm land and borrow to pay such huge taxes. Besides they had to find resources for normal expenses, such as repaying debts, rent for agricultural land, celebration of festivals, marriages, seeds for the sowing season and other exigencies. Increased debt also led to increased poverty of the affected people.³ F.C. Grant comments about the situation, “. . . the economic background of the New Testament is one of the rising tide of general well-being-except for the little land of Palestine with its poverty, over-population, declining food supply, wasteful government and recurrent rebellion”⁴

2.3. Sickness & Suffering

The Gospels record a number of occasions when Jesus intervenes in the life of persons affected by sickness of various kinds. This indicates that sickness and the accompanying suffering to which a sick person was subjected to was a reality that widely affected people in the Mediterranean during the time of Jesus. Sickness was in fact viewed as a misfortune that stuck the affected and the healing removes it and sets the person back to his/her normal course of living. According to Pilch, ‘Sickness’ is a blanket term that describes a reality whereas “disease” and “illness” refers to species. “Disease” is a biomedical perspective that sees abnormalities in the function of organs while “illness” reflects a socio-cultural perspective.⁵ When a therapy affects a disease so as to check or remove it, it’s a “cure” whereas when an activity intervenes in an illness, it’s “healing.”⁶ He further states,

Since healing essentially involves the provision of personal and social meaning for the life problems that accompany human health misfortunes, all illness are healed, always and infallibly since all human beings

ultimately find some meaning in a life-situation including disvalued states.⁷

2.4. Purity and Pollution

Ritual purity was considered a core social value to be preserved in the ancient Mediterranean culture. People were to be scrupulous in observing the requirements of purity laws. This helped a member of society to monitor space and time for all actions. It helped one to be clean than unclean and pure than polluted, thereby preserving the core values of honour and shame.⁸ People were made impure by touching dead bodies, being affected by certain illness (e.g. flow of blood, leprosy) or refusing to follow the ritual laws such as for ritual cleansing. These could lead to the affected person being polluted. The affected were separated from the community and had to live away from them. Purity and pollution determined the exclusion and inclusion of people in a community. A place in table fellowship was determined by the purity status of the person to be included in the fellowship. Those considered expendables were excluded from table fellowships.

2.5. Protests and Violence

Protests by the Jews and violence on the part of the Romans marked the rule of the Romans around the period of the ministry of Jesus. Horsley remarks that there was widespread popular rebellion following the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E. with people’s demand for reduction of exorbitant taxes and the great revolt in 66-70 C.E. The only violent resistance recorded was the terrorism of the Sicarii against their high priests. Anti-Roman protests by Jews were spontaneous and non-violent and organized by the common people.⁹ Horsley further states, “Because of the Roman imperial system and governing practices, the popular nonviolent Jewish demonstrations evoked repressive violence, either actual or potential.”¹⁰

We thus see a convergence in the socio-political situation of the current Indian setting and that of the Roman imperial context

where Jesus carried out his ministry. Both are characterized by Political Subjection, Protests and Violence, Hatred and Exclusion, Cultural superiority, Poverty and Indebtedness, Sickness and Suffering, and Purity and Pollution. We now move on to look at what was Jesus' response to his own situation as he carried out his ministry.

3. Kingdom of God & the People Around Jesus

3.1. Message of the Kingdom

The message Jesus came to proclaim was about the inauguration of the rule of God in the midst of despair and dejection. People long waited for the arrival of the Messianic rule, and the prophets have repeatedly assured them of the day when God will set everything right. Extreme oppression and suffering under the Roman imperialists have only heightened their anticipation. Hence the people paid great heed to the message of Jesus when he said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mk. 1:15). It is in realization of the message of freedom and deliverance that Jesus set out his mission agenda, when he proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Lk. 4:18-19)

While the term 'kingdom' itself is absent from mission mandate that Jesus set out in Nazareth, it comes the closest to a definition of what the 'kingdom' might mean for Jesus. The message enshrined within it included: good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom and liberation to the oppressed and proclamation of the jubilee year. Any message of the kingdom that does not measure up to these essential

elements of liberation in its ambit, fails in its task of witnessing to the kingdom.

The parables of the kingdom (Mt. 13 // Mk. 4 // Lk. 8) vividly portrays the working out of the kingdom in the everyday affairs of a peasant community of the early first century C.E. in their daily engagement with routine affairs of sustaining life, whether a farmer sowing his seed, or a housewife hiding the leaven in the dough or a fisherman casting his net.¹¹

While Jesus left undefined his expression of the kingdom of God, it is in Paul that we find a clear definition of the kingdom. To Paul, the kingdom is a kingdom of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Writing to the Roman congregation, he says, "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". (Rom. 14: 17). The kingdom is experienced in the practice of righteousness/justice, peace and joy all originating from the Holy Spirit. "For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power". (1 Cor. 4:20). The three key words that characterize the kingdom are 'justice', 'peace' and 'joy'. These then are the fundamental values of the kingdom. It involves practice of these values by living in right relationship with one's neighbour in a 'community of mutual responsibility and mutual rights'. Such a relationship also is "creative, liberating and vindicating."¹² Peace is the right relationship with God and fellow humans leading to the experience of fullness of life in wholeness, harmony and reconciliation. The outcome is 'physical comfort and wellbeing' which is termed as 'joy'. It is an expression of 'fullness, life and love.'¹³ Kingdom of God is a new and changed relationship operative now in the present world led by the Holy Spirit.

3.2. The People around Jesus

Community consists of a group of people who have things in common including shared values and commitment. Jesus came from a community of subsistent peasants, followed farming and part time carpentry as the means of his subsistence. When the

time came for him to embark upon the mission that he was sent for, Jesus began to gather a people around him in preparation for the task. They came primarily from a poor fishing community although there were some among them who were relatively better off compared to the rest. It is to them that he first passed on the message of the inauguration of the rule of God. All of them chose to be part of the counter community which Jesus was inaugurating (Mk. 6:7; Mt. 10:1; Lk. 9:1). They have always been with Jesus through the three years of his mission and ministry. Gospels also make mention of a larger group of followers of Jesus termed as the “seventy others” (Lk. 10:1). Theissen terms this early followers of Jesus as “wandering charismatics” as against the settled Pauline communities.¹⁴ He prefers to call it the “Jesus movement” and that it “emerged out of a deep-seated crisis in Palestinian Jewish society.”¹⁵ It served as a renewal movement in the midst of the crisis. The disciples called to be part of this renewal movement were to share the homelessness of Jesus by self-stigmatization (Mt. 8:19). They were to share in the mission and authority of Jesus by healing and driving out demons (Mk. 3:14), and to participate in the messianic authority of Jesus (Mt. 19:28).¹⁶ The movement consisting of the disciples included the wider circle of sympathizers and all who listened to Jesus and were attracted by him without becoming his active supporters.¹⁷ Horsely does raise question about the historicity of “disciples” and “post-resurrection Jerusalem community” as the “Jesus” community.¹⁸ According to him,

Jesus preached the presence and availability of the kingdom of God for the people generally, seeking the renewal of Israel as a whole people, not the establishment of a separate community or the separation of a “remnant”. After the crucifixion and resurrection Jesus’ followers apparently went on living within the already-existing Jewish societal forms.¹⁹

Along with his disciples Jesus travelled far and wide to proclaim the message of the arrival of the rule of God as against the oppressive imperial rule. Among the many who listened to Jesus and chose to become his followers included: prostitutes, lame & blind, tax collectors, lepers, the poor and the hungry, and the women. The religious leaders and the rich people who occasionally turned up to listen to Jesus more often than not were not convinced by his message and hence refused to join his band. We have several stories in the Gospel narratives that tell us about these people who chose to follow Jesus. More and more it is the oppressed class that heeded to the message of Jesus. Referring to the classification of ancient peasant society by Gerhad Lenski, J.D. Crossan remarks,

The beatitude of Jesus declared blessed, then, not the poor, but the destitute, not poverty but beggary. Recall for a moment, Gerhard Lenski’s typology of stratification in agrarian societies from the first section of his book. In its terms, Jesus spoke of a Kingdom not of the Peasant or Artisan classes but of the Unclean, Degraded, and Expendable classes.²⁰

The ministry of Jesus saw his interaction with people of diverse kinds. The most prominent to note among them are: tax collectors, prostitutes, lame & blind, lepers, demon possessed, the poor and the hungry, and women. Many of them were people who have been considered expendables in society and therefore the honourable maintained no social relationship with them.

Gospels narrate number of instances where Jesus is found to be interacting with the tax collectors. Jesus has repeatedly been accused of associating with “tax collectors and sinners.” (Mk. 3:15; Mt. 11:18-19; Lk. 15:1-2). They were small-scale toll collectors who were hated by people because of their dishonesty and extortion (Lk. 3:12-13) and were even excluded as witnesses. One of the accusations against Jesus by his opponents was that Jesus had fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. Despite

Horsely's argument to the contrary²¹ the testimonies of the Gospels favour Jesus associating with tax collectors and sinners not withstanding that he may not have approved their wrong doings. While Jesus may not have associated with toll collectors and sinners, he has obviously had relation with the ones repented (Zaccheus, Lk. 19:10).

Another section in society Jesus was accused of relating with was the prostitutes (Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:35-50). It is argued that Jesus has had followers who were prostitutes. If one were to assume the Samaritan woman who has had seven husbands (Jn. 4) fall in the same category, it's another example of Jesus associating with prostitutes who became his followers. Jesus though not approved their deeds, did not refuse to incorporate them among his followers when they turned around.

Lame and blind were those whom Jesus healed. The beggars, the crippled and the destitute along with tax collectors and prostitutes belonged to the lower rung of Jewish society. The blind beggar Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:46-52) received sight and is said to have followed Jesus on the way. In Jn 9 we have the story of the man born blind who has confessed his healing by Jesus and testified in this regard. The beggars and the blind, deaf, crippled (Mt. 11:2-6) are said to have been among the followers of Jesus.

The sick, poor and hungry (Lk. 6:20; 7:22) have followed Jesus expecting him to heal them and provide food. To the crowd that sought after Jesus after his feeding of the five thousand, Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fills." (Jn. 6:26). People who were possessed with illness of various kinds besought Jesus to heal them. Official's son at Capernaum (Jn. 4:46-54); Paralyzed man lying at the pool of Bethzatha (Jn. 5:2-9); the demon possessed (Lk. 11:20//Mt. 12:28); Woman suffering with haemorrhages (Mk. 5:24-34); many who were sick at Gennesaret (Mk. 6:53-56) were examples of those who sought healing from Jesus.

There are instances where lepers were cleansed by Jesus. Leprosy was considered to be an unclean disease and those affected by it were driven away from the community (Mt. 8:1-4; Lk17:111-19). Jesus did not let them suffer the stigma associated with their illness. He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests". He wanted them not only to be cleansed, but reinstated back in the society.

Women haven't had an important place in the ancient society. They always sought to keep women in their place. Respectable Jewish women were not to speak in public. Jesus associated with them and freely conversed with them (Jn. 4:4-42; Mk. 5:33-34; Mt. 15: 21-28).²² During the course of his ministry, Jesus received support from women. Jesus appreciated their faith, made them witness to his resurrection and attended to their concerns.

Jesus shared meals and had table fellowship with the excluded. One of his parables spoke of inviting those from the bye-lanes to fill up the banquet hall as wedding guests. When the slave reported to his master the failure of the invited guests to come for the banquet, "Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame'" (Lk. 14:21). For "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11).

Jesus has summarized the task of his mission to the disciples of John the Baptist when they were sent to enquire whether Jesus was really the one who was to come or we should expect someone else? Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Mt. 11:4-6). The Kingdom message of Jesus and his mission engagements and that of his disciples were to provide justice for the oppressed, release for those bound and fellowship

and acceptance to the excluded ones under the burden of imperial policies and were driven away to the margins of the prevalent social order.

4. Biblical and Theological Basis for a Just and Inclusive Community

Jesus carried out his ministry in a context of conflicts, division and depravity. He was involved in creating a community of renewal in a polarised setting. Jesus' example can serve as a model for our engagement in the present day Indian scenario and provide us the biblical and theological basis for our action today.

God does not discriminate between people whom God has created in God's own image. The community that Jesus came to build is not one of like-minded people only. It consists of all people, more importantly those from the margins and the vulnerable sections. Since all people represent God's image it's our responsibility to work towards erasing the disfigurement of God's image as reflected in the weak and the deprived. Segregating people on the basis of religion, caste, class, colour or any other external factors is contrary to creating a nation of equals where 'sab ka saath and sabka vikas' serve as the ultimate goal.

Jesus considered all people as God's creation and hence paid more attention to those who have been excluded from the social set-up of the time on various counts. It is for this reason that Jesus chose to associate with the most vulnerable of the social set-up of his time. Jesus portrays God as a God of community, hence none can be excluded from belonging to a community. When community restricts its association with people and marginalises them by excluding them on one pretext or the other they deserve our special attention..

Christological commitment that has no room for the people that Jesus associated with and cared for is defective. Our claim of commitment to Christ demands from us that we work to provide justice to the downtrodden and care and companionship to the excluded. Jesus included all sorts of people whom the laws of

purity and pollution excluded from associating with. Thus we see there is a biblical sanction and a Christological basis for identifying with and working towards the progress and wellbeing of the excluded.

The community of the Church is the body of Christ. You cannot create a body with only particular kind of limbs. It includes all and excludes none. The early church consisted of Jews and Gentiles, wise and foolish, rich and poor, educated and illiterate. Birth, status, positions and power cannot undermine the integrity of the body that Jesus gave his life to establish. Within the body there cannot be discrimination on the basis of caste, race, region, language, denomination, gender, sexual orientation, etc. How true it is that today people are excluded within communities on the basis of these factors many of which are the given than a deliberate personal choice.

The mission entrusted to the disciples and all followers of Christ is to "Make disciples of all nations." It includes all people groups without distinction and division. The mission is a universal mission of proclamation of salvation and well being that is to be made available to all including the creation. For the least in the kingdom is greater than the greatest. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he". (Mt. 11:11)

The community Jesus came to create was an egalitarian community, a community of the equals despite distinctions and differences, a community that does not dominate over the weaker ones, a community that excludes none and includes all, a community that practices love and reconciliation where there is no place for violence and hatred, a community of healing and compassionate care. Jesus was not only a reformer or revolutionary, but one who proclaimed the message of the Kingdom, a message that called

for radical action of solidarity and justice, healing and wellbeing, compassion and care which demanded the laying down of his own life. Pride and prejudice take us nowhere as a church and as a nation. It calls for a radical discipleship of equals to relentlessly work for justice, peace and joy for all.

End Notes

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- 22 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 129-34.

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“Voice from the Whirlwind”¹: An Ecological Awakening from the Book of Job

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“The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel” (Prov. 12:10)

Introduction

Today we are facing many issues that contribute towards injustice and exclusion within our society. One of the key factors is issues arising out of disregard for environmental concerns. These pose challenges of air pollution, water pollution and land pollution that could adversely affect the very survival of life. Rising temperature and melting of the snow leads to climate change, extinction of many species of animals, birds, fishes and other living beings are some of the effects of climate change that can be seen. Natural forests are also under severe threat from climate change. Rising temperatures and sea levels and changes in precipitation patterns are expected to put at risk one-third of the world’s forests and with them many of the species they harbor and the people dependent on them for making a living.

Since the Industrial Revolution in 1750, human activities such as burning fossil fuel, deforestation, letting of industrial waste products into the rivers and the seas has started to pollute the air, water and land. This shows how under the name of development human beings have misused and destroyed the natural resources. James Nash opines that this ecological crisis which has been

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created by human beings should not only be regarded as scientific, technical and political problem but also as an ethical issue that could be addressed from the religious point of view.²

In the recent years there has been a great emphasis on re-reading the Bible, particularly the creation account with ecological motif. The encounters of eco-justice are very much felt in reading the biblical texts. This paper is an attempt to read the book of Job (chapter 38) in our present context of ecological crisis and draw some implications from it.

1. Understanding of Creation and Wisdom in Hebrew Thought

Von Rad states that Israel did not know our concept of nature nor the Greek view of cosmos. While in present day human lives life very much isolated from the creation and is determined by the feeling of otherness and foreignness to it, the Hebrew felt it to be much more personally related.³ According to C. Westermann, creation is seen as fitting into God’s blessing upon all the divine handiwork. Blessing is the continuous, un-obstructive, working of God. Westermann’s view of creation dictates his understanding of wisdom: “The theological position of wisdom is thus to be determined from the perspective of creation and primeval history.” The blessing of humanity in Gen 1:28 is correlated with wisdom: “When Adam and Eve are commanded during creation to cultivate and maintain the garden, wisdom as a coming to terms with life is implied in this commission.” For Zimmerli wisdom theology is creation theology.⁴

1.1. Wisdom in Israel

Observation of nature and reflection on life led the Israelites to conclude that there was some kind of order inherent in the world. They believed that if they could discern how this order operated and harmonized their lives with it, they would live peacefully and successfully. Failure to recognize and conform to this order would result in misfortune and misery.⁵ Wisdom began in the

family, in the villages and tribes. This happened in three ways. First parents shared their wisdom and experience with children. Second, older people in the community serve as a source of wisdom to the younger generations. Finally, the villagers regard certain individuals within their community as wise, and a source of good judgment.⁶

1.2. Ecology in Wisdom Literature in the Hebrew Bible

The wisdom literature shifts the reader's attention while not ignoring the question of salvation (Ps. 78; Wis. 10:11) more to the religious significance of the world of God's creation. In the context of religious systems which tend to divinize the cosmos, or particular things within the cosmos, the authors of the biblical texts are concerned with emphasizing that the beauty in creation points to an even richer beauty in the reality of God who is the Creator of the world.⁷ In the wisdom literature we find several significant concerns on the idea of creation and ecology. In Psalm 104 equal rights are given to both human and non-human creation and this idea is reflected throughout the Psalm. Also we see such ideas as the command to learn wisdom from the ant and its ways in Proverbs 6: 6-8, wisdom of small creatures in Proverbs 30:24-28 and so on.⁸ A doctrine of creation is widely agreed to be at the centre of wisdom thought. So von Rad wrote in his *Old Testament Theology*, 'Wisdom became the representative of one of the most central concepts of Jahwism. Bypassing the saving history it legitimates itself straight from creation.'⁹

2. Voice from the Whirlwind (Selected verses from Job 38)

Scholars have proposed the dates for the book of Job from the tenth century to the fourth century B.C.E. The very fact that the author locates the characters in a distant world and avoids direct allusions to the later historical and prophetic traditions of Israel makes the task of determining an appropriate date rather difficult.¹⁰ Samuel Terrien opines that the Book of Job came into being in the sixth century B.C.E. when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had

just put an end to the kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem had fallen after a long siege (587-586 B.C.E). While many gave to despair, some found comfort in quietism, chanting in the elegiac rhythm (Lam. 3:26). Others looked toward the future and prepared for the rebirth of the nation as a religious community. (Ezek. 40:1 ff. Lev. 12:1ff.). The poet of Job was different. He ignored cults, temple, law, covenant, Messiah, even the concept of the chosen people. He approached the enigma of human beings fate in the world in terms of universal humanity. The Joban poet could speak in universal terms and couch the ideas in the form of a dialogue because the poet belonged to the international movement of wisdom.¹¹

In chapter 38 we see that Job, who has demanded time and again that God appear and argue with him, now has his wish granted, but on terms vastly different from those he imagined. Speaking out of a whirlwind, the Lord challenges Job to understand, let alone share, the task of creation.¹²

2.1. Voice from the Whirlwind brings to light the inadequate knowledge of Human Beings (vv. 4-7)

Norman Habel comments that by initial set of question Yahweh leads Job back to the primordial when the world was created. The opening rhetorical question challenges Job to declare whether he preceded creation and was therefore familiar with the design and construction of the earth. The full force of Yahweh's ironic challenge is evident in Yahweh's demand that Job demonstrate his knowledge of primordial "discernment" (*bīnā*). "Discernment" (*bīnā*) is a synonym for the "wisdom" (*hokmā*) acquired by God during the process of creation (28: 12, 20-28).

Dhrome observes, "to know discernment (*bīnā*)" is to know the inner "truth" of a matter (Prov. 4:1; Isa. 29:24). "Knowing discernment" (Prov. 4:1) seems to be synonymous with "gaining wisdom" (Prov. 4:5). Thus God is not merely asking if Job had an understanding, but whether he has acquired that primordial wisdom which would enable him to "discern" the mysteries of the earth's design.¹³

2.2. Voice from the Whirlwind affirms that Yahweh is the Creator and Director (vv. 8-11)

The sea is born (v 8), and still has some traits of that primeval sea- above all the "pride" (*gā'ōn*) of its waves- but no longer comes into play; it is shut out from birth on. Now apparently the description here is consciously kept ambiguous: as the chaotic sea is locked out by gates and bars; but at the same time it appears as the infant whom Yahweh provides as swaddling clothes and under this metaphor it is even less conceivable as an adversary. On the other hand the sea appears visibly as a part of the earth, and is again limited concretely by the coastlines. But in such a context there is no longer anything threatening about the sea; therefore, it is not suitable as a metaphor of the chaotic powers of the world, as they were expressed in those very different creation texts referring to the primordial floods.¹⁴

2.3. Voice from the Whirlwind challenges Job's understanding of Interrelatedness and Interconnectedness (vv. 19-20)

The Lord is talking in these verses about events of creation beyond Job's previous understanding. Job thought of darkness on one level as the extinction of human life which he wishes for and on another, as the black world of the sinner into which he was thrust by God's abusive action. But the Almighty shows him how little he really understands about darkness. Darkness has a reality of its own, not simply in relationship to human beings. Job's horizon is being extended.¹⁵

2.4. Voice from the Whirlwind displays Yahweh's love and care to the non-human world (vv. 39-41)

Norman Whybry comments verses 39-41 begin a series of paragraphs about the lives and characteristics of animals and birds which continue until the end of chapter 39. Far from being just a list of names, this is a remarkable poem and also astonishingly perceptive, showing a detailed knowledge that ironically belies

its own message that these things are known only to God. It goes beyond the previous paragraphs in that it stresses not only on Yahweh's knowledge and human ignorance but also Yahweh's loving care for those creatures that can be of no possible use to human beings; Yahweh provides them with food, watches over their births and cares for them generally. Its very pointed omission of any reference to human being, with their own problems and their demands that God should conform to their own notion of justice, cannot but be intentional; it presents a picture of the breadth of God's activities that neither Job nor his friends could have imagined. Two things in particular are emphasized: these creatures' freedom and independence from human and God's loving concern for them.

The lion is generally portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as a fierce creature that is the enemy of humankind. In vv 39-40, however, the author's concern is with the lion cubs, whose appetites require to be satisfied; and Yahweh speaks of Yahweh self as the hunter who forages for their food in default of human assistance, while at the other end of the scale Yahweh also ensures that the young of the ravens do not go hungry.¹⁶

Implication

We can find some theological responses when we read the book of Job in the present context of ecological crises. First, the book of Job tells us the story of a righteous man who suffers and asks the question why there is suffering of the righteous? While finding the answer to this question he and his friends revolve around reason and assumption that are mostly related to the human world. Yahweh then speaks through the whirlwind, thus using a force of nature to convey the message. Yahweh speaking through the whirlwind is a powerful act of showing that God works in and through God's creation. The creation thus moves and lives through the life that flows through Yahweh. Sallie McFague proposes reimagining the world as God's Body. She argues that God is to the world as the self is to the body, so the point is not to identify God with the

world but to recognize a living involvement in the world. She proposes to use the models of God as mother, lover and friend of the world.¹⁷

Secondly the Voice from the whirlwind does not start the conversation by issuing the address of suffering that Job is going through but starts by speaking about the creation of the world. Our tendency as human is to be at the centre to be the crown but the voice from the whirlwind comes and pushes Job into the circle of creation making him aware that the creation existed before him and if he is to talk about justice he cannot leave the creation out of it. The Norwegian activist and philosopher Arne Naess in the early 1970's introduced the term 'Deep Ecology'. He stressed on the need to move beyond superficial responses to the social and ecological problems we face. Deep Ecology is a holistic approach to facing world problems that brings together thinking, feeling, spirituality and action. It involves moving beyond the individualism towards seeing ourselves as part of the earth. This leads to deeper connection with life, where Ecology is not just seen as something 'out there,' but something we are part of and have a role to play.¹⁸

Conclusion

The Voice from the whirlwind in the Book of Job calls us to be awake to the need of the hour. The greed of the human heart has already brought a lot of destruction and devastation to the earth. Mission belongs to God we only participate in it. The voice from the whirlwind is thus not mission to the creation but it is mission from the creation. Through the voice from the whirlwind Yahweh tells of the beauty, uniqueness and wonder of Yahweh's creation. Yahweh also speaks about the love and care that Yahweh has for the non-human creatures. Yahweh tells of the magnificent story of the creation before the human were part of it. But to listen to the voice from the whirlwind we have to be willing to listen to it. The Voice of the whirlwind today symbolizes the voices of the marginalized communities who suffer the most due to climate

change. The voice of the whirlwind thus challenges us to listen to these voices and stand in solidarity with them.

End Notes

- 1 The title Voice from the whirlwind is taken from the book: *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, edited by Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.
- 2 Cited in K. Jesurathnam, "Ecological Concerns in Wisdom Literature," in *Good News to the Whole Creation: A Festschrift to the Rev. Dr. V. J. John*, edited by Limatula Longkumer, Philip Vinod Peacock, Rodinmawia Ralte (ISPCK: Delhi, 2016), 45.
- 3 Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Volume 1 (London: SCM Press), 426-428.
- 4 Ronald E. Murphy, "Wisdom in the OT," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, volume 6, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 924.
- 5 Dianne Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature A Liberation- Critical Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 12.
- 6 David Penchansky, *Understanding Wisdom Literature Conflict and Dissonance in the Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 11.
- 7 Zachary Hayes, O.F.M, *The Gift of Being: A Theology of Creation* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 30.
- 8 K. Jesurathnam, *Old Testament Theology: History, Issues, and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2016), 187-188.
- 9 Cited in Katharine J. Dell, "Green Ideas in the Wisdom Tradition," in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 47 1/ 1994, 427.
- 10 Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985), 40.
- 11 Samuel Terrien, *Job Poet of Existence* (New York: The Bobbs- Merrill Company, 1957), 34-39.
- 12 Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 297.
- 13 Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, 537.
- 14 Hans-Jurgen Hermisson, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom Theological and Literary: Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, edited by John Gammie, Walter Brueggemann, W. Humphreys and James Ward (Montana: Scholars Press, 1978), 53.

- 15 Sylvia Huberman Scholnick, "Poetry in the Courtroom: Job 38-41," in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, edited by Elaine R. Follis (Great Britain: JSOT Press, 1987), 198.
- 16 Norman Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield, 1998), 161-162.
- 17 Cited in Wati Longchar, "Interconnectedness of Life in God's Home," in *Good News to the Whole Creation: A Festschrift to the Rev. Dr. V. J. John*, edited by Limatula Longkumer, Philip Vinod Peacock, Rodinmawia Ralte (ISPCK: Delhi, 2016), 174.
- 18 <https://www.thegreenfuse.org/johnstone.htm> (Accessed on 5th January, 2018)

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Situational Tribal Theology: An Inclusive Approach towards Developing Tribal Theology

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Introduction

The complex situations of Tribals in Northeast India require a very careful approach in developing theology. Tribal Contextual theology in Northeast India has indeed explored many areas of research in developing viable theologies for the people. Nevertheless the approach seems to claim a generalized contextual research since it calls itself as Tribal contextual theology relevant for all tribal situations. The proposal here is for a shift in focus from doing tribal theology from generalized contextual studies to a particular situational approach.

The tribals of Northeast India are living in multiple realities and one single or few situations clubbed together cannot be called the context to accommodate the whole tribal people of Northeast India, in such a situation generalization will only further conflicts in regard with the argument of, “whose situation/s” are to be used for the so-called “context of the people”. Therefore if Tribal theology of Northeast India approaches theology from specific situation such an approach it will be more inclusive as it incorporates each particular tribal situation in the process of theologizing. In the presence of multiple cultural, lingual, social, economic and ethnic realities, etc., tribal contextual theology as it is practiced now does

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not do justice to the whole human situations found in Northeast India. Therefore one needs to have an approach specific to each situation.

1. Complexity of Tribal Situation in Northeast India

In order to understand the theology of the Tribals of Northeast India, one also needs to understand the situation under which the Tribals of Northeast India developed their theology. The situation plays a vital role in any theology as it becomes the molding ground of any theology as every theology is rooted to its context.¹ Under this section we shall briefly look into the geographical, socio-cultural and economic situation, and conflict situation of Northeast India.

1.1. Geography and Ethnic Groups

The entire area of Northeast India covers an area of 255,182 sq. km. It is home to over 70 major ethnic groups and sub-groups, speaking approximately 400 languages and 70 major dialects and having around 272 tribes.² Razouselie Lasetso claims that Northeast India have population of 38,857,769 covering an area of 262,230 sq.km and have 250 ethnic tribes, speaking more than 350 dialects.³ The region was occupied by ethnic group of people who had their own sovereign state. The British occupied the entire Northeast and eventually dislocated the indigenous settlers of the region for their own administrative convenience. Today the entire Northeast India is divided in 7 sister states namely Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal and along with the seven sisters Sikkim which is also known as the brother state of this region is also included.⁴ This shows that Northeast India is a complex society wherein many different situations exist geographically and ethnically.

1.2. Socio-cultural and Economic Situation

It is noted by Renthly Keitzar that the socio-cultural polity among the hills people of Northeast India, the Khasis (Meghalaya),

Mizos (Mizoram), Semas and Konyaks (Nagaland), Noctes, Wanchos and Tangsas (Arunachal) the social setup is classified into two classes Chiefs and common people, while the other Naga tribes were egalitarian and democratic, wherein elders from different clans in the villages formed a government in the socials setup.⁵ But on the other hand the declaration of being an egalitarian society is challenged by Narola Imchen asserting that women did not enjoy equal rights as their male counterparts.⁶ Nevertheless we may note that the Tribals of Northeast India had their own semi-government with chieftains and common people among some group while some practice an egalitarian and democratic social setup.

The culture of the Tribals are handed down to them from their forefathers, they have a distinct character of life. They practice their own customs, rituals and rites and since pre-historic times they had their own economic, political and territorial identities. The main occupation is agriculture, and they live very closely linked with nature. But today the tribal people are constantly under threat from outsiders who have diminished their simple and egalitarian lifestyle.⁷ Economically the Tribals of Northeast India are backward but culturally they are very rich.⁸ The arrival of the non-tribals in this region has disturbed the economic stability of the region. Village economy which largely relied on agriculture and forest products practicing barter system have been commercialized by non-tribals and thereby self sufficient Tribal economy is now slowly becoming dependent.⁹ Today after the commercialization of the tribal areas we see that the rich and poor are divided greatly. The socio-cultural and economic situation of tribals in NEI is very much diverse and therefore one cannot identify all of them under a single context but rather identify situations and respond to it.

1.3. Conflict Situation

The conflict situation prevalent in Northeast India can be largely identified within the struggle for self determination and

identity. Northeast India is home to many insurgent groups;¹⁰ such groups are formed for the love of self determination. In due course of time factions within such groups emerged and internal conflicts arose due to various reasons. Factional clashes are also common and from time to time they are either targeted by State or Central forces or the vice versa.

Apart from insurgency problem, ethnic clashes and inter village clashes are very common in Northeast India. For instance the Kuki-Naga Ethnic clash claimed 677 lives, injured 402 and destroyed 5452 houses.¹¹ Kuki-Paites conflict, Kukis and Hmars, Karbis and Hmars, Zeme Naga and Dimasas are some ethnic clashes reported in Northeast India.¹² Thus one can say the tribals inhabiting Northeast India strives for self-determination and for which they can even go to the extent of taking up arms.

In the presence of such conflicts theology must be sensitive to the people; it should not ignore the realities of human situations found in such complex society. Taking into consideration the above realities one can understand that the Tribals of Northeast India are a group of complex people who find themselves in different situation to overlook any of the situations will lead to discrimination. Contextualization or generalization will only lead to further disagreement and thus the need of situational studies.

2. Problems within Tribal Contextual Theology

The Contextual study thus far pertaining to tribal theology in North East India (NEI) does not cater to the needs of all the tribes and sub-tribes of NEI. The differences in world-views, values, and identities are dealt with an exclusive approach and not inclusive. Thus the question arises: does the tribal theology of NEI cater to the needs of all the tribal communities/situations? Some problems which arise within tribal contextual theology will be discussed.

2.1. Definition

Tribal theology is defined by Yangkahao Vashum as, “a critical reflection on the faith experiences of the tribal people in the light of their sociopolitical and economic and religious situations.”¹³ The definition claims that it takes into account the situations of the tribal people, but in reality the tribal theology of NEI addresses to the time and space of particular community and not the minute situations of all the tribals of NEI.¹⁴

2.2. Sources

The sources for doing Tribal Theology in regard to the tribals of NEI are, first, tribal traditional heritages such as tribal religion and socio-cultural traditions, second, tribal experience, and third tribal history.¹⁵ Here a serious question arises in considering these sources. Who are the tribals from whom these sources will be extracted? Thus, a need to seriously consider the tribal situations of all the tribes under the name ‘tribal’ is first needed before generalizing and considering the validity of such sources to determine tribal heritage, religion, socio-cultural tradition, tribal experience and tribal history. Even within a single tribe the above mentioned sources vary from village to village.

2.3. Methodology

K. Thanzauva suggests a synthetic-Praxis model in developing Tribal Theology, whereby it is a combination of two models, i.e., the synthetic model which is the synthesis of the Gospel and the tribal culture and also the synthesis of inherited theology from the West and tribal culture in the context of Northeast India. In regard with praxis model he considers it as the formulation of right actions for the transformation of the society in realizing the Kingdom of God. Thanzauva asserts that the “combination of the two is necessary the tribal society is suffering from a crisis of identity, and at the same time struggling for liberation from all forms of alienation.”¹⁶

Once again a serious question of which or whose tribal culture, whose tribal identity, reflection on which group of people, and whose traditional values? are the questions which need to be answered before the synthesis is done. Thus once again we see that a serious look into the situational tribal heritage, religion, socio-cultural tradition, tribal experience and tribal history of the tribals of NEI is needed for an inclusive theology and for which situational theological exploration is proposed.

2.4. Generalization/contextualization

Renty Keitzar is considered as the pioneer of tribal theology,¹⁷ he used the term ‘Tribal Christian Theology’ in developing a contextual theology for the tribals of Northeast India,¹⁸ Keitzar also on the other hand at an All Naga Theological Seminar held at Kohima in November of 1984 presented an unpublished paper titled ‘The Indigenization of the Naga Christian Theology.’¹⁹ Further in terms of identity Keitzar asserts that the traditional heritage of the tribals of Northeast India determines their identity as Arunachali, Assamese, Garo, Khasi-Jantia, Manipuri/Meetei, Mizo, Naga and Tripuri Christians, thus the emergence of Northeast Indian Tribal Christian Theology must emerge from this understanding.²⁰ Under each of the above mentioned tribes there exist multiple differences within the tribes. All Arunachali, Assamese, Garo, Khasi-Jantia, Manipuri/Meetei, Mizo, Naga and Tripuri are not the same, sub-tribes, villages, clan, etc., divides the tribals. In such a situation one must not bluntly generalize a group of people in the name of contextualization and rather study their situations to do justice.

2.5. Terms and Terminologies

O Alem was one of the first to write about the concept of God from the Tribal perspective.²¹ His book ‘Tsungramology: Ao Naga Christian Theology’ was a major breakthrough in formulating a deeper understanding into the original meaning of the Ao concept of divinity and develop a Tribal Christian Theology.²²

To a non Ao, *Tsungremology* will be a completely strange terminology which does not mean anything to them. Even within the Naga tribes only Ao or those into tribal studies will be able to understand the term. Thus, terms and terminologies are situational or collection of situations and thus cannot be considered the context of the larger community.

2.6. The starting point of Theology

Wati Longchar articulates a methodological shift from the human-centric to a creation-centric methodological approach in articulating a tribal theology as creation, especially the land, as it is the foundation of history, existence and identity, for it not only “sustains and nourishes all beings...[but]...gives them an identity and selfhood.”²³ From the Indigenous perspective Longchar furthers his methodological approach to a contextual liberative Tribal indigenous theology from the departure point of ‘space’. He states that, “Human always understands them as an integral part of creation/land and not apart from it... Space is the foundation of self-understanding out of which liberation, justice and then peace will flow naturally and necessarily.”²⁴ Thus for Longchar the starting point of tribal theology is ‘space’, but the problem again in this approach is that all the tribals of NEI don’t all share the same time and space.

Thanzuava seems to emphasize more on the struggles of the people and considers the starting point of Tribal Theology as the sufferings and struggles of the people.²⁵ The tribals of NEI don’t share the same kinds of suffering and struggles. Therefore one has to be sensitive to all the situations instead of generalizing.

Taking all the above points into consideration one may now understand the complexity of the Tribal situations and therefore it will be misleading to bring all the different and rich culture, tradition and worldviews of the people of NEI under one single context rather each situation must be given importance.

3. Poumai Naga a Case Study

An attempt to bring out the difficulties in formulating Poumai Contextual theology will be done in this portion so as to prove that tribal theology needs situational studies and not contextual.

3.1. Origin and Creation Folktales

The Poumai Naga traces their origin from Makhel village which in the local dialect is known as *Makhrifii*,²⁶ according to Poumai tradition it is believed that before the departure from Makhel, the ancestors took an oath at *Deifii*²⁷ pledging that they will not reveal the place of their origin prior to their settlement at Makhel.²⁸ With such secretive tendency within the Poumai people, one cannot help but doubt the oral history which is passed down from the time of their settlement at Makhel. How far can such history be used in formulating tribal theology?

Furthermore even the creation folktale varies from village to village, Pahrii identifies two such creation folktales, one of the versions says:

Once upon a time, there lived an old woman called *Dziilmachcha* at Makhel. One evening she was basking in the Sun facing the West, meanwhile she saw a small white object (cloud) as big as an egg approaching her from the west. When it reached her, it covered her and she became pregnant. She gave birth to four sons. That is how human beings came into being and departed to different places.²⁹

The other version says:

In the beginning, there was a woman. She had three children: human, tiger and god. They stayed together as a family. But she knew that it would not be possible for her children to stay together after her death. One day she told them that there was going to be a competition and whoever won, would rule the open space. The other

two would have to go and hide in the bushes, cliffs, and rocky places. Since the mother loved the human one, she helped the human to win the competition. When their mother died the tiger (animal world) and god (spirit) went away from the open space and hid themselves in bushes and other places, where humans would not dare to tread.³⁰

In the midst of such different folktales, one cannot really rely on one single folktales and folklores as a source for doing Poumai tribal theology; rather one must be sensitive to the complexity in the situation and thereby deal such issues according to the situation.

3.2. Language

The common language of the Poumai people is known as 'poula',¹³⁷ nevertheless each village have their distinct way of pronouncing certain words. The Poumai Bible and Hymnal contains mixed representation of different style of pronunciation. It will be difficult to come to a single consensus on the spelling and pronunciation of 'poula' since each village prefers their own way of pronunciation. Furthermore three villages namely, Oinam, Ngamju and Ngari have their own distinct dialect. The three villages uses Poula as a common language but while interacting within their own villagers they prefer to use their own distinct dialect.

With such kind of complicacy within the language of the Poumai people, it will be difficult to generalize a single term as a standard term for the Poumai people as a whole and therefore a need to look into the situation of each village in order to formulate theological terminologies. Thus one cannot simply overlook this complicacy and impose a single view upon the whole of the Poumai Society.

3.3. Gender division

While pointing out some flaws in the present Tribal Theology, Pahrri a Poumai Naga teaching at Baptist Theological College, Pfutsero, Nagaland points out that the attempt made by Tribal theology of Northeast India to revitalize the close relationship with nature, God and human beings have brought about a situation where land has become the center of the theological approach. In such a context Pahrri questions who owns this land?³¹

Sadly even in Poumai context the land is owned by men, thus the theology which does not consider women is not inclusive and thereby it is an injustice meted out on women. Therefore, theology must take serious consideration on how every individual can relate themselves to God and not be gender biased.

3.4. Morung³² (*Kheloukizii*³³)

Pahrri pointed out is in regard with the 'community home', he argues that most tribal community homes are meant only for men and that in such community homes activities related to head-hunting and warfare were given importance, although other issues were also discussed. Therefore such community homes become a male centric home and thus Pahrri opines that for the tribal communities of Northeast India the community homes should be replaced by the household church where the early disciples of Jesus came and worshipped and which is more inclusive as it accommodated both male and female.³⁴

On the other hand Duo argues that the Poumai calls the community homes as 'Kheloukiziifii', which is derived from four suffixes 'khe' means bachelor, 'lou' means unmarried ladies, 'ki' means house and 'ziifii' means sleeping place³⁵ and thus it is meant for both male and female. Considering the above given points one can say that even in a single tribe many complexities exist in terms of understanding ones own history, origins and worldviews.

4. Situation Ethics vis-a-vis Situation Theology

One cannot separate ethics and theology, for Karl Barth theology and ethics must not be separated because if dogmatic and ethics are separated one will see a change in focus, wherein dangerous exchange of the subjects God and human will take place.³⁶ Therefore considering situation ethics a proposal for situational approach to theology is presented for consideration.

4.1. Situation Ethics

Deontological Ethicists would assert that the sense of 'duty' decides right and wrong,³⁷ which the teleological ethicists would disagree and assert that it is the 'end goal' which decides right and wrong.³⁸ Contextual ethicists would disagree to both and say that the context which is the socio-political, philosophical, economical, psychological, biblio-theological perspective of a given context needs to be considered before deciding right and wrong.³⁹ All this approaches seems to emphasize on their own way of doing ethics, but they all have a commonality where they all seems to propagate a set of exclusive rules for deciding right and wrong, and thus situation ethics comes into this juncture and proposes for a new approach to ethics of eradicating exclusive claims and aims to be more inclusive by considering possible situations wherein the exclusive claims may not be applicable. Likewise even in theology, systematic theology and contextual theology also attempts to bring out a set of theology which is to be applied for a given context. Such approaches ignore specific situations and thereby are not relevant to all situations.

Situation Ethics can be traced back even to Augustinian writings, where Augustine asserts that one must act according to how God would act when faced with a situation and he particularly talks of acting in God's love.⁴⁰ Different Christian writers have been able to find biblical support for their ideas concerning ethical thinking for Christians. Tillich, for example, declared that "Love is the ultimate law."⁴¹ Barth found great support for an ethic of divine command.⁴² Hauerwas found

biblical confirmation of an ethics of the virtuous character.⁴³ Burtress found examples of consequential ethics in the writings of Paul and the sayings of Jesus.⁴⁴ All these scholars' views are in support of Joseph Fletcher the father of situation ethics.

4.1.1. Joseph Fletcher's Four Presuppositions

Joseph Fletcher is known as the father of situational ethics and bio-ethics. He is widely known for his ground breaking thoughts on minute details others seem to overlook. His book *Situation Ethics* is used as a model for the Situation Ethics platform and nearly all later studies and research refer to it as Fletcher's model. Fletcher's approach to situation ethics is based on four presuppositions, pragmatism, positivism, relativism and personalism.

4.1.1.1. Pragmatism

This simply means that whether we like it or not, what is good must be judged on the basis of what works.⁴⁵ Therefore even in formulating a theology, whether one like it or not what is good must be judged based on how it works out in a particular situation.

4.1.1.2. Relativism

Situation ethics is also based on the principle of relativism. This does not mean that everything is relative. It still claims the principle of love. However, the way in which love is carried out may be different from one situation to another.⁴⁶ Similarly, every theology cannot be related to every situation and at the same time it can carry different meaning to different situation. Therefore, how far a theology is relative to a situation needs to be seriously considered.

4.1.1.3. Positivism

Faith claims cannot be proven to be true rationally. They can only be "posited" and affirmed by the person who chooses to believe their accuracy. Thus, situationism does not seek to prove that an ethical conclusion is true. It only seeks to provide justification (support) for the ethical decision.⁴⁷ Theological claims

are also faith claims and thus theology can only be 'posited' and affirmed by the person who chooses to believe their accuracy.

4.1.1.4. Personalism

Personalism means ethics cannot be separated from people. To have an ethical system that is based upon a code or rule without regard for the people is pointless. Situationism, with love as its primary standard, focuses on love as it relates to people.⁴⁸ Further Fletcher goes on to first attack the wrongful separation of love and justice, he argues by saying that, "To say that love is between individuals and justice between groups, and that a union cannot love a corporation or a city cannot love the nation, is to sentimentalize love and dehumanize justice,"⁴⁹ Here we see that Fletcher is arguing that love and justice cannot be separated as to do so is a dehumanizing process and it cannot be love nor justice. Similarly, a theology which does not love the people does not do justice and a theology which does not do justice does not love the people. Therefore, theology must be based on its love for the people and thereby do justice.

5. Situational Tribal Theology: A Methodological Shift

Tribal Theological researches have largely depended on the larger context of the tribal people and ignored situations wherein such theologies might not be applicable. Therefore for the larger good of the tribal people of NEI and for a more effective tribal theology two methodological approaches are proposed.

5.1. Pragmatic-Personalism

Pragmatic-Personalism is to say that theology must be practical and personal. It is to say that one must be able to personally relate to the theology which is presented to him/her. If the theology cannot be related to the receivers then the theology is not valid and therefore does not benefit those who receive it. This is also to mean that if a set of theology is constructed and yet it does not relate to the people then the theology does not stand valid.

Pragmatic-personalism will open up windows of new insights which in turn will make the theology more inclusive and thereby do justice to the receivers of the theology. In doing Tribal theology if one does not agree to the worldview of the other and yet want to remain true to the scripture one can seek a pragmatic approach to theology which one can personally accept. One must not impose one's views on the other since that will be injustice. Theology must promote inclusiveness and not exclusiveness. While being inclusive, one must also be able to draw out a practical approach and not a superficial approach which does not have any effect on the people.

5.2. Relative-Positivism

Relative-Positivism, 'Relative' is to say that not every theology can be related to every situation but each theology is understood and applied differently in different situations. Further, 'Positivism' is to say that, theology deals with matters of faith therefore it cannot always be proven rationally and thus theology can only be 'posited' to those who choose which theology to accept. Tribal contextual theology have found itself difficult to relate itself to the Western theology, thereby developed an approach to indigenize its theology, in such an approach the theology should seek to relate itself to all the situations of the tribal realities/situations. At the same time it must be just a proposal for the consideration of the receivers of the theology since not all will agree to it.

5.3. Sources

Previously used sources such as Scripture, Christian heritage, tribal traditional heritages such as tribal religion and socio-cultural traditions, tribal experience, and tribal history are the sources used in tribal situational studies, the only difference is that instead of diluting tribal realities to a larger context and developing exclusive claims, situational approach will rather focus on detailed situation of creation and seek to develop more inclusive and relative approach towards developing tribal theology.

6. Reflection

One of the best examples to point out the misunderstanding between context and situation, can be found in the statement of Abraham Stephen, he states

Theology has to take seriously the context of the people for whom it seeks to interpret the faith. That means it is the task of theology to interpret the faith in terms of the personal needs of the people of each generation, as well as in terms of the social, cultural and religious environment.⁵⁰

In the above statement, 'Context of the people' is addressing to the larger context of the society which may not serve the needs of individuals, while 'interpret the faith in terms of the personal needs of the people' is addressing to the situation of a person. Such difficulties arise in doing theology when we are confused between context and situations. Context is not a single situation or the accumulation of few situations rather context should be the accumulation of all situations. Therefore, in order to do justice we need to consider all situations to formulate a context. Without situational studies or situational approaches one cannot claim to have a context.

7. Evaluation

The problems within the conflict between contextual and situational approaches are:

Problem 1. If one chooses to generalize the experiences and choose to contextualize, the issue of not delivering justice to individuals arises.

Problem 2. If one chooses individual situation over the overall experiences, the issue of individualism overruling collective decision arises.

Solution: Towards a Just and Inclusive Society, means to have concern for everyone. The question of rich or poor, powerful or

weak, influential or less influential and minority or majority does not arise; rather the question of empowering the lesser is the focus. Situational studies will include contextual realities but contextual studies overlook minute situations, therefore situations are to be addressed so as to do justice to both.

Conclusion

Theology has its root in a particular ideology; today we see many theologies mushrooming out of each ideology a particular group of Christians felt related to. Tribal theology of NEI has emerged from the liberative ideology. Today tribal theology has taken many different directions and attempt for developing a holistic tribal approach to understanding Christianity from the tribal perspective. In this process tribal theology has indeed contributed much in opening the eyes of the people towards cultural values and traditional practices and its relevance to Christian message. Nevertheless, such venture into formulating an adequate theology for the tribal people as a whole seems to have taken a direction of promoting theologies which is not relevant to the whole of tribal communities in NEI. This is because tribal theology has failed to look into situations within the larger context. Therefore an urgent need to respond to this is felt.

Pragmatic-Personalism and Relative-Positivism is an approach which considers every situation of a given context in doing theology. Situational tribal theology proposes for a theology which is practical and personal at the same time which is relatable to the receivers and not imposed but given the freedom of choice to choose.

To conclude, Situational Tribal Theology proposes for developing theology which considers the situation of all creation in the light of personal relationship with God and the whole of creation for a productive building of faith and work in the light of the scripture. This approach will contribute towards building a theology which is just and inclusive.

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Exploring the Issue of Multiple Religious Belonging towards Fostering Inclusivity and Hybridity in Communities

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Introduction

This essay is an attempt to critically reflect on the issue of *multiple religious belonging*¹ for its potential to foster inclusive and hybrid communities, in the context of India. It begins with an investigation into various meanings and usages of this phenomenon, dwelling on its status and implications both in the West and India. The investigation also includes a discussion on the phenomenon's strengths and weaknesses, along with its implications for Christianity and the Church in general. In the final analysis the implications of multiple religious belonging in India are especially drawn out with respect to dalit and tribal communities and how this phenomenon has been a cause of complexity and also a source that facilitates alternative, counter-cultural spaces and hybrid identities.

Multiple religious belonging is a complex phenomenon of the interplay of identity and religious belonging in different cultures. Peniel J.R. Rajkumar and Joseph P. Dayam admit that, 'needless to say, an amoebic and amorphous phenomenon like multiple religious belonging, which is replete with its variegated diversity and attendant complexity, holds in it more questions that we haven't even yet learned to ask.'² However, the conceptual

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difficulty in understanding multiple religious belonging is somewhat minimised by the efforts of some who have tried to explain it by applying different terminologies or highlighting the differences between Western/European/American and Eastern/Asian understanding. There are others who have tried to categorise this into various strands.

1. Various Usages of the Terminologies of Multiple Religious Belonging

Here I will begin by briefly discussing the categories. In terms of terminologies, various usages, besides 'multiple religious belonging' are used viz., *Multiple Religious Participation*, *Hybridity* and *Liminality*.³ John J. Thatamanil suggests that in some instances the term multiple religious participation is more appropriate than multiple religious belonging and highlights the difference between the two. He claims that the former is the 'best generic term for modes of religious life in which persons take up ideas and practices drawn from the repertoires of discrete traditions.'⁴ Thatamanil revises the definition of multiple religious participation following John Berthong, a Confucian-Christian thus:

[...] multiple religious participation is the conscious (and sometimes even unconscious) use of religious ideas, practices, symbols, meditations, prayers, chants, and sensibilities drawn from the repertoires of more than one religious tradition.⁵

Thatamanil further notes that 'multiple religious participation may lead to multiple religious belonging but it need not.'⁶ He argues that the terms *belonging* and *identity* are more problematic than the term *participation*. The term belonging suggests actually having membership in more than one community, which is both acknowledged by the individual and the concerned communities, but he says such acknowledgements from both sides are rare. Often the individual who acknowledges his or her status as such is

not validated or acknowledged by the other community. In this circumstance, Thatamanil asks a pertinent question: 'Must claims of double belonging receive communal authorization before they can be recognized as valid?'⁷ He argues that even the term *identity* is complex because we can speak of multiple religious *identities* or multiple religious *identity* depending on how we understand the formation of identity of a person.⁸

The term *hybridity* is also used to describe the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging. The concept of hybridity in a positive sense was actually brought into postcolonial and cultural studies by Homi Bhabha and Salman Rushdie among others. This term denotes intermingling and fusing of cultures, but also emergence of a new identity.⁹ Another term closely associated with hybridity is *liminality*, which is used by various authors to express one of the authentic categories of 'Indianness,' i.e. the fact of transcending of religious boundaries,¹⁰ or imagining inclusive communities. Felix Wilfred writes:

In the Indian tradition, the concept of *sandhya*-conjunction is very important. It is the *twilight zone* where night and day meet. The borders and twilight zones, or to use an anthropological terminology, the position of *liminality* [italics mine] is unique and creative.¹¹

The various terms mentioned above helps to highlight different aspects of the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging.

2. Western and Eastern Understandings of Multiple Religious Belonging.

The Western status and understanding of multiple religious belonging differ from their counterparts in the East. Catherine Cornille notes that the West is slowly coming to terms with this phenomenon, while it is almost commonplace in the East, eg., in China, Japan and India to name a few.¹² Wilfred writes about

the Asian situation of transcending of borders and inclusive nature of various communities:

One widespread experience in different parts of Asia is that people, by and large, do not hold on to rigidly demarcated borders. The borders are fluid and porous. This is even more true when it is a matter of religion and religious experience [... ,] the Asian cultural ethos of fluid borders is very alive and active.¹³

Wilfred further notes that in the West, belonging to one religion may be the norm and multiple religious belonging the exception. In the East and in the wider history of religion, multiple religious belonging is the rule rather than the exception at least at a popular level.¹⁴ There is a further important distinction between the West and the East in this matter: In the West, it is more a matter of choice or selection for the individual to choose the religion one wants to draw closer to. In the East, it may not be wholly a question of choice, but a question of one's birth in a particular community, circumstances, upbringing, socio-cultural or other factors.¹⁵ In this context it is important to note that the concept of religions as a monolithic entity is debatable. In North America and Europe, religious multiplicity is legitimate, but it is often delegitimized as syncretistic.¹⁶ Thatamanil draws attention to the fact that scholars like Wilfred Cantwell Smith long ago understood religious traditions as fluid and impure, which flow into each other and are not essentially 'discrete, reified and homogenous entities.'¹⁷

3. Various Categories of Multiple Religious Belonging

To further understand the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging, Catherine Cornille's categorisations are helpful. She broadly categorises the issue into two aspects: involuntary and voluntary. In the involuntary category, she gives the example of the situation in East Asia where being a Chinese person also

means belonging to Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism. This is not a matter of choice, but that of cultural identity. Another aspect in the involuntary category is of a person being born in a family where his or her parents belong to more than one religion. This person then has to negotiate different religions during his or her upbringing. This refers to the external circumstance rather than an individual choice.¹⁸ In the voluntary category, there could be occasions of crisis, need or necessity in terms of disease or difficulty when a person chooses to turn to another religion or practice it occasionally for help. Another aspect of the voluntary category is that some people might choose to identify permanently with more than one religion because they find in that religion some resources or vitality that brings them fulfilment. Cornille mentions about Raimon Panikkar who went through a similar experience saying: 'I started as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu, and returned as a Buddhist without ceasing to be a Christian.'¹⁹ Furthermore, there are people who have not completely identified with two religions on an equal level, in which case one of the religions continue to be more dominant than the other. There are other kinds of belonging in which a person fully initiates himself into the religion of the other. Cornille gives the example of Paul Knitter, the pluralist theologian, who also took vows in Buddhism. Other 'borderline' cases include situations where a person identifies with the symbolic and scriptural framework of one religion and with the hermeneutical framework of the other. Cornille cites cases where Christianity is sought to be understood in terms of *Advaita* or other categories.²⁰

4. Problems with Multiple Religious Belonging

Multiple religious belonging is understandably not without its numerous adherent problems. It also poses a significant challenge for the churches. Thatamanil in his discussion of the topic points out three pertinent problems which he categorises as: *misappropriation*, *contraindication* and profound *existential uncertainty*. In his discussion of the first

issue of *misappropriation*, Thatamanil claims that all forms of religio-cultural-ritual borrowing might not be legitimate. While exclusive ownership of a particular religious symbol or ritual by a particular religion is a debatable issue, there can be borrowing in an asymmetrical relationship of power. Thatamanil notes that 'prudent questions must be raised about who borrows from whom and under what circumstances.'²¹ He gives the example of the religio-cultural relationship between Native Americans and non-native Americans as a result of colonisation and missions. There were cases where religious identities of the native-Americans become hybrid due to coercion, and where the non-Native Americans misappropriated the cultural and ritual motifs and artefacts of the subjugated natives without giving them due honour.²²

In other cases borrowing might be a consumerist enterprise where spiritual disciplines and ritual practices are simply taken over, sold in the market and severed from their community of origin.²³ Therefore, Thatamanil suggests that there must be criteria to discern which form of borrowing is legitimate and not dehumanising. In this sense, he suggests an ethical criterion where 'persons engaging in such activities remain in conversation with communities from whom they are borrowing. *Borrowing from* is done best when *learning with*' says Thatamanil.²⁴

The second problem Thatamanil highlights is that of *contraindication*. He asks whether the ritual or practice of a particular religion is always compatible with the different tradition into which it is borrowed. He says that this is not always the case. Thatamanil contends that care should be taken about the appropriateness of the practices and their therapeutic value before borrowing. As an example he cites that certain kind of meditations may not be practiced in a different religious tradition without a guru.²⁵ The third problem of *existential uncertainty* has to do with anxiety and uncertainty that people might face while engaging in multiple religious participation. This is true both for mystics and

scholastics as well as ordinary people. Thereby Thatamanil raises the question of spiritual care for persons who engage in such practice and highlights the lack of expertise in that field.²⁶ Rajkumar and Dayam have pointed out that multiple religious belonging also has the danger of persons engaging in it in the sense of a 'bricolage spirituality' or a non-serious mix of different religious and cultural elements especially as a trend of postmodernity.²⁷ They agree with Cornille and Peter C. Phan that there are people who take it as a 'light-hearted flirting with different religions'²⁸ or 'self-indulgent, free-floating, cafeteria-style potpourri of mutually incompatible religiosities.'²⁹

5. Implications of Multiple Religious Belonging for Christianity and the Church

Multiple religious belonging is a significant problem for Christianity and the Church. It particularly poses a problem for Abrahamic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam that demand exclusive commitment on the part of their adherents.³⁰ Cornille axiomatically states that: 'The more encompassing a religion's claim to efficacy and truth, the more problematic the possibility of multiple religious belonging.'³¹ Phan shows through a survey of well-known personalities³² several complications and hurdles involved in the process of multiple religious belonging. He argues that for authentic multiple religious belonging to occur, hard and patient intellectual work is needed otherwise it might run the risk of shallowness. He shows that this may lead to a continuous tension in the life of the individual who engages in this phenomenon and that the learner needs stepping into the shoes of the religious experiences of others and the guidance of some teachers.³³

While problems and hurdles abound, the reality of multiple religious belonging in relation to Christianity and the church cannot be avoided. Scholars and theologians continue to grapple with the problem, so that they can understand what it means theologically and ecclesiastically. Some examples would give us an idea of how scholars continue to think of multiple religious

belonging. John B. Cobb thinks that multiple religious belonging is rather a means to an end and looks forward to transformation of religions in the process.³⁴ Cornille summarises Raymon Pannikar's position as someone who practiced a lifetime of multiple religious belonging. Pannikar thinks that the question of religious identity and belonging is not only a subjective matter, but also a question of acceptance by the group. However, the group consists of individuals who continually have to negotiate boundaries.

Pannikar thinks this helps in the process of the self-understanding of our faith while going beyond boundaries of fixed identities and exclusive belonging.³⁵ An interesting contribution in this field is made by Jacques Dupuis who comments on the relationship of complementarity and convergence of Christianity with other religions. He proposes that this relationship is able to hold the value of any particular religion while acknowledging the salvific value of other religions within the plan of God. Dupuis writes:

The question of a complementarity and convergence between Christianity and the other religions of the world arises in the context of a theology of religions that while holding clearly to the essential and constitutive elements of the Christian faith, attributes to the other religious traditions a positive value in the order of salvation for their members and a positive significance in the plan of God for the whole of humankind.³⁶

5.1. Multiple Religious Belonging in the Context of Dalit and Tribal Communities in India Including Christians

While the above positions describe different ways of positively understanding and responding to the issue of multiple religious belonging in a wider context, I want to stress that in India, this phenomenon includes other factors which need a different

approach. It is well-known that both dalits and tribals continue to suffer oppression, marginalisation and violence from which they seek liberation. Further, colonial Christianity has long since driven an unrealistic wedge between different communities and uprooted the masses from their indigenous communities for which these marginalised groups still continue to struggle. For most of them it is not an intellectual choice, but one that their context demands. It is essentially a struggle for survival spiritually and existentially. Thus the question of legitimising or de-legitimising multiple religious belonging by Christianity or the Church especially in the context of *dalit* and tribal marginalisation takes on a different note. Phan draws attention to the necessity of engaging in multiple religious belonging with particular attention to solidarity with the poor and marginalised otherwise, working for their emancipation can easily slip into ‘spiritual escapism’ or ‘bourgeois leisure life.’³⁷ Sunder John Boopalan argues that for the right kind of hybridity (he uses this word instead of multiple religious belonging) to occur, especially a hospitable kind of hybridity, it ‘needs to be perpetually disposed toward marginality and sites of oppression.’³⁸ He argues that marginality is the ethical rudder as one steers through the ambiguity of hybridity.³⁹ Stephen Moore notes that hybridity disrupts the normative, which corresponds to the pure, neatly arranged, straightforward space that excludes the marginalised.⁴⁰ Hybridity also functions as a worldview that ‘allows disparate identities to relate to each other based on shared identity and to co-exist without needing to undermine each other.’⁴¹

5.2. Rituals of the Marginalised as Alternative Hybrid Spaces

Boopalan agrees with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a post-colonial theorist, that the Indian scene is mostly ruled by a ‘liberal pluralism of repressive tolerance,’⁴² a pluralism which pretends to be hospitable by claiming to be tolerant and harmonious. Actually this is a superficial kind of pluralism that is devoid of an analysis of power, class, caste, gender and the plight of the marginalised.⁴³

Boopalan instead argues for a hybridity and plurality that is embodied, mostly expressed through various rituals and practices of different religions.⁴⁴

He reminds us that rituals have an inherent power to implicate and create alternative cultures and communities. He writes:

[...] rituals create alternative cultures that are not easily co-opted by dominant cultures, enabling hospitable freshness and creating nonhegemonic multiple belongings. They “contest the exclusivity in religious orthodoxies by redefining boundaries and reformulating the relationship between Self and Other.”⁴⁵ Thus rituals have the ability to foster hybrid identities that contest⁴⁶ and reorganize identities.⁴⁷

Boopalan contends that rituals make use of space and time that rejects the unequal elevation of intellectual over the material. The meaning-making power of ritual embodiment elicits response from participants⁴⁸ especially those from the marginalised. James Ponniah shows the importance of rituals in multiple religious belonging through the hybrid identities that are produced and promoted in the Christian and Muslim shrines in Tamil Nadu.⁴⁹ Ponniah agrees with Selva Raj that rituals are performed ‘often in opposition to and defiance of institutional norms and ecclesial prescriptions-that occur at the grassroots level in the arena of popular piety and rituals.’⁵⁰ Hybridity is thereby grounded in rituals, which can be an alternative model of religious dialogue, ‘a dialogue that emanates from the epicentre of rituals, performances, and practices of the people, and differs substantially from that which emanates from the official deposit of faith of institutionalized religions.’⁵¹ In this espousal of the critical and the embodied rituals and practices, ensues the discussion of how the church can understand or appropriate the issue of multiple religious belonging, especially in relation to the *dalits* and tribals. Joshua Samuel highlights how the *dalits*, both Hindu and Christian, themselves use hybridity to

counteract the influences of oppression and how the church can stand in solidarity with them in this struggle. Samuel writes:

[...] through hybridity the subjugated people at the bottom of the social pyramid creatively appropriate and use the religious and the cultural sources of the dominant (usually their oppressors) in order to sustain themselves through their oppressive situation.⁵²

Samuel argues that this element of hybridity has helped the *dalits* survive under oppression. It is this element of plurality and not being able to be limited by a particular religion that has been the strength of the *dalits*.⁵³ In relation to the church and the acceptance of *dalits* living in multiple religious belonging, Samuel asks, 'rather than insisting on their "exclusive" membership in Christianity, would it be possible to accept them as members of the body of Christ, without laying down stipulations and conditions? Would that be too unchristian?'⁵⁴

5.3. Multiple Religious Belonging as a New Face of the Church and Community

A relevant example for a new face of the Christian community is the *Kristbhakta*⁵⁵ movement, in Varanasi which consists of a group of non-baptised believers who are in the liminal position of being Hindus and also having love, faith and attachment to Jesus.⁵⁶ This group of people testify to their unique experience in Jesus, but express this in terms of signs, symbols, and rituals drawn from Hinduism. They are largely from the marginalised communities, but its significance lies in being a 'prophetic interrogation to the static and archaic tenets of established religions.'⁵⁷ Jerome Sylvester, who researched this community writes:

The *Khristbhaktas* are at the periphery of established religion [...]. Many Christians find *Khristbhakta* Movement as a new way of spreading the Gospel and new way of being Church. The type of discipleship

emerging from the *Khristbhakta* Movement is different from the conventional membership of Christian Churches. Being a disciple of Christ without being member of the Church is a reality to be faced.⁵⁸

The experience of believing without affiliation to any institution is therefore a reality in this case not only individually but also in terms of community. This points to the fact that in India, communities as well as individuals can practice multiple religious belonging. They can belong to Christ-centred communities without being baptised.⁵⁹

Turning to the tribal Christians, we also see this group maintaining both continuity and discontinuity with their previous religions especially in terms of rituals and practices. Tribal Christians continue to negotiate their borders in terms of their relationship with their former *Sarna* religion and Christianity. This is especially true in East and Central India among the *Adivasi* (tribal) community. Lovely Awomi James argues that tribal Christians maintain hybridity in terms of their use of several customs and traditions, rituals and practices. She shows that among tribal Christians in the Northeast India, their belief in the world of the spirits, practice of totemism, practice of taboos, shamanism and traditional feasts continue amidst their Christian faith.⁶⁰

Conclusion

The above observations on multiple religious belonging and hybridity, in India, drive home the fact that the church cannot neglect the reality of this phenomenon. Multiple religious belonging continues to happen not only intellectually but concretely in rituals, ceremonies and religious life of individuals and communities. Multiple religious belonging is a grounded reality for many common people in India; it is not limited to religious experts as we have found. As the majority of the church in India consists of *dalits*, tribals and the marginalised groups, it is expedient that the church should recognise this situation.

In this case can there be a way out in terms of re-organisation or re-conceptualisation of the boundaries of the church and reimagining of inclusive communities?. In the Indian context and especially through our discussions of the kinds of multiple religious belongings evident in the Indian context, such churches and communities provide the avenues to relate to people's past and also provides occasions to witness to a particular faith. It allows the people, especially *dalits*, to continue to live in multiple religious belonging for their own survival amidst oppression and also allows them to determine their identity in their rootedness to their own culture and traditions. It works similarly in the case of tribals who will then be able to uphold their particular tradition while being Christians. Rajkumar and Dayam point out with Stephen Barton the possibility thereby to live life in 'creative fidelity':

Where fidelity involves recognisable continuity with our scriptural faith tradition, and creativity involves an openness to the Spirit for the inspiration to interpret and 'perform' that tradition in ways that are life-giving?⁶¹

Thus, as argued so far, the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging, though fraught with challenges and limitations, holds out promises for inclusive and hybrid communities, especially in the context of marginalisation and oppression in India.

End Notes

- 1 This occupies a minor section of my unpublished PhD thesis, 'Towards a Permeable Spirit Ecclesiology in the Context of North India', 2016, U.K.: University of Edinburgh, presented here with some revisions.
- 2 Peniel J.R. Rajkumar and Joseph P. Dayam, "Introduction" in *Many Yet One: Multiple Religious Belonging* (henceforth, *MYO*), Geneva: WCC, 2016, 1.
- 3 The terms (*In*) *Betweenness*, *Dual Belonging* and *Hyphenated Identities* are also used sometimes. See Rajkumar and Dayam, "Introduction" in *MYO*, 1 and Allan Samuel Palanna, "(In) Betweenness and Being Analogical: Making Sense of Hospitable Faith," in *MYO*, 149.

- 4 John J. Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," in *MYO*, 10.
- 5 Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," in *MYO*, 11.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 See Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 349. The term was earlier used in a derogatory sense to refer to persons of mixed origins. See John Scott, "Hybridity" in John Scott and Gordon Marshall, *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2004). The above references are cited in Sunder John Boopalan, "Hybridity's Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder" in *MYO* 138.
- 10 See Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 346 cited in *MYO*, 136.
- 11 Felix Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 171.
- 12 Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, Faith Meets Faith Series, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1970), 1-2. (Henceforth, *MM*).
- 13 Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies*, 175.
- 14 *MM*, 1-2.
- 15 See. Rajkumar and Dayam, "Introduction" in *MYO*, 2. Also see Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," 8.
- 16 Thatamanil explains syncretism through an example. He argues that a person who cultivates yoga practice in addition to Eucharist engages in multiple religious participation, but if the yoga practice is installed within Eucharist it becomes syncretism. He argues that the term syncretism 'must first serve descriptively before they are subjected to normative evaluation.' See Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," 11.
- 17 See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) cited in Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," 7.

- 18 Catherine Cornille, "Multiple Religious Belonging and Interreligious Dialogue" *Current Dialogue* 57, (December 2015): 4-5.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 20 Cornille, "Multiple Religious Belonging and Interreligious Dialogue", 5.
- 21 Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation." 17.
- 22 *Ibid.*; also see John B. Cobb Jr, "Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation," in *MM*, 22.
- 23 Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," 17.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*, 17-18.
- 26 Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," 18, 19.
- 27 Rajkumar and Dayam, "Introduction," in *MYO*, 3.
- 28 Catherine Cornille, "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions," *Buddhist Christian Studies* 23 (2003): 48, cited in Rajkumar and Dayam, "Introduction," in *MYO*, 3.
- 29 Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 495 cited in Rajkumar and Dayam, "Introduction," in *MYO*, 3.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 *MM*, 2.
- 32 One of them Phan holds up as an example is Aloysius Pieris of Sri Lanka.
- 33 Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," 510-513.
- 34 See John B. Cobb Jr, "Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation," in *MM*, 20-27
- 35 Raimon Panikkar, "On Christian Identity: Who is a Christian?" in *MM*, 121-141.
- 36 Jacques Dupuis, S.J., "Christianity and Religions: Complementarity and Convergence," in *MM*, 61.
- 37 Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," 513.
- 38 John Boopalan, "Hybridity's Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder" in Rajkumar and Dayam eds., *MYO*, 136.
- 39 Boopalan, "Hybridity's Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder" 136.

- 40 Stephen Moore, *Empire and the Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament, Bible in the Modern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 109 cited in Raj Nadella, "Motif of Hybridity in the Story of the Canaanite Woman: Its Relevance for Multifaith Relation," in Rajkumar and Dayam eds., *MYO*, 111.
- 41 Nadella, "Motif of Hybridity in the Story of the Canaanite Woman: Its Relevance for Multifaith Relation," *MYO*, 111
- 42 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 176, cited in Boopalan, "Hybridity's Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder" 138.
- 43 Boopalan, "Hybridity's Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder," 138.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 139.
- 45 Alexander Henn, "Introduction: Beyond Norm, Text and Dialectics- Rituals as Social Praxis," in Henn and Klaus Peter Kopping, eds., *Rituals in an Unstable World: Contingency-Hybridity-Embodiment* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2008), 13 cited in Boopalan, "Hybridity's Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder" 141.
- 46 Pnina Werbner, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity", in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, eds., *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1997), 23-24, cited in Boopalan, "Hybridity's Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder" 141.
- 47 Boopalan, "Hybridity's Ambiguity (Gift or Threat?): Marginality as Rudder" 141.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 James Ponniah, "Shrines, Ritual Hospitality, and Hybrid Identities in South Asia" in Rajkumar and Dayam, *MYO*, 100.
- 50 Selva J. Raj, "Dialogue 'One the Ground': The Complicated Identities and the Complex Negotiations of Catholics and Hindus in South India," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 17(2004): 41 in "Shrines, Ritual Hospitality, and Hybrid Identities in South Asia" in Rajkumar and Dayam, *MYO*, 107.
- 51 Raj, "Dialogue 'One the Ground': The Complicated Identities and the Complex Negotiations of Catholics and Hindus in South India," in "Shrines, Ritual Hospitality, and Hybrid Identities in South Asia" 41.
- 52 Joshua Samuel, "Practicing Multiple Religious Belonging for Liberation: A Reflection from a Dalit Perspective" in *Current Dialogue*, (December 2015): 80.

- 53 Samuel, "Practicing Multiple Religious Belonging for Liberation: A Reflection from a Dalit Perspective" 81.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 Kristbhaktas are devotees of Christ, but not members of any mainline Church. They are seekers, who accept *Yeshubhagavan* (God in Jesus Christ) as their *Satguru* (Teacher). *Yeshubhagavan* is their *istadevta* (personal God) according to *Bhakti* tradition. Apart from Varanasi, similar movements are seen in Bihar, Delhi, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. There are thousands of devout seekers who seek to follow Christ in this way. See Sylvester, *Kristbhakta Movement: Hermeneutics of a Religio-Cultural Phenomenon*, 2.
- 56 Felix Wilfred, "Forward" in Sylvester, *Kristbhakta Movement: Hermeneutics of a Religio-Cultural Phenomenon*, xi-xii.
- 57 Sylvester, *Kristbhakta Movement: Hermeneutics of a Religio-Cultural Phenomenon*, 131.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 135.
- 59 Particularly important in this field are the thoughts of M.M. Thomas. See M.M. Thomas, "Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism: The Church-the Fellowship of the Baptised and Unbaptised," accessed 27th September, 2016, <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1448&C=1274>. Also see Timothy C. Tennent, "The Challenge of Churchless Christianity: An Evangelical Assessment" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 29, No.4, (October 2005): 170-177.
- 60 Lovely Awomi James, "North East Indian Tribal Christianity and Traditional Practices: Implications for Theology of Religions Today," in *Current Dialogue* 57, (December 2015): 52-62.
- 61 Stephen C. Barton, "The Epistles and Christian Ethics," in Robin Gill, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63 cited in Rajkumarand. Dayam, "Introduction" in *MYO*.

Challenges Faced by Single Parents: Struggle for an Inclusive and Just Community

*Nukshijungla Longkumer**

Introduction

The problems of single parents are largely understood to be found in Western context or urban society and thus we intend to ignore such issues in less known places, but in reality single parents are found everywhere. The problems they face are largely psychological, social stigmatization, children upbringing and economy. It has today become a great challenge to the present Church and society.

The paper focuses on a research done on single parents in Dimapur Ao Baptist Arogo (DABA), Dimapur, Nagaland. It shall address single parenthood and bring out some of the statistical reports of DABA and attempt to draw out few points to help single parents to participate in the society and church. In a society where any group or individual is ignored or excluded, the society/church is not doing justice, by excluding them from social and church participation. It is the duty of society and church to give attention towards them so that the society will move towards an inclusive and just society.

1. Definition of Single Parent

Single parent can be defined as "lone parents who reside with and have principal day-to-day responsibility for their dependent children."¹ The single parent family is created in a number of

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ways; it may be due to death of one parent, divorce, separation, desertion etc. In the mid-twentieth century, most single-parent families came because of the death of a spouse. Single parenting is one person managing the affairs of a family without the benefit of a partner. It happens when a spouse is away for an extended period of time (e.g. in military service), when a family experience a divorce, when parents do not marry and one parent chooses to raise children, or when a spouses dies.² Single parents face many concerns that are often economic, social, emotional and practical in nature.

2. Understanding Single Parent Families

Single Parent families are those families in which children reside with one parent who bear and carry the major responsibility for their upbringing. According to Bharat as quoted by Phanemo, single parent family includes those who had dependent children, in which one parent was absent due to death, divorce or separation. It was also observed that over 40 percent of the single parent families were established because of the death of the parent, and that more than 70 percent of the single parents were women.³ Parents in these families experience numerous problems and challenges ranging from resource shortages to a host of discipline problems and parent child conflicts. Moreover, these families are often not accepted by a section of Indian Society.⁴

A Single Parent is someone who lives in a separate household with his/her child or children and who has no partner living with them to share directly in the parenting responsibility.⁵ The single parent is often left with no sufficient resources or support⁶ and the condition worsens if the in-laws are not supportive and not from a good family. In any case, single parenting brings added responsibility to both the parent and the child. Single parenting is said to have a number of effects on the Children.⁷

3. Single Parents in India

Today, as families become smaller and smaller, single-parent households are no longer as strange as it was once. Single parenting in India mostly exists because of the death of a spouse. Widowhood has always been the major reason for the creation of single parent home in India.⁸

Hence, with the breakdown of the joint family system as well as the increasing rate of divorce, illegitimate relationship and unmarried parenting, the single parent family is now coming out into the open.⁹ The exponential rise in single parents household has been one of the most important issues of concern for social welfare workers and policy makers today.¹⁰

The fight for respectable existence is a hard one for most single mothers in India. They may be widows, walked out on or divorced, or simply spinsters, the society's view is still very narrow-minded regarding them.¹¹ Anita Mishra in an interview says right after her divorce, "The reaction of people regarding her and her status in the society changed overnight. The older generation, even my own family sometimes, they blame me, call me a woman of no morals, threaten to take my children away, even call me incapable of handling them because of my divorce."¹² Anita also added

My situation is nothing compared to the women we have rehabilitated, especially those in the rural areas where widows are treated as bad-luck. Not just that, they are believed to have brought upon the death of her husband. Widows are still not allowed to participate in any ceremony including those of her children!" she tells, out of breath with indignation.¹³

Not everyone is a Sushmita Sen,¹⁴ the fight for a respectable identity in the society for single mothers still has a long way to go in India.¹⁵ Single parenting is not easy. People respond to the situation of single parenting differently.¹⁶ Before exploring the

variety of attitudes of single parents, let us discuss some of the factors that cause the rise of single parenting in our communities.

4. Factors that leads to Single Parenthood

a) Single parents due to death of spouse

The death of a spouse can be one of the most painful events a person ever experiences. The loss of spouse can mean the loss of one's partner, lover, best friend, confidant, and the parent of the children. In addition to dealing with the loss emotionally, a surviving spouse often faces major life changes that can be stressful and they get filled with loneliness, depression and despair. Coping with the loss of spouse involves working through the emotional grief and the psychological stress, while adjusting to new circumstances of taking care of all the needs of the child's basic physical, spiritual, mental needs and more importantly emotional needs for affirmation, affection and appreciation.¹⁷

According to Earl Grollman as quoted by Jane B. Brooks, "one of the greatest crises in the life of a child is the death of a Parent. Never again will the world be as secure a place as it was before. The child not only suffers the loss of the Parent, but is also deprived of the attention that he /she needs at the time when he craves that extra reassurance that he/she is cared for."¹⁸

b) Single parents due to divorce

Domestic violence, extra marital affairs and other reasons like when husband or wife cant click or can't adjust with each other, when a wife doesn't bear a child all this might lead to divorce or permanent separation without the legal process, ultimately ending up in single parenting.

Single parenting due to divorce means that the divorced single parent will have the primary custody of the child or children. The single parent will take up the major responsibility of raising the child or children but the other parent can still be involved in the family.¹⁹ The usual pattern in many case after divorce, is that the mother

becomes the single parent (taking the major obligation of raising the children) while the father becomes the supporting parent.²⁰

c) Single parents through Adoption

Adoption is an option for those who wish to bring child in their lives being single and for those who do not want to have biological children. The joy of becoming single parent through adoption is unique but the challenges associated with single parenting through adoption cannot be overlooked.²¹

Single parenting due to adoption is a viable option for single people who feel incomplete in life. However, loneliness should not be the sole motivation to choose single parenting. It could be a part of it but the desire to nurture and share life as a family should come first.²² In the United States, Single Parent adoptions are the fastest growing trend in the adoption field. Single parents due to adoption are usually single parents who work full-time, financially responsible and emotionally mature.²³

Single parenting through adoption in India is rising as the way of living has changed and there are lots of changes taking place in Indian society.²⁴ Priorities of people are changing as literacy level is also rising. Educated people do not consider marriage as their first priority but they want to build their career and at the same time enjoy parenting.

5. Challenges Faced by Single Parents (DABA, A case study)

a) Stigmatisation: As single parents, they often face stigmas in our community, and sometimes they even stigmatize themselves.²⁵ The fact is most of these stigmas are based on old fashion myths and stereotypes that no longer hold water in the real world.²⁶ The following information will expose the myths that we, as a society, place on single parents. Single parents are bad parents, irresponsible and so on. Many people would love to believe that all the children of single parents are emotionally and behaviorally

obsolete and useless. Or, that crime can solely be blamed on the children of single parents.²⁷

In a culture and Society where marriage and co-parenting are still considered the norm, single parents face quite a bit of inaccurate, stinging stigma about their choices and lifestyle. Stigmas are an infliction by an immature set of people.²⁸ Perhaps one of the most hurtful pieces of stigma surrounding single parents is the idea that their children are somehow at a disadvantage because they have one parent instead of two. The myth that single parents can't raise children as well as co-parents affects not only the self-esteem of single parents, but their children as well. One piece of stigma attached to single parents is the idea that most single parents are young, usually adolescents, with unplanned pregnancies resulting from reckless behaviour.²⁹

Single parents have it tougher, because they are individuals doing a team's job. One cannot stop people from thinking and airing their opinion, what you can do is filter the constructive and helpful part out of it and ignore the rest.

b) Social isolation: Single parents especially the single mothers in Dimapur Ao Baptist Arogo tell us that they sometimes feel trapped underneath a mountain of responsibility that never allows them to invest in friendships, much less find another companion for life. And that they mostly keep themselves confined at home, isolating themselves from the society and the church.³⁰

Single parents need friendships and encouragement. They need to look for environments that allow for some social time for them while keeping the children occupied or entertained, a church small group that offers childcare, an exercise class at a gym with a kids' space, a play date with other parents, single parents care group, programs and seminars organised for them will be helpful.³¹

c) Exclusion

The single parents feel themselves as unwanted and rejected and they alienate themselves from the church and the society. They

try to pull themselves back instead of fighting and facing the challenges and the struggles which comes their way.

In the Social Sphere, majority of single parents try to avoid attending social gatherings. They often feel isolated and as odd ones in the society. Because of all the negative surrounding in the Dimapur Ao Baptist Church, they mostly alienate themselves from the Society and the Church and confine themselves at home.³² Majority of the single mothers find it hard to maintain discipline among the children, to make decision regarding the higher education of their children due to absence of male members. The mothers complained about loneliness, trauma and depression and find it difficult to handle the responsibility of child-care and to establish a routine for her children. So, it can be said that single parents under Dimapur Ao Baptist Church face economic, emotional, psychological and social problems. Single parents need to look forward in life with a positive attitude and try their best to rear their children in spite of all the struggles.

d) Economic and Financial problems

There are many successful single parents, but all do not have the same experience, as economic and financial problems becomes the main stress for majority of the single parents. It becomes very difficult for the single parents, especially mothers, to meet the basic needs of children such as; food, clothing and school fees, maintaining the previous standard of living and to meet personal expenses with limited resources.³³ The emotional lives of the single mothers are also affected by their single status. Single parents had to go through a lot of new situations every now and then; they are continuously under economic and financial tensions,³⁴ lonely, helpless, hopeless, lack of identity and confidence, concern for children and their future.

6. Findings of research done under DABA

The findings are based on questionnaires distributed to the single parents under DABA

a) Involvement in the Church and society

Majority of the single parents responded with a 'No' when asked whether they get privileges in the church and society, while a few responded with 'Yes', but they do as they come to the front (voluntarily) to take part in the society. For others, pastors and church members are not even aware of their existence. They are not included in the various programmes and activities. Most single parents responded that they hardly get any opportunity to take part in church programmes and activities of the church. Thus, most single parents were of the opinion that they wanted the Churches to develop certain programmes in order to help the single parents, to educate them, to encourage and strengthen them and to help them get involved in various activities of the Church and Society. They could be incorporated in house visitation, organising programmes, seminars and imparting various trainings that would aid in addressing these needs.

b) Relationship of the Single Parents with the Church and the Society

Some of the single parents shared their view that they felt that society looked down upon them because of their status, others felt that it was because of traditional restriction and church practices.

Majority of the single parents responded that their relationship with the Church and Society was not good, just 4% responded that their relationship was normal. Only 10% responded that they have good relationship with the Church and Society. As they felt odd in the midst of the other members of the church, they were reluctant to come forward and kept themselves confined to home and to their own small circles. According to the findings, many of the pastors were aware of their status but only 13% positively responded that the Church extended help whenever a need arose. For the majority, help was not always available. Pastors hardly preach any sermons on single parenthood, indicating Church's indifferences towards the single parents.

c) Need and Expectation of Support from the Church, Society and Family

Church: Most of the single parents shared that they need support and encouragement for their emotional and spiritual needs. Feeling lonely and isolated, church could give them fellowship and support. Respect, prayer, counselling, encouragement, seminars, retreat programmes and home visitation by pastors and the Church members will also greatly help. One of the single mothers shared her feelings,

Prayer and encouragement is most needed because for me, it was a hard time living with my husband who was a drug addict. I tried my best counselling him but I alone couldn't help in such situation. I would like to suggest for the Church to be more sensitive and sincere for those broken families before they become a single parent. Coming from a divorced background, I feel when the parents are at odds, I felt it was very important for the church to intervene as a neutral third party to mediate disputes, defuse psychological conflicts and most importantly encourage co-operation.³⁵

Society: From the society single parents needed acceptance because as human beings sometimes they lost courage to face everyday challenges.³⁶ They shared extending help when in need and giving privileges in participating in social programmes really helps. To remove bias against widows/widowers, involve them in social activities instilling a feeling of care. Respect and regard them as normal persons. Single parenthood is not so easy, so support and encouragement, love, care, kindness, co-operation and acceptance would be the best help.

Family: Single parents shared their concern about the support they needed from the family. They want the family to understand and adjust to them, as they face many struggles and hardships all of which can't be shared. They need unconditional love, help in financial matters, support for children's education,

encouragement, physical, moral and prayer support. They need support of the family and children in every possible way, especially in times of pain and crisis to make life a bit more bearable.

7. Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, some suggestions and recommendations for the Church and Society have been highlighted.

7.1. The Role of the Church

The Church stands as an intermediary between God and people. It consequently has an essential responsibility to take part in restoring the broken relationships of the single parents. The Church should be obliged to stand as an example of love, hope, forgiveness, acceptance, atonement and reconciliation for others.³⁷ The Church has a greater role to play in this regard.

7.2. Need Education, Care, Acceptance and counselling

In order to make available timely help, care and counselling a department assisted by a person having impressive competence in this particular field should be made available. So for the church it is necessary to have trained counsellors or prepare the present pastors and counsellors with further training. Specific pastoral counselling skills are needed in order to educate the single parents, encourage them, accept them and care for their needs and problems. The Church needs to get involved and become practical and positive in helping its members by forming a care and counselling department in the Church.³⁸

7.3. Developing a channel of Communication and Confidence

In the analysis made, it was found that there was a strained co-relation between the pastors and the single parents. A pastor should take the opportunity to act, to offer peace and good relations. He could function to effectively educate and enlighten single parents to not be reluctant to tell about one's emotional state, reactions and struggles. The pastors should not wait for the members to

come but should try to look out for troubled hearts and attend to the needs of the single parents. It is an inevitable responsibility for the pastors to reach out to each member personally in order to be more effective.

7.4. Seminars and Retreats

A seminar especially meant for single parents, addressing their various needs and struggles, about child upbringing, family management, financial management etc would be of great help. As pointed out, among the different selected Churches, only a few churches have carried out this kind of programme. Seminars and retreats for the single parents should be organised in new set ups, which can refresh them and help them further to bear and carry out their responsibilities meaningfully. The conducting of programmes should be according to the convenience of the parents, where all can avail their time and attend. These programmes should be structured with certain aims and objectives to effectively educate and strengthen the single parents and to meet their needs too.

7.5. Use of Innovative Methods

As indicated from the questionnaire, adequate steps and measures are not currently being used in the church. Hence, to avoid monotonous programmes, innovative and creative teaching methods should be encouraged. Efforts must be made to undertake feasible programmes by using electronic media, like power point presentations, audio visual aids and by showing educative movies which can be reflected in their lives as well as in their families. By following these methods Church leaders can help parents learn more meaningfully and practically. Methods in the homes should be used to impart Christian education in the home. Methods should be creatively planned.

7.6. Management Skills Programme

Along with sound Biblical teachings, management skill programmes will help parents to manage their family well, as well

as, help them to meet their children's needs. In this programme, topics suggested by Prabhakar, we can teach moral values and principles with a Christian understanding of work, sex roles, time stewardship and responsibility towards the family etc.³⁹ These programmes can be of great help to many parents in the family especially for those who are struggling and going through hard times in their life and in managing the family alone. It will also be of great help to those who are unaware of their responsibility in the home and in their profession, and who are unable to balance them well, which further affects their family.⁴⁰

7.7. Facilitating Wholeness

The Church needs to publicly recommend and support a holistic attitude towards life, which is the heart of pastoral care and counselling. In relation to this, the focus must not only be on spiritual matters, but also on the overall development of the single parent. The Church can enlist the help of medical professionals to guide and provide care for the health issues. Regarding psychological issues like depression and others, the Church can offer help, support and counselling to single parents.⁴¹ The Church can also act as a facilitator to strengthen and encourage them and to maintain healthy relationship with others.

7.8. Addressing the Issue

Pastoral responses serve as a challenge and comfort to single parenthood for surviving in a world of loss, coping with single life and becoming aware of how to live a complete and satisfactory life. The pastors need to address important topics from healing, praying, encouraging and spiritual disciplines to objective issues such as financial assistance, mentoring programs, partnering parents and setting up single parent's retreats, seminars and conference. This is necessary because the single parents who are under significant stress often give priority to their children's need while neglecting their own. Here, the Pastor can encourage the single parents to seek out support groups.

7.9. Coping Strategy and Ministry

It would be helpful if pastors understand the change in structure, organization and functioning of the single parents in the family. Pastors need to accept the changes and lower the expectations of how things should be, in order to efficiently help the single parents. There is also a challenge for the pastors in helping the single parents to balance the needs of the family with their personal needs.⁴² Pastors can help single parents in spiritual matters to see opportunity amidst loss, and grace amidst disruption. One needs to provide backup and support in terms of child care, support groups and acceptance of single parent households in the life of the congregation.

The Church should give due consideration to this aspect in the ministry and try to address this problem. Single parent should be encouraged to take advantage of professional counselling provided by the church or non-governmental organizations. The Church must strive hard to help, if possible do away with this problem by creating awareness in the Church.

8. Biblical Understanding of Single Parents

The Bible nowhere teaches to discriminate single parents rather teaches us to stand up for the single parents. The understanding that Yahweh is Holy therefore Israelites also needs to be Holy (Leviticus 11:44) and Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11: 1) which teaches Christians to imitate Paul as he imitate Christ commands us to follow what God does to single parents. Therefore, we need to defend the cause of the widows (single parents). Furthermore, we see that Jesus did not judge on the quality or quantity rather judges on the intention of the giver as we read in Luke 21: 2, which clearly challenge us to experience the problems and struggles of a widow and give accordingly.

The above Biblical passages clearly show that single parents have a special consideration and love in God's sight. 1Timothy 5: 3 commands us to honour single parents. With these passages

in the Bible, one cannot and must not victimize or ignore single parents.

Conclusion

The struggles and challenges faced by single parents are immense, even within the family they struggle to raise children and at the same time maintain family relations. Despite the many challenges, the church and society have in many ways given a deaf ear to their cries, blind eyes to their struggles and a dumb mouth to their rights. This situation have alienated the single parents from the society and church, therefore a serious need of the hour is to be sensitive towards them and include them by counting them as equals like any other parents.

In order to build a conducive environment for the children of single parents to grow normally alongside the rest of the children and in order to uplift the status of single parents socially, psychologically, economically and spiritually the church and society have many roles to play and that begins by accepting them and not stigmatising them. Doing so, the society and church will move towards building a just and inclusive society from the perspective of the single parents.

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Influences on Theological and Philosophical Developments in Islam

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Introduction

Islam, like any other living religion in the world, has rich and diverse characters marked by a theology and a philosophy of its own which aim at establishing its faith firmly on the one hand and refuting heretical teaching that arose with the development of Islamic religion on the other hand. The way Muslims articulate their faith and beliefs today has been shaped by a long and rich history, beginning from the Prophet. The theological and philosophical developments have been prominent landmarks in the whole history of Islam. This essay considers in brief theological and philosophical developments in Islam highlighting reasons for their development and factors that influenced them. However to make our discussion clearer, it will be helpful to present *Kaliphas* and their periods as follows:¹

Prophet Muhammad A.D. 570 – 632 (his life time)

Kaliph Abu Bakr A.D. 632 – 634

Kaliph ‘Umar A.D. 634 – 644

Kaliph ‘Utman A.D. 644 – 656

‘Ali A.D. 656 – 661

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Umayyad Dynasty A.D. 661 – 750

‘Abbāsid Dynasty A.D. 750 – 1258

1. The Emergence of Theology in Islam

Prophet Muhammad was not a theologian and he had shown no intention of doing theology. In fact there was no sign of systematic theology during the lifetime of the prophet and of the first four Caliphas. The early Muslims accepted the word of the Qur’an literally. They raise no metaphysical or theological questions. When confusion arose about the meaning of the Qur’anic verse dealing with God or any of His attributes, they were told to accept it as was stated in the Qur’an with no further explanation or interpretation. But soon after the death of Muhammad, political questions relating to his rightful successor were raised, and with them arose certain theological questions concerning the nature of the true *Imam* (Muslim head of state), the meaning of faith, sin, infidelity, punishment in future World, and so on. The interest was primarily political, but the contending parties gave their views a religious colouring, and there was much persecution and bloodshed in the name of religion. Political, or rather political-theological parties appeared on the scene – the Kharijites, the Qadaites, the Shi’ites, the Murjites, and the Umayyads, who were the state party and the bitterest opponents of Ali and his followers. This was a period of strife and dissension within the Muslim community.²

The earliest questions posed – The rapid political and social changes the community underwent during the caliphates of ‘Utmān and ‘Ali and the disruption of the original unity of state and religion under the Umayyads led to wide and deep questioning. The uppermost question posed by these developments was: ‘Does a Muslim remain a Muslim after committing a grave sin?’ In other words: ‘Is faith alone sufficient, or must it express itself in words as well?’ The first clearly defined group that separates itself from the main group was that of the serious-minded ‘radicals’, ‘hardliners’, the Kharijites (break away or separated group).

They came into conflict with the mainstream because in their opinion, only the best Muslim could be called upon to guide the community. The basic principle their movement adhered to was that faith happens to be so closely linked to works that a grave sin suffices to extinguish the faith and make a Muslim an apostate, some one to be killed. They maintained that a grave sinner no longer remains a Muslim. And if it be the Caliph who commits a grave sin, as in their opinion was the case with 'Ali and 'Utmān, then by this very fact he is deposed. That is why the Kharijites fought against 'Ali and 'Utmān.³

Another movement, opposing the Kharijites, that brought together all those Muslims who recognized 'Ali as the first legitimate successors, were called *Shi'at 'Ali*, the partisans of 'Ali. They declared that the possession of faith alone was sufficient for a person to be defined as Muslim and that works were not essential. The basic principle of the Shi'a conviction was and remains to this day, that it was God who decided and they mean that political power, seen as having been established by God's will, ought not to be disobeyed. These two groups described are in fact the beginnings of the two great sects of the Shi'ites and the Kharijites (in Arabic usually written Khawarij).⁴

From the above discussion we could see how theology and politics go together in early Islamic era. W. Mongtagomery Watt remarks: "Exponents of the sociology of knowledge would hold that all theological and philosophical ideas have a political or social reference...The connection between theology and politics is particularly close and obvious in the Middle East. The Old Testament is full of it."⁵

2. Objective of Theology

The main aim of Islamic theology was to establish the principle of the unity of God. On this principle Muslim theologians know no compromise. It is the foundation of Islamic faith and the root from which all other dogmas of Islam are derived. Hence Islamic theology is also called the science of unification, because its object

is to determine the nature of God and His attributes, and to explain the relation between Him and His creation.⁶

3. Factors Responsible for the Formation of Theology in Islam

There are two important factors – **internal** and **external** - which helped the development of the new theology. The Qur'an contains two different types of verses, those which form the main substance of the Book and are clear and definite in their meaning; and the comparatively few verses which are dubious or less definitive or unclear. The scripture also acknowledge this – "He (God) it is who hath sent down to thee the Book; some of its verses are of themselves perspicuous; they are the basis of the Book, and others are dubious" (Surah III:7). The reason for the presence of these dubious verses in the Qur'an has been discussed by theologians. The majority incline to believe that they are purposely given as a trial in order to test the strength and validity of human's faith.⁷

Whatever may be the real reason, the fact remains that these dubious verses played an important role in stirring up dispute among Muhammad's followers of the second generation. Out of these disputes emerged different parties, each supporting a different point of view - thus, the beginning of Islamic Theology. The Second or **external** factors in the development of Islamic thought were from outside Islam. Up to the second half of the second century A.H. we meet only the individual men who expressed their opinions on some religious problems. There was no recognized system of religious thought; no real theological schools, although there were what we might call semi-theological parties.⁸

In course of its expansion, many Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Manicheans joined the fold of Islam and they brought with them elements of their hitherto-held beliefs and would continue to reflect in ways and directions familiar to them from the time before their conversion. So, dilution of Islamic faith is inevitable under such condition, Thus, theology emerged as

protection from heretical teachings. However, ‘recent scholarship has made it increasingly clear that early Muslim theological development has to be understood primarily in terms of internal political tensions and from the ideological discussion arising from these. The close link between socio-political and ideological developments is surely not surprising in the context of Islam where both these aspect have always been viewed as integral parts of a comprehensive whole.’⁹

4. Factors that Influenced Islamic Theology and Philosophy

There are at least three factors that had influenced and shaped Islamic theology and philosophy. The *first* one was **Christian influence**. It is noted that most of the major issues in religion were discussed in Syria, which was an important center of Christian theology. We know that Saint John of Damascus, the great doctor of the Greek Church, was a Vizier (minister) under the Umayyads, and that he and his pupil Theodorus Abucara wrote polemic treatises on Islam summarizing discussion between Christians and Muslims. Saint John himself considered Islam as Christian heresy. This is taken as evidence that direct contact between Christians and Muslim scholars must have taken place at an early stage. It is also to be mentioned here that Greek philosophy was translated into Arabic mainly by Christians, among whom Hunayn ibn-Is’hāq (809-73 AD) was well known.¹⁰ So, many scholars including De Boer, Von Kremer and D.B. MacDonald declared that the development of Muslim theology was largely influenced by Christian thought.¹¹ This of course, is not accepted by many Muslim Scholars as we shall see later. However, we can safely assume that right from the beginning of Arab conquest contact between Muslims, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and others led to all kinds of comparisons and polemics. Medina, Damascus, Kufa and Basra in Iraq were centers where such contact took place early and intensively.¹²

The *second* one that influenced Islamic thought is **Greek Philosophy**. There are traces of it in almost all the leading theological theories – either in the bearing of some Greek concepts on such theories, or in the way they were presented and discussed. Yet, according to Muslim authors, Greek ideas never remained unaltered; they were given such a turn as to harmonize with fundamental concepts of Islam.¹³

*Translations of Greek Philosophy*¹⁴ – Shortly after the inauguration of ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate (750-1258 A.D.), translations into Arabic began to be made of Greek scientific and philosophical works. At first the choice of works depended probably on the individual scholars or his patron. This translation works reached its climax during the time of Caliph al-Ma’mūn al-Rashīd (reigned 813-833). Under him an institution was set up called *bayt al-hikma* or “House of Wisdom”, where books were translated and copied, and where a library was kept for reference. For two centuries this translation works was going on. The greatest name connected with this translation work is that of Hunayn ibn-Is’hāq (809-73 AD), a Christian, he had something like a bureau for translation, with several well-qualified colleagues. The translations were mainly done from Syriac version and not from the Greek originals.¹⁵ Ali Engineer observes that translations were made not only from Greek but also from Persian and Sanskrit, and that the collection was so much that it was perhaps the biggest and richest library of its time. ‘House of Wisdom’ was the only institution of learning and knowledge of its time and it was a place that treasures of Knowledge from Greece, Persia and India were stored.¹⁶ It is beyond doubt that Greek philosophy had exerted great influence upon the theological and philosophical thought of the Arabs, and this truth shall be visible later in this paper. How far Indian thought had influenced the Muslim thought is difficult to ascertain. However, the fact that many Indian literatures has been translated into Arabic and stored in the “House of Wisdom”, hints that some influence would have been imparted on Islamic thought by Indian Philosophy.

Thirdly, the basic source of inspiration for the formation of Muslim theology and philosophy is **Islamic ones**, in short, **the Qur'an**. Many Muslim scholars attribute Qur'an as the *main* source and influence of philosophical and theological thought of the Muslim, and Greek philosophy, Indian thought, Persian ideas and Egyptians concept worked as *secondary* sources.¹⁷ Though Qur'an is not a book of Philosophy in technical sense, but it solves philosophical problems, prescribes a rational vision, and rejects the opponents with sound rational arguments. All these aspects led to the emergence of Islamic philosophy and the Arab thought. Many Quranic verses address reason and invite to think and ponder; it invites people to thinking, observation and deep contemplation (E.g. verses like 12:19; 7:185; 50:6-11). Therefore, according to Hamid Naseem, the Qur'an has provided rational knowledge, it has provided the background for the flourishing of philosophical and rational sciences in the Islamic world prior to other factors which led to this activity. So, the main source of their philosophy and theology has been the Qur'an from which the streams of knowledge, philosophy, science and literatures have gushed forth and all the prestige, honour and Islamic thought is rooted in this sublime source.¹⁸ Therefore, "the first factor to cause emergence of Islamic thought in Muslim is the Qur'an", holds Hamid Naseem.¹⁹

5. Schools of Theology

When Islam grew fully into the surrounding world shaped by Hellenistic values in either Christian or Jewish milieu, the Muslim theologians employed the categories of Greek logic in their discussion and disputations. This rational method was designated by the name *dialectic theology* in Islam. The Arabic term for this is *'ilm al-kalām* or simply *kalām*. Broadly speaking, there are two schools of theology in Islam – *Mu'tazila*, the rationalist and *Al-Ash'ari*, the traditionalist.

During the Umayyad period heated discussion took place on questions like whether human person is free or determined. Those

who thought human person was free were known as *Qadriyas* and the other opposite party was called *Jabriyas*. In fact this question acquired political overtones – the supporters of the Umayyads stressing that human persons are not free but determined by divine will and their opponents maintained that they are free. Hasan Basari, the great Sufi scholar of the first century A.H., supports free will and it was his disciple who became the founder of rational school called school of Mu'tazalites, the first rationalist of Islam.²⁰ They have the support of Abbāsīd dynasty, caliph al-Ma'mun of Abbāsīd patronized Mu'tazilites doctrine.²¹

(1) *Mu'tazila School* – Mutazilites were the first to use the term '*kalām*' for the name of the organized discipline of Muslim theology, and those who engaged in it were called *mutakallimūn* or dialectician.²² This school maintained the freedom of the will; insisted that right and wrong are knowable through reason independently of, but confirmed by, revelation; and claim that God's attributes are identical with his essence and that God cannot do what is unreasonable or unjust.²³ Their main concern was *'adl wa'l-tauhid*, Justice and Unity. They opposed a widespread way of stressing divine omnipotence to the point of endangering a proper understanding of God's justice. If God is so powerful that he creates even the actions of humans, if He predetermines men and women to eternal bliss or to damnation – where is His Justice? For them human being has freedom to choose right and wrong and God will judge according to their deeds. As they are very strict to maintain the unity of God they even reject the vision of God and the idea of eternal attributes.²⁴ In this way they protected Islamic dogma against the influence and intrusion of any form of dualism, be it Christian trinity or dualism in Iranian religions.

The Mu'tazilites also opposed the mainstream Muslim doctrine of the uncreatedness of the Qur'an and considered the Qur'an, God's speech, to be created in time. This doctrine was approved by Caliph Ma'mūn in 827 AD and declared to be the binding dogma. However, the official victory of the Mu'tazilites

was of short duration. The Mu'tazilites began to force Muslim doctrines into the mould of Greek concept, and derive their theology speculatively from Greek metaphysics instead of the Quran. Moreover, in their exaltation of justice, they seemed to erect a *priori* concept into an absolute even over Allah. Having influenced by Greek philosophy, they valued human *reason* above the *word* of God. So, the orthodox could not tolerate, applying the methods of Greek dialectic to support Qur'an, and the *hadith*, they (the orthodox) evolved a new orthodox scholasticism and defeated the Mu'tazilites in their own ground.²⁵ When caliph al-Mutawakkil (reigned 847-861) came to power, any discussion on the Qur'an was forbidden and finally the orthodoxy completely routed the Mu'tazilites as a theological school, but the spark of Mu'tazilites kindled the purely rationalist movement in philosophic thought.²⁶

(2) *al-Ash'ari School* – In opposition to Mu'tazilites the more traditional and orthodox school of theology called al-Ash'ari school came into existence. It was started by al-Ash'ari (873-935 AD). The main doctrines of al-Ash'ari school are the following – (i) The divine attributes are not identical with the Divine Essence. (ii) The Divine will is all-embracing. The Divine providence and predestination encompass all events. (iii) All evil, like good, is from God. (iv) Man/woman is not free in his/her acts, which is created by God. (v) Possibility of beatific vision, God shall be visible to the eyes on the Day of Resurrection. (vi) In opposition to the Mu'tazilites of their rejection of all the *hadith*, Al-Ash'arites recognized six authentic *hadiths*. (vii) There is nothing wrong about God's pardoning some one without repentance. Similarly, nothing is wrong about God's subjecting believer to chastisement. (viii) Over against the Mu'tazilites emphasizing 'human reason', this school holds that it is possible that the Divine acts do not necessarily follow any purpose or aim, because human reason is not capable always to understand that purpose or aim, which is therefore, determined solely by the revelation²⁷ (ix) They

emphasized the uncreatedness of Qur'an. They were influenced by older speculations on a similar subject, particularly the Christian and Jewish theories of Logos, which in their turn were influenced by ancient Greek theories.²⁸ (x) The Ash'arites went further in distinguishing two kinds of speech, the external and the internal. The external, which consists of words and sound can be drawn in writing, is created. The internal which is expressed by such words, is identical with the divine consciousness and therefore eternal, cannot be written. This distinction is certainly borrowed from the philosophy of Stoics who spoke of potential and actual, or internal and external *Logoi*, or from Christian doctrine of *Logos* which distinguishes the words which was from eternity with God and was God from the word which appeared in a temporal manifestation in the form of Christ.²⁹

This new theological school, i.e., Ash'arites is so influential and appealing that by the year about 1065 AD it was established as the main theology of the Sunni Muslim.³⁰

6. The Development of Philosophy in Islam

In Islam the development of philosophical thought, properly speaking, succeeded earlier schools of dialectical theology (*Kalām*) that begun to arise in the eighth century AD (second century A.H.). This development is the outcome of massive translation works done from the Greek philosophy, and it is obvious that Islamic philosophy is deeply influenced by Greek Philosophy. A.E. Affih rightly states, "The Muslim philosophers made use of Platonic, Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas in constructing their own metaphysics, in which Islamic ideas also play an important part."³¹ In the same vein, Fazlur Rahman maintains: "The material with which this philosophical system was constructed were either Greek or deduced from Greek ideas; in its material or content aspect, therefore, it is Hellenistic throughout."³² In another place he says,

The main character of Islamic philosophy was set by the combination of Aristotle and Neoplatonism that...particularly by the Neoplatonic commentators on Aristotle in Athens and Alexandria...The Muslim philosophers introduced into this tradition other fundamental concepts in order to adapt it to an Islamic milieu; the most important were the ideas of contingent and necessary being and of prophethood. Despite these fundamental changes, the Muslim Philosophers accepted the general cosmological scheme they had inherited from the Greek traditions.³³

This is evident from the fact that stars play an important role in their philosophy but has no place in Qur'an, so this must be attributed to the Greek beliefs about the status of stars and the heavenly bodies.³⁴ Some of the important Muslim philosophers will be considered here.

Al-Kindi – The first important Muslim philosopher was the Arab prince Ya'qūb ibn-Ishāq al-Kindi (after 870 AD). His philosophic thought is directly connected with, on the one hand, Greek philosophy, and on the other, with the rationalist theological movement of the Mu'tazilites which he had espoused in *toto*. Thus, the Mu'tazilites dogma of the attributeless transcendence of God must have led him to the somewhat parallel idea of God as absolute and transcendent being, a combination of Aristotelian concept of God and the Neoplatonic concept of the One. Because of this he formulate the doctrine, which is common to all great Muslim philosophers, that philosophy and religion, or the rational truth and the revealed truth, not only do not conflict with each other but, support each other and are basically identical. This reflects Mu'tazilites doctrine that source of knowledge is reason confirmed by revelation.³⁵ Al-Kindi adopted the Neoplatonic doctrine of *emanation*³⁶ in his metaphysic and cosmology; although he accepted the theory of emanation, he asserted that the first being was created by the sheer act of God's will and out

of nothing, an antithesis to general Greek doctrine that nothing comes out of nothing.³⁷

Al-Fārābi – With al-Farabi (875-950AD) philosophy reached maturity in Islam. In his cosmology as well as in his psychology, al-Fārābi was almost entirely Aristotelian, except for the doctrine of emanation. It was said that al-Farabi was once asked: What is your relation with Aristotle? He said: "had I lived during the time of Aristotle, I would have preferred to be his obedient student."³⁸ In his political theory he based himself on Plato's *Republic*.³⁹ The importance of al-Fārābi lies in his attempt to elevate philosophy to the place of highest value and to subordinate the revelation and the *shari'a*, or religious law, to it. He also believes that the entire world should have one religion, of which all particular religions would be considered symbolic expression.⁴⁰

Al-Fārābi's writings gave us a full-scale picture of the basic world view of Muslim Philosophy. At the apex of his scheme of reality stands God, who is both One of Plato and the First Cause of Aristotle. From Him proceeds the first intelligence, which is the archangel. The first intelligence has a dual nature and gives rise to two further beings. This process of emanation continues until we reach the tenth and the last sphere and the last intelligence, identified as the angel of revelation, Gabriel, on the one hand, and as the sphere of the moon on the other. Human being according to him is made up of fully organized body and rational soul and the end of human being is to reach philosophic contemplation, and al-Fārābi categorically states that human whose rational faculty remains undeveloped cannot attain immortality but perish with the physical death. So, the goal of man/woman, wherein lies his/her ultimate bliss, is to develop his/her rational faculty by his/her will.⁴¹

Al-Fārābi, in his political philosophy, like Plato in *Republic*, developed the idea of a hierarchy in which each stratum received orders from above and issues commands to those below. Just as the top there is a ruler who is not ruled, so at the bottom there are

those who are ruled but do not rule. It is fully authoritarian view of government.⁴²

Abū ‘Ali ibn-Sinā – Better known as **Avicenna** in the West (980-1037 AD), was the most important and original Muslim philosophers. The philosophic movement in eastern Islam comes to its highest peak in the thought of Avicenna. The central thesis of Avicenna’s metaphysics is the division of reality into *Contingent* being and *Necessary* Being like Aristotle.⁴³ He prefers to call God the Necessary Being, or Self-Sufficient Being, rather than Allah. His intention is to bridge the gulf between the religious and philosophical concepts of the Deity, and thus to follow up his analysis of being and necessity, or self-substance, to their logical conclusion.⁴⁴

Ibn Sina started his analysis of the relation between God and the world as ‘necessary being’ and ‘contingent’ being. The ‘necessary being’ is that being whose existence is self-necessitate; its essence and existence are identical; the supposition of its nonexistence involves contradiction. This is God. The ‘contingent being’ is that which has no essential or necessary reason for its existence; its being or nonbeing is equally possible; its essence is different from its existence. This is phenomenal world; it is all that is ‘other than God’. Ibn Sina says that the mere fact that we have notion of the Necessary Being proves that He exists.⁴⁵

Aristotle maintained that a contingent universe has no temporal beginning and it is dependent for its existence and the continuity of its existence on God. It is an eternal being which derives its existence every moment from God. Here Ibn Sina is in complete agreement with Aristotle and in complete disagreement with the theologians who insist on the idea of creation that the world was created out of nothing by the will of God and at the time He appointed, which is the principal dogma of Islam.⁴⁶ In this Ibn Sina reflects the *Advaita Vedanta* of Sankara: creation has no existence apart from the Brahman. As regards to the attributes of God, Avicenna holds that the divine attributes are

simplicity, oneness, absolute perfection, pure goodness, God is the contemplator and contemplated; God has no equal nor opposite.⁴⁷

Ibn Sina was severely criticized by **Al-Ghazali** and **ibn-Rushd**, known as **Averroes**, on certain issues: the eternity of the world, the inferior status of the *shari‘a* as a mere symbol of the higher truth, the rejection of resurrection of the body, and his distinction between essence and existence. After Averroes no proper Islamic philosophy was developed.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Our survey concerning the theological and philosophical development in Islam reveals how Islamic thought emerged from highly political influence during the time of the four Caliphs to a more of pure philosophical consideration influenced by the Greek thought in the time of ‘Abbāsīd dynasty. Islamic theology and philosophy may not be free from political influences but there was considerably less or no visible political overtone in the later phase of their development when Islamic philosophy matured in the hand of al-Fārābī. In the whole process Greek influence is inevitably clear, Christian influence is also not difficult to deduce and Indian and Persian influence can also be assumed. However, all Islamic writers maintain that the main source of their theology and philosophy is none other than the Qur’an and that other source are secondary. How far this is true is not easy to ascertain. We can only presume that Qur’anic contribution is greater in case of theology whereas Greek and other influence is more in case of the philosophy.

It is interesting to note that the illiterate Arab before Islam became great patron of learning after Islam in less than one hundred years. Volumes of works on religious matter were written. It produced many great theologians and philosophers like al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Averroes, Al-Ghazali, etc., whose works were taught in European University during medieval period and exerted great influence to the West. H.G. Wells rightly described Arabs as foster fathers of knowledge.⁴⁹ This is possible because along with

their own resources they learned to incorporate and utilize foreign thoughts in their theologizing and philosophizing. By doing so, they protected their religion from heretical teachings, and make Qur'an more meaningful, interesting and enlightening.

End Notes

- 1 Cf. L. Bevan Jones, *The People of the Mosque*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1988, pp. 10-38.
- 2 A.E. Affih, "Rational and Mystical Interpretations of Islam" in *Islam the Straight Path*, edited by Kenneth W. Morgan, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, pp. 146-7.
- 3 Christian W. Troll, "The Development of Muslim Religious Thought" in *The Muslims of India: Beliefs and Practices*, edited by Paul Jackson, S.J., Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1988, p. 179.
- 4 Shites derived their name from the fact that they are par excellence the "party" (shi'a) of 'Ali. The Kharijites, (in Arabic usually Khawarij) were so-called because they 'went out' or "seceded" first from 'Ali and then from Umayyads, cf. W. Mongtgomery Watt, *Islamic Surveys I: Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962, p. 3.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 6 A.E. Affih, "Rational and Mystical Interpretations of Islam" in *Islam the Straight Path*, p. 145.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- 9 Christian W. Troll, "The Development of Muslim Religious Thought" in *The Muslims of India: Beliefs and Practices*, p. 178-9.
- 10 He is from al-Hira who became a teacher of medicine in Baghdad and court physician to the caliph al-Mutawakkil. He has something like a bureau for translation, with several well-qualified colleagues, cf. W. Mongtgomery Watt, *Islamic Surveys I: Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p. 41.
- 11 A.E. Affih, "Rational and Mystical Interpretations of Islam" in *Islam the Straight Path*, p. 150.
- 12 Christian W. Troll, "The Development of Muslim Religious Thought" in *The Muslims of India: Beliefs and Practices*, p. 183.
- 13 A.E. Affih, "Rational and Mystical Interpretations of Islam" in *Islam the Straight Path*, p. 150.
- 14 Various reasons were put forward as the reasons for this translation works - (1) As various heretical teaching developed in course of Islamic extension to various countries and cultures, to defend the true Islam by using Greek philosophy for rational arguments. (2) To reply the questions raised by the atheists and misguided people they find Greek Philosophy appropriate. (3) It was the concern of Muslim scholars with the classification of knowledge that enabled them first to appreciate the intellectual output of other civilization and then synthesize it with the world-view of Islam. (4) Qur'an encouraged acquisition of knowledge, observation, insight, contemplation, research and investigation. (5) Muslim stabilized their rule during the 'Abbāsīd period and were inclined towards Greek and other philosophies. (6) Some alleged that Muslims were attracted to those sciences because of their weakening of religious beliefs and Islamic consciousness. (7) During the period of 'Abbāsīd rule, the Persian, Indian, Greeks, and Arabs civilization had chance to make representation in one way or the other, there in Islamic world, it was but natural that advancement of sciences and philosophy should take place. (8) The vast expansion of Islam brought it into contact with Greek philosophy in those conquered territories where Greek sciences had flourished, such as Syria, Iraq and Egypt, so it is natural that Muslim were drawn towards Greek philosophy, cf. Hamid Naseem, *Muslim Philosophy, Science and Mysticism*, (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2001), pp. 10-11.
- 15 W. Mongtgomery Watt, *Islamic Surveys I: Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, pp. 41-42.
- 16 Asghar Ali Engineer, *Rational Approach to Islam*, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House), 2001, p. 76.
- 17 Hamid Naseem, *Muslim Philosophy, Science and Mysticism*, p. 1.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5. Islamic authors stress the contribution of Qur'an for the development of Arab thinking. Pre-Islamic Arab had no formal theology or philosophy. They were following their ancestral practices on the basis of oral authority. The Qur'an has declared the Arabs as the "ignorant". Although rich in Poetry, no civilization of their own as was the case with Persian, Indian or Greek nations. According to Ali Engineer the Arabs before Islam was mostly illiterate and they were proud of being illiterate and there were only 17 literate persons in Mecca. However, Islam gave great deal of importance to reading, writing and learning. 'Ilm (knowledge, science) is repeatedly stressed in Qur'an. Some of the attributes of Allah are 'alim (knower), khabir (informed), etc. The Prophet also encouraged learning by his famous saying that the ink of a scholar is more precious than the blood of a martyr. All these only show how Qur'an is the main source of inspiration for Islamic theology and philosophy. Cf. Asghar Ali Engineer, *Rational Approach to Islam*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2001, p. 75.
- 19 Hamid Naseem, *Muslim Philosophy, Science and Mysticism*, p. 5.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- 21 It was said that al-Ma'mun demanded of all his administrators and servants to declare their belief in the dogma of Mu'tazilites. Those who refused were

- severely persecuted and many of them landed in to prison. Cf. Asghar Ali Engineer, "On Developing Liberation Theology in Islam" in *Islam and Revolution*, edited by Ashgar Ali Engineer, (Delhi: Ajanta Publication, 1984), p. 15.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 23 Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol. 4., edited by Paul Edwards, (New York, The Macmillan & The Free Press, 1967), p. 219.
- 24 Christian W. Troll, "The Development of Muslim Religious Thought" in *The Muslims of India: Beliefs and Practices*, pp. 186-187.
- 25 H.A.R. Gibb, *Islam*, Oxford: (Oxford University Press), 1978, pp. 78-79.
- 26 Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 219.
- 27 H.A.R. Gibb, *Islam*, pp. 36-37.
- 28 A.E. Affih, "Rational and Mystical Interpretations of Islam" in *Islam the Straight Path*, p. 153. The Ash'rites hold that God is the supreme creator and maintainer of the universe and in comparable with Christian and Stoic theories, they personified the Word and give power to create and sustain. Moreover, the Word Logos, is in one respect identical with God, in another different from Him and coeternal with Him, cf. *Ibid.* p. 154.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 H.A.R. Gibb, *Islam*, p. 80.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 160.
- 32 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, p. 117.
- 33 Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 220.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 The theory of 'emanation' can be found to some extent in the philosophy of both Plato and Aristotle. According to it out of two highest principles, ideas evolve, out of solid the physical world evolves. This doctrine first appeared in full clarity in the system of Plotinus. His supreme principle, because it is transcendent, ineffable, and absolutely simple (one) must "overflow", just as what is matured must beget. The first product of this overflowing is intelligence, from intelligence emanates psyche, from the psyche emanates matter that, when illuminated by the psyche becomes the physical world. See for detail Philip Merlan, "Emanationism" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, edited by Edited by Paul Edwards, New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1967, pp. 473-474.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Hamid Naseem, *Muslim Philosophy, Science and Mysticism*, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

- 39 In 'The Republic' Plato applying the economic principle of division of labour, sets up in his utopia three classes: the guardian or ruling class, the auxiliary class, and the labourers, ref. for detail, Gilbert Ryle, "Plato" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 6, Edited by Paul Edwards, New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1967, pp. 330-331.
- 40 Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 220.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 221.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 A.E. Affih, "Rational and Mystical Interpretations of Islam" in *Islam the Straight Path*, p. 162.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 164-166.
- 48 Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Philosophy" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, pp. 221-3.
- 49 Asghar Ali Engineer, *Rational Approach to Islam*, p. 76.

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Book Review

Money and Possessions by Walter Brueggemann Foreword by Richard Horsley Interpretation Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church Louisville Kentucky Westminster John Knox Press 2016 pp. xxii + 319 ISBN – 13 978-0-664-23364-8

The book is among the series on Biblical Interpretation that deals with themes and issues of contemporary concern from the whole Bible -- its variety of literature, thereby providing resources for those engaged in teaching preaching and in studying the Bible on a very relevant and important theme for Christian action.

A renowned Old Testament scholar of contemporary times Brueggemann demonstrates his expertise on the entire Bible as he surveys the theme on money and wealth picking up important images and symbols. He thereby shows the integral connection between all aspects of life in the biblical worldview. Unlike many who consider Bible has not much to say about economics, Brueggemann views the “Bible talks relentlessly about economics, about the management and distribution of life resources . . .” (p. 12) as social and political relations are defined by the use of possessions and money.

Of a total of 15 chapters he devotes nine to the Old Testament and six chapters to the New Testament covering the entire Hebrew and Christian scriptures. In Brueggemann’s view, money and possessions are integral to our questions on issues of ultimacy. Wealth and Possessions are gifts of God and play an important role in making available the “abundant life” promised by God to all people and creation. From the Hebrew Scripture he identifies memes such as “No coveting” in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:17) as God is the provider and the need to shun the desire for

acquisitiveness; refraining from the abuse and oppression of the vulnerable (Exod. 22:21-24); and damage settlement for injury (Exod. 21:20-21) In place of being anxious, confident trust in God to provide and good neighbourliness through appropriate economic conduct based on a transformable covenantal neighbourliness stressed (p. 35). Abandoning the covenantal distinctiveness leads to “death and adversity”.

In Deuteronomy focus is on civic and social regulations (Deut. 15:4-15) and economic protection (Deut. 23:19-20; 24:10-13, 17: 24:14-15; 24:19-21; 25:13-16) in contrast to cultic issues (p. 44). The stress is laid on a “neighbourly covenantal economy”. (p. 50) Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings The contest between the Deuteronomic tradition of obedience as the ground for blessing in the land and the unconditional promise of protection and support of Israel to David (1 Kgs 11:11-13) is the focal point. Elijah and Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18) and Naboth’s vineyard (p. 21) serves as caution against disobedience, and as promise of blessing in remaining faithful (p. 56). In Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah change of status of Jews from one of political identity to being under imperial oversight receive the centre of attention (p. 78). The Persian Empire was an extractive regime for whom Judea served as a tax-collecting agency of the government. While giving *selective support* they coercively extracted wealth (79). Chronicle rewrote Kings in favour of Jerusalem and the Davidic king, spoke of David’s generosity towards the temple, a royal exhibit of piety. Ezra and Nehemiah prohibition of marriage outside was aimed to maintain tight control over ancestral properties.

Attention in Psalms is centred on Torah piety resulting in gracious and merciful conduct towards neighbour by generous lending, conduct with justice and generous dealings (Ps. 1; 112; 10; 19:7-10). Song of Zion (Ps 2, 72, 89, 100); royal Psalms (Ps. 2, 72, 89, 100); and enthronement Psalms (93, 96-99) are also given attention. Failure of Davidic house due to greed will be set right by God who will rule with justice and abundance for all (Ps.

145-50). Acquisitiveness is futile and hope is to be placed on God rather than money. Proverbs and Job “is the critical awareness that all of life (including money practices) is situated in a social fabric of neighbourliness that cannot be disregarded. . . . Money and possessions are [to be] contextualized by *love of God* and *love of neighbour* . . .” (p. 118). As there is no safety in economic extremity, the prayer of the wise should be for the supply of food for the need (p. 119) *Diligence* against *laziness* (Prov. 10:4; 12:11, 27; 15:19) not confined to hard work, but of “. . . social awareness about the well-being of the entire neighbourhood and the moral capability to attend to the needs and possibilities of the community” (p. 123). Choices about money and possessions be made with reference to their social impact. Job is concerned with good life with wealth and without it. Job transforms wealth in terms of a larger common good emphasizing the generosity of God. Gratitude is the human response to God’s generosity.

The prophets speak about the ill-gotten wealth by exploiting the poor as not long lasting. “A predominant theme of the prophetic corpus is the conviction that a predatory economy that permits powerful moneyed interests to prey upon the vulnerable peasant population is unsustainable.” (p. 142). God does not tolerate such practice (e.g. Solomon -1Kgs. 12:1-19; Omri – 1 Kgs. 21:12-14) Amos speaks of extravagant life style as leading to the “ruin” of the community (Amos 6:4-6a; cf. Is. 1:23; 2:6-7). While for Isaiah the abuse of the poor accomplished by law brings about woes (Is. 10:1-4), Micah emphasized greedy economic practices would lead to the fall of the ruler (Micah 2:1-2) Disobedience to Torah was the cause of judgement upon Jerusalem (Jer. 7:5-7; 5:26-28 cf. Hab. 2:4-5; 6=-19). The sixth century prophets continue the theme (Is. 47:6; Jer. 50:26-27; Ezek. 27:27; 28:13, 16, 18). Torah obedience and prosperity have a covenantal connection for eighth, 7th and 6th century prophets.

The five scrolls (Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes Lamentations and Esther) known as the festal letters celebrating

the Feast of Weeks, Passover, Feast of Booths, the Ninth of Ab and Purim all concerned with the theme of money and possessions. They are concerned with loss and hope and commodity and agency. Ruth is a story of ‘have’ and ‘have-not’, a man of substance and woman without resource. Readiness of Ruth to be active in her own history and the hidden work of Yahweh did not allow economic reality define her relationship with Boaz. Song of Songs concerns abandonment of wealth in pursuit of love. Ecclesiastes, money never satisfies as one never has enough. Refrain from deification and demonization of money. Recognize money for what it is without being seduced by it. Lamentation speaks of loss of precious things including money and possessions. (Lam. 1:7-11). Fidelity to Yahweh is more important than possessions and money. Esther begins with display of wealth and pomp and ends with a Jewish celebration of deliverance with presents to the poor (Esther 9:22) “Thus from 1:4 (wealth exhibited) to 9:22 (“presents to the poor”) is a journey from *self-aggrandizing self-congratulatory wealth to responsible community* in which wealth is repositioned from ultimacy to a resource for communal well-being” (p. 183).

The Gospel narratives and stories of Jesus emphasize the performance of an alternative economy. Beginning with the initial announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God (Mk. 1:15) and the declaration in the Synagogue of Nazareth of the good news to the poor (Lk. 4:18-19), Jesus speaks of an alternate economy over against the extractive economy of the Romans where peasants always remained in debt (p. 187). The creditor class wanted to kill Jesus while the people were amazed at teachings (Lk. 19. 47-48). Story of the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:17-31/Mt. 19:16-30/Lk. 18:18-30), Jesus looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Mk. 10:21) The disciples were to renounce their possessions completely. Jesus did not give a clear answer to

the question on paying taxes to the emperor (Mk. 12:13-17/Mt. 22:15-22/ Lk. 20:20-26), yet He lays emphasis on “the things of God”. Jesus refuses to interfere in a dispute over family estate but said, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Lk. 12:15). Of the rich man who tried to store away all his possessions (Lk. 12:13-21) perhaps concerned about scarcity was told. Life does not consist of commodities or accumulation of them, but of the kingdom that defies commoditization of creation. (p. 193) Alternative is a life of giving that is sustainable. The Magnificat of Mary (1:46-55) and Luke's parable of the Great dinner (14:12-24); Dishonest wealth (Lk. 16:1-13); The rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31); parable about the final judgment (Mt. 25:13-46) all deals with money and possessions. (p. 202) Jesus' provision of bread (Jn 6:12-13) and water (Jn 4:14) indicate abundant life (Jn 10:10). A reading of the gospel apart from its concern for economy is a misreading. (p. 204)

Acts provide us a community of solidarity with radical account of shared possessions. This is against concerns of the empire. Peter and John answer to the beggar at the temple gate, “silver and gold we have none, but in the name of Jesus of Nazareth stand up and walk” (Acts 3:1-10) emphasize transformative restoration of the beggar. The early church practiced communal life and the proclamation of resurrection (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-37). Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) were punished as they went against this.. Alliance between divination money making and imperial rule was broken in the emancipation of a slave girl used for money making for her master (Acts 16:16-24).

Paul speaks of all that a Christian possess is of God's grace whether little or plenty, well-fed or hungry, and plenty or in need (Phil. 4:11-13). Realizing that the present time is too short people are called upon to live in recognition of it (1 Cor. 7:29-31). This leads towards cheerful giving (2 Cor. 9:6-8). As God is generous, the community is called to be generous. He combines the Macedonian

model (2 Cor. 8:2) and the Christological affirmation (Phil. 2:5-11) to emphasize on generosity. He stresses on a transformed life that is generous and hospitable towards strangers. Christian conduct should lead to a flourishing of the community (Col. 3:5-8, 12-15). Pastoral epistles speak of managing one's household well which include financial administration and the leader being not greedy for money (1 Tim. 3:8-13). James speaks about the transitory nature of wealth and one should not find security in wealth. (Jas. 1:9-11, 12-16, 17-18, 27). He speaks against social favouritism (Jas 2:1-7); inability to serve God and mammon at the same time (Jas, 4:1-4). James criticizes reliance on wealth (5:1-6) as the assurance provided by it is short lived. Disparity of wealth and poverty is unsustainable. (p. 261) Preoccupation with and pursuit of money and wealth is criticized and generosity is advocated. The Book of Revelation provided the ultimate alternative of a new heaven and new earth. The faithful are encouraged to order their life over against the hegemonic life promoted by the imperial powers.

The book is an invaluable contribution towards understanding the biblical view on money and possessions in the globalized context of a Market driven economy. With recession on the horizon it is a timely lesson for our overdependence on wealth creation at the expense of the vulnerable communities. It advocates an alternate mode of living for all who claim to follow Christ. It will serve as a text book for understanding biblical view of wealth for a longtime to come.

V.J. John