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Editorial

This issue of the *Indian Journal of Theology* contains **seven essays** and **one book review**. I am thankful to all the contributors for their stimulating thoughts and significant contributions. The two essays on Old Testament have to do with subaltern interpretation particularly from Dalit, Adivasi and Tribal perspectives. The lone New Testament essay is a counterpart essay of the Byzantine text-type and its derivative Greek New Testament editions published earlier in this Journal by the same author. The remaining four essays revolve around ethics, disability, politics, and religion, each with an insightful theological reflection.

In “Juxtaposing the Forgotten Women Liberators of Exodus Narrative and Indian Independence Movement,” **Aravind Jeyakumar Moniraj** unearths the stories of suppressed subaltern voices of women in the Hebrew Bible and Indian history, and focuses on certain women freedom fighters of India from different regions. He employs the subaltern hermeneutics and makes use of the subaltern-syntactic, semantic and pragmatic analysis in order to bring out the contributions of the women in his essay.

In “Religious Authority and Political Power: Insights from the Damascus Document and Dalit Struggles,” **Mede Jeevan Sagar** makes a comparative analysis of the Damascus Document and the Dalit struggle and emphasizes on how the former could provide a powerful framework for understanding the intersections of religious authority and political power in the context of Dalits under a plutocratic system in India. He carefully examines how the Dalits assert their identity and resist oppressive power structures through the reclamation of religious and social narratives.

In “Characteristics of Major Critical Editions of Greek New Testament: Critical Texts,” **H. Joseph Lalfakmawia** undergoes

an intensive study to highlight the Alexandrian text-type and the consequent Greek New Testament editions. The Alexandrian texts are minimal in terms of quantity as compared to the Byzantine texts. The author's work on the *Textus Receptus* (TR) based critical editions has already been published last year (IJT, Vol. 65, No. 1, 2023). He deals with thirteen critical texts in this essay. Readers should not miss his final analysis stated in the Conclusion.

In "Exploitation of the Flesh: A Christian Ethical Response to Human Trafficking," **C. Vanlalhruaia** carries out a comprehensive assessment on how trading in human beings is a conspicuous violation of human rights with special emphasis on trafficking in women. Using Kant's *Categorical Imperatives*, he asserts the fundamental reason for the immorality of trading in human beings. He analyses the ethical issues and challenges involved in human trafficking and ends with a Christian ethical response by tackling certain theological problems and providing concrete solutions.

In "Deothering the Body for Envisaging a Disability Theology: A Tribal Reading from North East India," **Chenijan Patton** argues that PWDs make up the 'unreached cluster of people in church and society' who experience marginalization due to their physical orientations. The othering of individuals in public spaces calls for the need to deother the PWDs and envision a liberative space for all individuals. The author engages with tribal ethical perspectives and principles for inclusivity and asserts that '*Tlawmngaihna, Khankho, Sobaliba, and Sükhying* offer substantive space for all citizens in tribal society.'

In "Religion and Politics with Special Reference to Naga Churches and Naga Nationalist Movement," **Solomon Khyouchi Veino** explains how religion and politics in the Naga context have multiple complexities. He traces the beginning of nationalism among the Nagas and examines how the Political Parties, the Naga Nationalist movements, and the Church share an inconvenient relationship. He puts together Joseph Fletcher's 'Agape Love' and M. M. Thomas' 'Living theology' as his theological reflection and

response to understanding the role of church and politics in the Naga context.

In "Manipur Conflict: The Plight of Kuki-Zo Tribes in Churachandpur District," **K. Laltlankima** identifies the reason that prompted the Kuki-Zo community in Manipur to demand a separate administration and presents a detailed analysis on his interaction with the Kuki-Zo community of Manipur. Even though the consequences and damage have been severe for the two parties involved in the Manipur conflict, readers must be aware that the essay is a product of the writer's direct interaction with the Kuki-Zo community and therefore contains narratives only from one side of the party involved. The writer evaluates the plight of the Kuki-Zo community and the impact of the conflict on education, health care, church, the IDPs, and village volunteers, and uses Moltmann's theology of hope as the point of reference in his theological reflection.

Juxtaposing the Forgotten Women Liberators of Exodus Narrative and Indian Independence Movement

*Aravind Jeyakumar Moniraj**

Introduction

“The most important story in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) begins with women determining events.”¹ Five women played a vital role in the birth and survival narratives of Moses – the two midwives, Moses’ mother and sister and Pharaoh’s daughter. However, among these five women, only the names of the midwives are mentioned – Shiphrah and Puah and others are defined by their relationship to men.² Shiphrah and Puah, as midwives, played a pivotal role in shrewdly acting against Pharaoh’s cruel plan of a mass genocide of new born male children of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt.³ Similarly, there are Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women who have played a major role in the freedom movement of India. However, the caste and ethnic hierarchies which have existed before, during, and after the colonial rule, have subtly ignored the participation of the ethnic minorities in the independence struggle of India. People from the subaltern communities especially women fought many battles and wars against the oppressive colonial rule, while simultaneously fighting local and regional forms of marginalisation which were engendered by brahmins and the upper caste groups. Therefore, it is essential to unearth

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the stories of these subaltern voices which were suppressed in the Hebrew Bibel as well as in the Indian history. With this outlook, this piece of work attempts to reread the women's history with the help of subaltern hermeneutics and this work has been structured in the following way: firstly, hermeneutical principles are dealt with, followed by tracing out the subaltern voices (esp. the women liberators) of the Exodus redemption movement with the help of the subaltern-syntactic, semantic and pragmatic analysis, and the third section of this paper unveils the women freedom fighters of India especially from the Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi backgrounds in a brief manner.

Methodological and Hermeneutical Considerations

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's original essay, "Can the Subaltern⁴ Speak?" transformed the analysis of colonialism through an eloquent and uncompromising argument that affirmed the contemporary relevance of Marxism while using deconstructionist methods to explore the international division of labor and capitalism's "worlding" of the world.⁵ Spivak's essay hones in on the historical and ideological factors that obstruct the possibility of being heard for those who inhabit the periphery. It is a probing interrogation of what it means to have political subjectivity, to be able to access the state, and to suffer the burden of difference in a capitalist system that promises equality yet withholds it at every turn.⁶

In the second half of the 20th century, there has been a powerful and solid resistance from the people whose voices were suppressed in order to redefine and rewrite the historiography which were often formulated from the elite-groups' point of view.⁷ Hence, emerged writings which were written from the perspective of the subaltern groups, and gradually these writings became the voice of the subordinate social groups which is in fact a hermeneutics from below.⁸ Moreover, "the subaltern writings refuse, reject or disown all the religious interpretations of the dominant groups and bring out the picture and words of forced marginalization and

powerlessness."⁹ Hence, this approach rereads and reinterprets the events which have been written from an elitistic perspective. Nevertheless, this approach has been used in this piece of research focusing on rereading the Exodus narrative in order to unearth the suppressed voices of the liberation event, especially the women folk who have contributed in the Exodus Redemption History, and in addition, this work also aims at identifying the women leaders who have contributed in the freedom movement of India, especially from the marginalized groups whose stories were not highly commended. Therefore, it has to be noted that the subalterns indeed speak or act, but we seldom listen. With this motive, a critical reading of the Exodus narrative and the history of independence movement has been undertaken to listen to what the subalterns have to say.

Tracing Women Characters in the Exodus Redemption History of Ancient Israel: Unmuting the Subaltern Voices

In the initial chapters of Exodus, there are almost 12 references made to women. Moreover, there are thousands of nameless women (girls, young single women, wives, mothers and widows) who struggled and toiled with the Israelite men in the Egyptian bondage, whose names are not mentioned.¹⁰ A few scholars opine that the ancient storytellers gave women a crucial role in the initial stages of the major events but the later narratives and narrators gave emphasis to male characters and male interests which encouraged women to confine to their domestic spheres.¹¹ Out of the twelve women characters mentioned in the initial chapters of Exodus, the vital role of six of the women is primarily that of life saving act at national level during the crucial period in the history of Ancient Israel. Among the six women, Shiphrah and Puah entered the history as lifesaving women even before Jochebed (the mother of Moses), Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter who appear in the setting of the Nile while rescuing baby Moses. The following passage from Exodus 1:15-22 narrates the life-saving role played by the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah:

¹⁵ *The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,* ¹⁶ *“When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.”* ¹⁷ *But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.* ¹⁸ *So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?”* ¹⁹ *The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”* ²⁰ *So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.* ²¹ *And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.* ²² *Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”*

In the ancient world, the public spaces are strictly reserved for men only and women had less roles or no roles to play in the influential decision-making process. In such a situation how far were the midwives “Shiphrah and Puah” powerful in saving the new born male babies? Based on the Exodus narrative, some envisage the midwives as the “two lowly Hebrew women,”¹² “simple and modest midwives,”¹³ “presumably uneducated and lowly in social status.”¹⁴ But for others, the “midwifery” in Egypt is an important occupation.¹⁵ However, it is doubtful whether trained midwives existed and it was suggested that this profession was not highly esteemed and considered as “impure.”¹⁶ At times it is normally the family or friends who assisted at deliveries in Ancient Israel.¹⁷ In the other cultures of ANE (or AWA) especially in the Egyptian tradition, the midwives were health practitioners who were also dealing with the religious realm.¹⁸ They had control

over the forces of life and death. Therefore, the midwives also had the function of prophetess who had the role of prognosis, and being able “to determine through divination if her patient will live or die.”¹⁹

Another important aspect has to be noted based on the significance given to the midwives in Egypt under political grounds. According to archaeological evidences, certain status was given to this profession and the midwives were living throughout the country and they had overseers as well.²⁰ The overseeing midwives were regularly reporting to the king regarding the deliveries of his offspring.²¹ Presumably, Shiphrah and Puah were also overseers of the guild of midwives in the central palace harem who were known to Pharaoh.²² Being sought by Pharaoh and having direct contact with him suggest positions of high esteem.²³ However, the Hebrew midwives did not bend themselves to the will of Pharaoh, although he was able to make the entire Egyptian community to yield to his instructions especially in terms of killing the new born male children of the Hebrews. Being overseers of the midwives and personally known to the king, Shiphrah and Puah were bold enough to challenge the powerful king through their actions of not heeding to his instruction to commit a massive infant-genocide.²⁴ Although the profession of midwives in Egypt had different connotations, the above lines enhanced to place the influential position of Shiphrah and Puah as overseers of the guild of midwives.

A Syntactic, Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis of Exodus 1:15-22

The previous section shed light on the status of the midwives in the Egyptian context and especially the significant place of Shiphrah and Puah as overseers of the midwives. The beginning and the end of this pericope are marked by Pharaoh’s two commands and a chiasmic structure can be seen in the narrative style of this passage:²⁵

- A. Pharaoh's directive to the midwives (vv 15-16)
- B. The midwives' fear of God – their refusal to obey (v 17)
- C. Pharaoh's reaction to their refusal – the midwives' response (vv 18-19)
- C¹. God's reaction to their refusal – the effect on the people (v 20)
- B². The midwives' fear of God – their reward (v 21)
- A³. Pharaoh's command to all his people (v 22)

In the first command, the midwives were directed by Pharaoh in the following way: *im-ben hu' wah'mitten 'oto w'im-bat hi' wahayah*...*if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live...* To eradicate the people of Israel, the king of Egypt adopts a curious but sensible plan – male infanticide. If only genocide was Pharaoh's sole aim, he could order all Hebrews slain on the spot.²⁶ The consequence would be he will lose thousand slaves. But Pharaoh says, let us kill their males only, and we will keep their females to that we may give them to our slaves as wives. And whoever is born from them will be a slave and will serve us.²⁷ The shrewdness of the midwives can be noticed here. In front of the king, they did not retaliate or utter a single word against his cruel command to engage in a mass male infanticide. However, their action was powerful which is mentioned in the following verses: *אתהאלהים המולדת אתהאלהים ותיראן* (*watirena hamyalledet 'et-ha'elohim*)...*but the midwives feared God...and it continues in the following phrases,* *מלך מצרים ולא עשו כאשר דבר אליהן* (*w'lo 'asu ka'asher dibber 'elehen melek mitsrayim*)...*they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them...and it concludes by stating,* *ותחיינן אתהילדים* (*wathayyen 'et-hayladim*)...*but they let the boys live...*

Like the other biblical accounts of defiance, the midwives' heroism involves an element of the underhand. Apparently, the midwives were powerless, they did not openly contravene Pharaoh, but deceive him instead. The biblical writers were not

prevarication in a good cause and the Bible narrates many such stories in which a weak party tricks a stronger, or in which characters engage in reciprocal, even competitive, tricky.²⁸ According to the observation of some scholars, “the role of women in the Hebrew Bible and in the ANE was termed as ‘tricksters’ – using deceptions when necessary to influence the course of events, to keep out of trouble with one in authority.”²⁹ Some commentators argue that deception is insufficient and that an actual trick need to be played. But for others, these midwives fall into the category of tricksters, because trickery is an instance of “a humorous reversal of power.”³⁰ The midwives Shiphrah and Puah played the role of power broker and the one expected to wield authority is under the thumb of the weak.³¹

When Pharaoh came to know that he was deceived by the midwives, he summoned the midwives and questioned them for allowing the boys to live, but their reply is fascinating: *צריח העברית כי לא כנשים המ המולדת וילדו* (*ki lo kannashim hammistriyot ha'ibriyot*)...*because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women...*and the next phrase is continued in the following manner, *כיחיות הנה בטורם תבוא אליהן המולדת וילדו* (*ki-hayot hinnah b'eterem tabo' 'alehen hamyalledet w'yaladu*)... *for they are vigorous and give birth before midwife comes to them...* The language which Shiphrah and Puah have used should be underlined here. They retort by using the unusual word *כיחיות* (*ki-hayot* – for they are vigour, energetic, or they are strong). *Hayot* (חיות), which is derived from the root word *חיה* (*hayeh* – *having the vigour of life or lively*)³² is used here to describe easy labour of the Hebrew women. The noun form of *Hayot* (חיות) is *חיה* (*hayyah*) meaning “animal or beast;”³³ therefore, it can be translated as “they are just like animals.”³⁴ According to Midrash – “these women are animal-like that before the midwives can get there, they have dropped the baby.”³⁵ The midwives who have acted here as tricksters exploit the social issues of order and disorder.³⁶ For some, the statement made by the midwives to Pharaoh is a sort of political satire where they

made fun of the Egyptian women by indirectly saying that they the Hebrew women are strong like animals or beasts *חַיָּה* (*hayyah*). Shiphrah and Puah trick their aggressive divine ruler by an ambiguous retort – it is a bit of underground humour.³⁷ An indirect agitation and implementation of God’s justice are explicit in the clever act of Shiphrah and Puah. The midwives are rewarded by God for their faithfulness in choosing to establish God’s justice instead of committing male infanticide.

Acknowledging The Significant Contributions of Shiphrah and Puah

It has to be fundamentally underscored that Pharaoh was not just a political leader of his time, rather he claimed both political as well as religious authority. Moreover, to oppose Pharaoh and his edict is not simply ignoring or opposing the command of the king – but it is literally opposing the demigod of Egypt – the all-powerful. It is like undermining the authority both in political and religious realms which would lead to risk of being stripped of one’s position, enslaved or killed.³⁸ In such an imperial hegemonic background one can understand that Shiphrah and Puah took a risky step in opposing the political and religious hegemony of Pharaoh. Rather than murdering the male infants as ordered, they let them live. In fact, they were well aware that they will be called to report for their actions, but they feared God (*תַּיִשָּׁרְרוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים* – *yattire’na hamyall’dot ’et-ha’elohim* – *but the midwives feared God*) and did as their moral conscience dictated.

Many scholars mark this brave prophetic act of Shiphrah and Puah as the first recorded instance of civil disobedience and that their rejection of this government decree was not just personal but overtly political.³⁹ Instead of being a coward and trembling before the most powerful demigod on earth, the midwives defended themselves directly before Pharaoh’s face. However, they were cautious and shrewd in handling the dreadful circumstance. By mentioning the word “vigorous Hebrew women,” firstly, they were satirically underscoring the power and wisdom that the Hebrew

women were possessing in contrast to the Egyptian women, and secondly, they subtly expressed how clever and tactful they are as midwives in establishing God’s justice. Hence, the diplomatic role played by Shiphrah and Puah can be equated with the role of the OT prophets in the crucial time of Israelite history. Therefore, it is appropriate to acknowledge their prophetic role and perceive them “as prophetesses of their time.”

All their actions had an ultimate goal “to save the life of boys and let them live.” Therefore, they were life-savers and they attained this goal on the cost of risking their lives. In a satirical way, they protested the political and religious hegemonies and saved the lives of many new-borns – they were real risk-takers. Pharaoh did not realise that he is not only being deceived but also being mocked satirically. It is imperative to see the action of Shiphrah and Puah through the lens of social justice. They both sacrificed their privilege, resources and power for the benefit of the oppressed.⁴⁰ The consequence of their honesty and boldness was massive killing of Hebrew male children – the edict of Pharaoh that all male children should be drowned in the river. However, the powerful and prophetic midwives Shiphrah and Puah are heroines in their own right. They didn’t save generations of male children, but they joined hands together to fight against the oppressive structure that was attempting to eradicate the Hebrew male children.

The role of the midwives Shiphrah and Puah as active women agents, their teamwork with strategic plans, and collective resources are some of the important themes that this narrative presents. It is twice underlined as mentioned above that the righteous action of the midwives against the powerful kingdom is due to their fear of God. In addition, the narrative also presents some pertinent theological themes such as oppression, solidarity, resistance, transformation, liberation, blessings and so on. The context is urgency, peril, challenge and promise and the function of the midwives in this situation is seemingly simple and

practical – to attend the birth,⁴¹ although it is quite challenging and complex in reality. The midwives preserved and saved lives and they ensured security in the context of emerging infanticide. They were attending, listening, witnessing to the process of what is emerging. “Shiphrah and Puah took subversive, risky and strategic steps to interrupt and dismantle oppression and to ensure the wholeness and future of their community during the time of crisis.”⁴² Although the role and function of the midwives fade quickly in the later accounts, there are Talmud traditions which assert that the midwives received the royal house and the house of the high priesthood.⁴³

Demarcating Subaltern Women in Indian Context with Special Reference to Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi Women

Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women are the most marginalized segments in the Indian society. The condition of these women is more vulnerable than the non-Dalit, non-Bahujan and non-Adivasi women. They are suffering from multi-disadvantages of being suppressed, i.e., socio-economically and culturally marginalized section, and of being women and sharing the gender-based inequalities and subordination.⁴⁴ Hence, the subaltern feminism plays an important role in the contemporary dominant era and it is the feminism of marginalized sections of women. It aims for the equality and freedom of Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women in the society. Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women face double marginalization in this patriarchal society.⁴⁵ Moreover, in such a context, the experiences of Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women are epistemic spaces which form the basis for a new conceptual and theoretical framework of a Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi “womanist–humanist complex” to analyse the materiality of caste, class, gender, sexuality, local economy, and power relationships. How do Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women navigate determined possibilities, fragile histories, socio-economic contexts, political pressures, and cultural realities to negotiate with the regimes of power, carve their agency, and contribute to feminist thought,

praxis, pedagogies, and politics? The innumerable ways through which Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women have consistently expanded, challenged, and revolutionised feminism, by working on different potentials, hopes, and futures should be explored.⁴⁶ Therefore, it is imperative to unmute the subaltern voices especially the Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi who have contributed in various capacities in the Indian context which were in fact suppressed by the dominant narratives, and the following lines attempt to unearth some of the Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi (Women) Liberators who have contributed to the freedom struggle of India.

Identifying the Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi Women in Indian Freedom Movement

While the caste and ethnic hierarchies have existed before, during, and after the colonial rule, the Nationalist Movement for an Independent India had witnessed a significant amount of participation from its caste and ethnic minorities. People from Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi communities fought many battles and wars against the oppressive colonial rule, while simultaneously fighting against local and regional forms of marginalisation which were engendered by brahmins and the upper caste groups. Thus, some of the significant Dalit Women freedom fighters and their contributions presented here are in fact are the real subaltern voices.

Kuyili was the Commander-in-Chief to Velu Nachiyar, the Queen of Sivagangai, a place in the southern part of Tamil Nadu near Ramanathapuram. The Queen was one of the first monarchs to have fought against the British Rule, around the year 1780, and in that war, Kuyili sacrificed herself to save her land, Sivagangai.⁴⁷ Remembered by her admirers as ‘Veerthalapathy’ (The Brave Commander) or ‘Veeramangai’ (The Brave Woman), this freedom fighter was born in a lower caste family of Arunthathiyar. In her early days, her father who worked as a spy for the Queen, helped Kuyili familiarise with the order of the day and become a companion to Velu Nachiyar. She protected the Queen’s life

multiple times and was employed as her bodyguard and later the Commander-in-Chief for the women's army.⁴⁸ She fearlessly led her army and deceived the British officials by hiding their weapons, to enter the Sivagangai Fort to attack their oppressors. The unprepared British army could not comprehend this attack and Kuyili was successful in giving life to her plans of destroying the weapons of the Britishers. In the process, drenched in oil, she set herself on fire and self-sacrificed her life. Her courage as a lower caste woman, fighting against odds and oppression, is commemorated to date.⁴⁹

One of the most trusted companions and advisors of Rani Laxmibai, **Jhalkaribai** was a Dalit warrior from the Kori caste, who played a pivotal role in what is known as the first war of Independence, the Revolt of 1857 against the colonial government. She was born on November 22, 1830, in a humble family in a village near Jhansi. Belonging to an oppressed caste, and living a life of poverty, Jhalkaribai was unable to receive a formal education. However, she did learn a few other skills such as the art of weaponry and horse-back riding. Various folklores are often heard around her ability to fight dacoits and wild animals in her local village, from a very young age.⁵⁰ Impressed by her skills, Jhansi ki Rani inducted her in the women's wing of the army, where Jhalkaribai was trained to shoot and ignite cannons to fight the wars against British rule. Due to the strange resemblance that Jhalkari had with Rani Laxmibai, she disguised herself as the Queen and took command of the army on the battlefield during the Rebellion. Even after having adequate consciousness about the perils of war, she did not reconsider her decision and walked right up to the opposition's camp. Her death however remains uncertain and various speculations are built around the same.⁵¹ The neglected Dalit women's histories of bravery for India's independence are often erased by upper caste and *savarna* systems of documentation.⁵²

Often referred to as the "Rani of the Nagas," **Rani Gaidinliu**, at the age of 16, evaded the Britishers, before being captured and sentenced to life imprisonment, which ended only after India's Independence.⁵³ Rani Gaidinliu was born on 26th January 1915 in Nungkao (or Longkao) village in the present-day Tousem sub-division of Tamenglong District, in western Manipur. She belonged to the Rongmei Tribe under the umbrella Zeliangrong Tribe and at a very young age, despite lack of formal education, she became a leader under the influence of her cousin, Haripao Jadonang, who had organised the Heraka socio-religious and political movement to condemn the British rule.⁵⁴ She mobilised people from the Zeliangrong tribe to resist paying taxes to the colonial regime. Successful in her endeavour, Gaidinliu led these people to emerge out of imperial subordination by refusing to aid the British in any manner and helped them evade the British forces from one village to another, across the states of present-day Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. Due to the growing anxieties around her anti-British stance, the special Assam Rifles contingent was prompted to arrest her immediately. She was later captured by the Britishers, handcuffed and taken to Kohima on foot. Her associates were either imprisoned or executed. She was only released after India became independent. After spending several years of her life in jail, she later continued to work for the betterment of backward groups in India.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The above lines have attempted to unearth the significant contributions made by the subaltern women both in the Hebrew world as well as in the Indian context, especially during the time of freedom struggle. It has been perceived that the role of women in community building in Ancient Israel (or Old Testament) is evident from the significant female protagonists who took risks at various levels. Hence, Alice Bellis rightly points out, "the most important story in the Hebrew Bible begins with women determining events."⁵⁶ Shiphrah and Puah are such protagonists

who decided history by engaging in saving the life of Hebrew male children when they were instructed to kill them. In the same way, the significant role played by the women in Indian context from the Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi communities cannot be overlooked or suppressed. The significant role played by Kuyili, the Commander-in-Chief to Velu Nachiyar from Tamil Nadu and Jhalkaribai, one of the most trusted companions and advisors of Rani Laxmibai from Uttar Pradesh and the “Rani of the Nagas,” Rani Gaidinliu, from the state of Manipur are a few examples to underscore how women folk especially from the suppressed classes played the role of liberators during the time crisis and unfortunately their histories were either ignored or purposely with political notions deleted from the Indian history. Thus, the above revisiting/rereading of biblical text and the Indian history have unearthed the contributions of subaltern women.

Endnotes

- 1 Alice O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 101.
- 2 Susanne Scholz, “The Meaning of Liberation from ‘His Perspective,’” in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature* (eds. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 33–50, 36.
- 3 Rosalind Janssen, “A New Reading of Shiphrah Puah – Recovering their Voices,” *Feminist Theology* 27/1 (2018): 10.
- 4 The word ‘subaltern’ has been coined by the Italian political theorist (Marxist) Antonio Gramsci and it means ‘as those who are below the altar,’ i.e., people who could be altered or subordinate social groups. The people who are subordinated in terms of class, caste, gender, etc. the subaltern is always in plural form denoting a group or groups of people who are oppressed. Cf. K. Jesurathnam, “Dalit and Subaltern Hermeneutics in Conversation with Reader Response Method: I Kings 22, A Case in Point,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* (2016), 46-60.
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Religious Authority and Political Power: Insights from the Damascus Document and Dalit Struggles

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Introduction

The intersections of religious authority and political power have long shaped the dynamics of marginalized communities, both in ancient texts and contemporary societies. This paper argues that the verses in CD 1:1-8 of the Damascus Document provide a potent framework for understanding these intersections, particularly in the context of Dalits under a plutocratic system in India. How does religious ideology justify or challenge social hierarchies? Can ancient texts like the Damascus Document offer insights into modern struggles for justice? By exploring these questions, this paper examines the ways in which marginalized groups, like the Dalits, assert their identity and resist oppressive power structures through the reclamation of religious and social narratives.

1. Brief Socio-Historical Background of Damascus Document

The Damascus Document,¹ also known as the Cairo Damascus Document, is one of the most interesting and debated texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls.² Discovered in two different contexts – first, in the Cairo Geniza, and later, among the Qumran manuscripts,

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it has been the subject of extensive scholarly research.³ The CD has two principal parts: an exhortation which covers much of columns 1-8 and 19-20: and a legal section, which includes columns 15-16 and 9-14. The text offers valuable insights into the beliefs, practices, and organization of a Jewish sect that may have grown in the late Second Temple period. The CD was a work of missionary exhortation, aiming to strengthen the community's self-confidence and bring its deals and way of life into new surroundings.⁴ Scholars have long debated these aspects, leading to various interpretations and theories about its historical and religious context.⁵ The following section deals with the debate surrounding the name "Damascus," and the ongoing scholarly efforts to identify the community behind these scrolls.

1.1. Naming

The CD lacks an original, central title. Scholars have assigned different names based on the document's content or manuscript. The meaning of Damascus has sparked debate among scholars.⁶ These names primarily stem from the frequent references to "Damascus" or "the land of Damascus" within the scroll.⁷ There is no clear consensus on whether "Damascus" refers directly to the Syrian city, Babylonia, the Qumran community, or the Qumranites' exile location. Israeli scholarship commonly refers to CD as תליגמ קשמד תירב ("the Scroll of the Damascus covenant"),⁸ emphasizing the twofold meaning throughout CD consistently described as a renewed covenant with the divine by the exiled righteous remnant in the land of Damascus (CD 6:19; 8:21; 19:34).

1.2. Identity

In 1910, Schecter published the Damascus manuscript. After that, scholars tried to identify the author(s) and audience behind the CD. Louis Ginzberg was the one first who wanted to identify the sect and wrote a book with the title *Eine unbekannte judische sect* (1992), translated as *An Unknown Jewish Sect* (1970). Collins views the community of DSS to have been less decentralized

and more variegated.⁹ Hemple and Hultgren argue that the community mentioned in the CD is a parent movement of the Qumran sect and thus long-progressed proceeding to the end of the 3rd century BCE.¹⁰ Jokiranta states that the use of the terms “sect” and “sectarian” have not only continued in the CD but have also been used in other passages found among the DSS that represent one or more religious sects.¹¹ Fradde opines that with the latest publications of the DSS came the consensus that CD needs to be understood in the broader context of Qumran and the DSS.¹² He says that it is challenging to determine the appropriate term for the group or movement that supports the CD due to this decentered variegated.¹³ Like many researchers, I firmly believe that the scrolls represent multiple communities, yet only one of these communities was present at the Qumran site.

2. Exegetical Analysis of CD col. 1:1-8a: The Intersection of Religion and Politics in the Damascus Document

Having examined the historical context of the Damascus Document, we now turn to a detailed exegetical analysis of CD col. 1:1-8a. This passage provides crucial insights into the intersection of religious authority and political power within the text.

2.1. Text and Translation

CD col 1:1-8a

ועתה שמעו כל יודעי צדק ובינו במעשי	1:1
אל. כי ריב לו עם כל בשר ומשפט יעשה בכל מנאציו .	1:2
כי במועלם אשר עזבוהו הסתיר פניו מישראל וממקדשו	1:3
ויתנם להרב. ובזכרו ברית ראשנים השאיר שאירית	1:4
לישראל ולא נתנם לכלה. ובקץ חרון שנים שלוש מאות	1:5
ותשעים ליתו אותם ביד נבוכדנאצר מלך בבל	1:6
פקדם. ויצמח מישראל ומאהרן שורש מטעת לירוש	1:7
ותמדא בוטב וְשָׁדְלוּ וְצָרָא תֵּא	1:8

Translation¹⁴

I:1 vacat And now listen all who know righteousness and discern the deeds of² God, for he has a dispute with all flesh and he will execute judgment against all who despise him. ³ For in their unfaithfulness when they left him, he hid his face from Israel and his sanctuary ⁴ and gave them over to the sword. But when he remembered his covenant with the first ones, he left a remnant ⁵ of Israel and did not give them to destruction. And at the end of the period of (his) wrath, three hundred ⁶ and ninety years after giving them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, ⁷ he visited them and caused a root of planting to sprout from Israel and from Aaron, to inherit ⁸ his land, and to grow fat on the goodness of his soil.

2.2. Textual Comments

A Root of Planting: The Damascus Document and the Concept of the Remnant

The CD is a critical text from the DSS that delves into the themes of divine judgment, covenantal fidelity, and the emergence of a righteous remnant.¹⁵ Its opening lines establish an authoritative tone, calling upon those who “know justice” and “understand the actions of God” to listen. This appeal mirrors the rhetorical strategies found in the book of Deuteronomy,¹⁶ emphasizing the text’s connection to a tradition of divine communication and instruction.¹⁷ The call to attention is not merely a literary device but sets the stage for an examination of God’s retribution against humanity’s iniquity, particularly concerning the destruction of the First Temple and the subsequent Babylonian Exile.¹⁸ This thematic framing positions the document within a broader narrative of divine justice and punishment, reflecting the historical context of its composition.¹⁹ Central to the Damascus Document is its concept of divine judgment, expressed through a covenant lawsuit where God holds humanity accountable for their transgressions. This

legal metaphor is crucial for understanding the text's approach to covenantal theology.

The Damascus Document employs legal metaphors to articulate its concept of divine judgment, framing God's relationship with humanity in terms of a covenant lawsuit. According to Thomas R. Blanton IV, the term “בִּיר” (legal dispute) encapsulates God's case against humanity for violating covenantal stipulations.²⁰ This imagery underscores the text's view of God as a judge who administers justice, reinforcing the community's belief in their unique role as the faithful remnant.²¹ The CD reflects a deep engagement with the notion of divine judgment, portraying the community as enduring the consequences of past sins while also being poised for a future vindication.²² CD's depiction of the remnant is particularly significant. It presents a vision of a purified and divinely favoured group that emerges from the trials of exile.²³ This concept of a righteous remnant, spared from destruction and chosen for future blessing, is central to the document's self-understanding.

Hanne Irene Kirchheiner notes that the text employs agricultural metaphors, such as “a root of planting,” to symbolize the community's emergence and its connection to the ancestral covenant.²⁴ This imagery aligns with the idea of the community as the legitimate heir to Israel's promises, marking the end of the exile and the beginning of a new era of divine favour. By portraying itself as the “root” that will flourish, the document articulates its view of the community as both a product and the fulfilment of divine promises.

Historically, the CD situates itself within a narrative of judgment and restoration. Paul Swarup highlights that the text divides the community's history into two phases: the emergence of a pious movement and the subsequent rise of the Teacher of Righteousness.²⁵ This dual-phase account underscores the community's belief in a transformative historical moment that signifies the end of exile and the beginning of a new era.²⁶ The text's historical perspective reflects its members' understanding of

their role in God's plan, positioning their community as central to the restoration of Israel and the fulfilment of covenantal promises.

The document also features a polemic against other Jewish groups perceived as having corrupted the covenantal laws. According to Bruce McComiskey, the text criticizes these groups for making the laws more lenient, thereby violating the terms of the covenant.²⁷ This critique is not merely a defence of the community's legal interpretation but serves to legitimize its own position as the true Israel.²⁸ By contrasting itself with those deemed unfaithful, the CD asserts its exclusive right to represent the genuine continuity of Israel's traditions. This polemical stance is integral to understanding the text's self-definition and its assertion of religious authority.

The CD also employs the concept of the remnant to justify its existence and to claim divine favour, reflecting a broader trend in Second Temple Judaism of using remnant theology to explain the community's role in divine plans.²⁹ Thomas R. Blanton IV points out that this theology is rooted in prophetic traditions, emphasizing God's mercy despite judgment.³⁰ The document's use of covenantal and agricultural imagery further reinforces its claims, portraying the community as divinely chosen and destined for future blessing despite past transgressions.³¹ This theological framework not only affirms the community's identity but also positions it within a larger narrative of divine justice and redemption.

In summary, the Damascus Document is a composite and multidimensional text that links themes of divine judgment, covenantal fidelity, and community identity. Its opening lines and legal metaphors establish a framework for understanding its theological and historical arguments. The concept of the remnant, along with its polemic against other Jewish groups, highlights the community's self-perception and its claim to justice. The text's theological implications reflect a broader tradition of using remnant theology to explain divine favour and justice. By examining these elements, we gain insight into the document's

role in shaping its community's identity and its place within the broader religious landscape of Second Temple Judaism.

3. A Brief Historical Background of Dalits

The themes of religious authority, political power, and community identity explored in the Damascus Document find stimulating parallels in the experiences of modern Dalit communities in India. By examining the historical background and struggles of Dalits, attempt will be made to draw meaningful comparisons that shed light on the dynamics of marginalized groups asserting their identity and rights in the face of oppressive Plutocratic systems. This comparison will allow us to explore how ancient texts like the Damascus Document can enlighten one's own understanding of contemporary social justice issues.

3.1. Who are Dalits?

Dalits are the poor and the oppressed. At the core, the Indian Government separated this group of people into Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Class (OBC). Ghanshayam Shah claims that in the current scenario, SCs are formed as Dalits and according to Article 341, these castes are considered scheduled by the President of India.³² Furthermore, James Massey comments that Dalits as a group are known to be poor, weak and helpless.³³ Also, the oppression of Dalits was not only limited to physical suffering, it included suffering under social, cultural and religious spheres of life. Because of this, Massey says that they were led to a state of not having any identity of their own. For the past few decades, they were known as 'no people' or people with 'no nation.'³⁴ In summary, Dalits, who are regarded as Scheduled Castes by the Indian government, have long endured social marginalization, poverty, and oppression in several spheres of life. Because of their marginalization, scholars such as Massey have come to characterize them as an identity-deficient group. The Dalit community continues in its pursuit of social and economic equity despite these challenges.

3.2. Etymology of Dalit

The term "Dalit" has a rich etymology deeply rooted in the linguistic and social fabric of India. James Massey probes into the Sanskrit origins of the word, noting its dual nature as both a noun and an adjective. Kondasingu Jesurathnam says "As a noun, "dalit" encompasses three genders, signifying actions like cracking, opening, and splitting."³⁵ In its adjectival form, it takes on meanings such as crushed, split, broken, and downtrodden.³⁶ Historically, Mahatma Jotirao Phule, a prominent social reformer in the nineteenth century, employed the term to describe the outcastes and untouchables, emphasizing their oppression and victimization within the rigid caste society of India.³⁷ The word gained importance and was later popularized by Ambedkarites in Maharashtra, symbolizing a rejection of forced identities imposed by non-Dalits.³⁸ Accepting the term became a means for the marginalized to assert pride in their new identity and affirm their commitment to taking control of their history.

Beyond its Sanskrit roots, "dalit" resonates with ancient languages, reflecting meanings such as hanging down, being weakened, being low, and being feeble. By adopting this term, Dalits in India reclaim their identity with dignity and honour, exceeding ordinary economic and physical poverty to encompass a deeper sense of psychological struggle and helplessness in the face of social oppression. The word "Dalit" not only sheds light on the experiences of oppression and subordination but also exceeds linguistic boundaries, drawing connections with Hebrew terms for the poor. In the context of the caste-based Hindu society, Dalits, also known as *panchamas*, face societal categorization as untouchables, marked by notions of pollution and defilement.³⁹ In contemporary India, "dalit" continues to serve as a powerful symbol of resilience, resistance, and identity, encapsulating the struggles and aspirations of a community that has historically been marginalized and oppressed.

3.3. Contemporary Struggles of Dalits for Justice

Ravela Jeeva Kumar says “Struggle for justice has been a phenomenon since time immemorial in the history of human society.”⁴⁰ Throughout human society’s history, there have always been struggles for justice. Throughout India, disadvantaged people have been fighting for justice in a variety of methods. The decades-long fight for justice for Dalits has been a permanent concern in this nation, especially in the post-independence history of India. The Dalits’ desire for social identity, stability, and dignity in all spheres of life has undergone significant transformation in the 20th century. Many Dalit movements for justice, which upheld the profound concern for Dalit self-assertion and dignity in the face of cultural enslavement, economic exploitation, and political supremacy in Indian society were born during the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Many literary forms have emerged to challenge the hegemony of the caste system and the propagation mechanism of Hinduism.⁴¹ Through this procedure, the core cause of the issue has been brought to a higher level, educating the victims of caste about the extreme occurrences of caste and its cruel practices. From this background, the similarities and differences between the Qumran Community and Dalits will now be explored.

4. Implications: A Comparative Exploration of the CD and Dalit Community

4.1. Identity Formation as Resistance

The CD and Dalit movements both demonstrate how marginalized groups use identity formation as a powerful tool of resistance against oppressive power structures. This process involves reclaiming and redefining group identity in opposition to dominant powers. In the CD, the community’s self-identification as a “remnant” and “root of planting” serves to solidify their group identity (see CD 1:4-5,7-8). The sentence “the root of the planting” refers precisely to the pre-Qumran group that boycotted

the temple.⁴² This metaphorical language positions the community as the legitimate heirs to Israel’s promises, marking the end of exile and the beginning of a new era of divine favour, whereas the “root” of 1,7 is a particular subset of the “remnant,” namely, the Damascus covenant itself.⁴³ By portraying itself as the “root” that will flourish, the document articulates its view of the community as both a product and the fulfilment of divine promises, thereby establishing a distinct identity separate from and in opposition to other Jewish groups of the time.

Similarly, Dalit movements have worked to reclaim and redefine their identity, rejecting caste-based stigma and asserting pride in their heritage. The very adoption of the term “Dalit” exemplifies this process. Originally a term with negative connotations, it has been reclaimed by the community as a symbol of pride and resistance.⁴⁴ By accepting this term, Dalits assert their commitment to taking control of their history and rejecting forced identities imposed by non-Dalits.⁴⁵ This can be found more evidently below:

A recent incident in Mumbai illustrates how identity formation and assertion can function as resistance, while also revealing the complexities of intersectionality in such processes. *During a “Reclaim the Night” protest organized by women from an upscale housing complex, women from the nearby Jai Bhim Nagar slums attempted to join and express solidarity. However, they were met with hostility and exclusion from the non-Dalit protesters. This incident demonstrates how marginalized groups - in this case, Dalit women - attempt to assert their identity and concerns within broader movements, only to face further marginalization. As one protester from Jai Bhim Nagar noted, “These women from the high-rises can only empathise with those like themselves. To them, a woman is a victim only if she comes from their own*

caste and class. The rest of us don't exist for them." This experience echoes the ways in which Dalit movements have had to assert their specific identities and concerns within broader social justice movements.⁴⁶

Both cases illustrate how identity formation can be a powerful tool of resistance against oppressive power structures. For the CD community, their identity as the true Israel provided a basis for critiquing other Jewish groups perceived as having corrupted the covenantal laws. For Dalits, the reclamation of their identity has been crucial in their struggle against the caste system and in asserting their right to dignity and equality. This comparison reveals a common strategy among marginalized groups across different historical and cultural contexts. By actively shaping and asserting their identity, these groups challenge the dominant structures that have been used to justify their oppression. This process of identity formation becomes not just a means of self-definition, but a form of resistance against dominant power structures.

4.2. Plutocracy and Religious Authority

While the CD does not explicitly address plutocracy, its critique of corrupt leadership and its emphasis on divine judgment against those who "despise" God can be seen as relevant to critiques of wealth-based power (CD1:1-3). The CD's portrayal of God as having "a dispute with all flesh" and executing "judgment against all who despise him" suggests a universal accountability that could extend to those in positions of power and wealth (CD1:2). The CD provides further insight into its critique of wealth and power. The pursuit of wealth is characterized as a means of exacting vengeance on neighbours for grudges long borne. The wickedness of these actions is described as self-centred, wanton and vicious.⁴⁷ The CD argues that wealth should be used for the benefit of the community, not for personal gain. This is in contrast to the practices of outsiders, who often use wealth to elevate themselves. Wealth is seen as a public resource that should be

used for the good of the community, and private property is made public within the limited bounds of the association.⁴⁸ The CD also criticizes corrupt leadership and emphasizes the importance of using wealth for the community rather than individual gain.

In the Indian context, Dalit movements often highlight how economic power intersects with caste-based oppression, creating a form of plutocracy. The struggle for justice by Dalits, particularly in post-independence India, has been characterized by a desire for social identity, stability, and dignity in all spheres of life, including the economic sphere. The emergence of Dalit movements at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries has brought attention to the interconnected nature of cultural enslavement, economic exploitation, and political supremacy in Indian society.

A contemporary example of plutocracy:

It can be seen in the ostentatious display of wealth by the Ambani family during the opening of the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre in Mumbai, as highlighted in the article, "Ambani Event Exposes the Vulgarity of India's Plutocracy." The event, attended by global elites, underscores the deepening economic disparities in India, where a small elite amasses enormous wealth while the majority struggles with basic needs. Such displays of wealth underline the increasing concentration of economic power, which undermines democratic values and deepens social divisions.⁴⁹

This parallel between the CD's critique of corrupt leadership and the Dalit struggle against economic and caste-based oppression offers insights into how religious language and concepts can be used to critique systems where wealth and traditional authority intersect. Both contexts demonstrate the use of religious or moral frameworks to challenge existing power structures:

- The CD uses covenantal theology and the concept of divine judgment to assert the legitimacy of its community while criticizing corrupt groups. It condemns the pursuit of wealth for self-centred purposes, challenging the concentration of economic power in individuals. The CD's discussion of the "three nets of Belial" further links arrogance to economic acts,⁵⁰ emphasizing the moral dangers of wealth accumulation.
- Similarly, Dalit movements reinterpret religious texts to challenge caste-based economic oppression, while the critique of plutocracy in the Ambani event highlights how the concentration of wealth exacerbates social inequalities.⁵¹

The comparison reveals how marginalized groups use religious or moral frameworks to challenge systems of oppression combining traditional authority with economic power. The Damascus Covenant critiques religious leadership unfaithful to the covenant, while Dalits challenge caste-based discrimination tied to economic marginalization. The article on the Ambani event serves as a modern example of this dynamic.

The Damascus Covenant's emphasis on wealth as a "boundary marker" for the community, insisting on economic practices that benefit the collective rather than the individual, provides a powerful critique of plutocratic tendencies. This approach parallels how Dalit movements and critiques of contemporary plutocracy, like that seen in the Ambani event, use moral arguments to challenge the intersection of wealth and authority.

This parallel suggests that religious concepts and language offer a potent framework for critiquing plutocratic systems, whether in ancient religious communities or modern social justice movements. It highlights the potential for religious discourse to resist oppressive power structures combining wealth and traditional authority. As the Damascus covenanters anticipate

eschatological justice, they provide a model for how religious communities can challenge economic injustice in their contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of the Damascus Document and the Dalit struggle reveals a shared strategy of resistance through identity formation and a critique of power structures. Both cases illustrate how religious authority can serve as both a tool of oppression and a means of empowerment for marginalized communities. The Damascus Document's portrayal of a righteous remnant resonates with the Dalit movement's reclamation of identity against caste-based plutocracy. By examining these parallels, this paper underscores the enduring relevance of ancient texts in understanding and addressing contemporary social justice issues. Ultimately, the study invites a deeper reflection on how marginalized communities navigate the complexities of religious and political power to forge paths of resistance and hope.

Endnotes

- 1 Hereafter referred to as CD.
- 2 Hereafter referred to as DSS.
- 3 The Damascus document was first discovered in 1896 in the famous genizah of the ancient synagogue in Cairo by the well-known Jewish scholar Solomon Schechter, who was a lecturer on the Talmud at the time at the University of Cambridge. At Qumran, ten copies of this document came to light. It has had a unique history among the communal texts discovered at Qumran because it was known before 1947CE. Cf. James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 56.
- 4 Florentino García Martínez and Julio C. Trebolle Barrera, *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden, Netherlands ; New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 53.
- 5 Cf. Charlotte Hempel, *The Laws of the Damascus Document: Sources, Tradition and Redaction* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Michael A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Eibert Tigchelaar, "The Cave 4 Damascus Document Manuscripts," in *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judaean Desert Discoveries*, ed.

- Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov (London: Oak Knoll Press, 2002), 93–109.
- 6 Cf. Michael A Knibb, “Exile in the Damascus Document,” *JSOT* 8.25 (1983): 99–117; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Damascus,” *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* 1:166–70.
- 7 Which indicates that internal markers in the lack of an external title page or the preferred Zadokite branch of the Aaronite priestly dynasty, with Zadok serving as the High Priest in Solomon’s temple. see CD 3:21–4:1; 4:3–4; 5:5; 4Q266 (4QDa) 5 I, 16. where it appears to be a place of exilic dwelling and covenant entry or renewal. Cf. Steven D. Fraade, *The Damascus Document*, First Edition., The Oxford Commentary on the Dead Sea Scrolls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3.
- 8 Fraade, *The Damascus Document*, 4.
- 9 John J. Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2010), 1–2.
- 10 Hempel, *The Laws of the Damascus Document: Sources, Tradition and Redaction*, 25–26; Stephen Hultgren, *From the Damascus Covenant to the Covenant of the Community: Literary, Historical, and Theological Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 66 of *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007), 535–39.
- 11 Jutta Jokiranta, *Social Identity and Sectarianism in the Qumran Movement*, vol. 105 of *STDJ* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 17.
- 12 Steven D. Fraade, *The Damascus Document*, The Oxford Commentary on the Dead Sea Scrolls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 5.
- 13 Fraade, *The Damascus Document*, 6.
- 14 Translation is by the Presenter unless it is indicated otherwise.
- 15 This concept was already advanced by the biblical prophets, who developed it into a key motif that God would not fail his people. In Isaiah it becomes associated with exile from which only a few will return. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 225–27.
- 16 This opening to a section is a call to attention, commonly employed in the hortatory sections of Deuteronomy (5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9), and conveying a sense of oral communication. See also CD 2:2, 14; 4Q266 (4QDa) 1 a–b 5; Mic 1:2; Prov 4:1; and especially Isa 51:7, with which the whole sentence is almost identical. It is suggestive of an oral rhetorical setting.
- 17 Fraade, *The Damascus Document*, 30.
- 18 Knibb, “Exile in the Damascus Document,” 113; Fraade, *The Damascus Document*, 33.
- 19 Fraade, *The Damascus Document*, 33.
- 20 Thomas R. Blanton, *Constructing A New Covenant: Discursive Strategies in the Damascus Document and Second Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 41.
- 21 Maxine L Grossman, *Reading for History in the Damascus Document: A Methodological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 180–81.
- 22 Blanton, *Constructing a New Covenant*, 49.
- 23 Hanne Irene Kirchheiner, “Revitalisation in Judea: An Anthropological Study of Damascus Document” (PhD, University of Birmingham, 2018), 85.
- 24 Kirchheiner, “Revitalisation in Judea: An Anthropological Study of Damascus Document,” 56.
- 25 Paul Swarup, *The Self-Understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls Community: An Eternal Planting, A House of Holiness* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 84.
- 26 Hempel, *The Laws of the Damascus Document: Sources, Tradition and Redaction*, 322.
- 27 Bruce McComiskey, *Rhetoric and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Purity, Covenant, and Strategy at Qumran* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), 86.
- 28 Knibb, “Exile in the Damascus Document,” 110.
- 29 The CD depend on greatly on remnant theology, understanding the members of the sect as the exiled remnant that would one day return to reclaim control of Jerusalem and the temple (cf. CD 3:18–4:4).
- 30 Blanton, *Constructing a New Covenant*, 49.
- 31 Blanton, *Constructing a New Covenant*.
- 32 Ghanshayam Shah, “Introduction: Dalit Politics,” in *Dalit Indentity and Politics*, ed. Ghanshayam Shah (New Delhi: SAGE, 2001), 17–18.
- 33 James Massey, *Towards Dalit Hermeneutics: Rereading the Text, the History and the Literature* (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit Studies, 2001), 3–4.
- 34 James Massey, *Dalits: Issues and Concerns* (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1998), 2.
- 35 Kondasingu Jesurathnam, “Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics: Rereading the Psalm of Laments,” *BTF* 34.1 (2002): 1–2.
- 36 James Massey, *Dalits in India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1999), 15.

- 37 Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), 271.
- 38 V Devasahayam, *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* (Madras: ISPCK, 1997), 13–14.
- 39 James Massey, *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 1–4; Linus Neli, *Human Dignity and Human Rights: Concepts from Christian and Hindu Traditions* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2014), 118–20.
- 40 Ravela Jeeva Kumar, “Justice of God in the Book of Job: A Sociological Reading” (Doctor of Theology, Senate of Serampore, 2018), 240.
- 41 Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, *Post Hindu India: A Discourse On Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual And Scientific Revolution* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2009), ix–xxvi.
- 42 Hultgren, *From the Damascus Covenant to the Covenant of the Community: Literary, Historical, and Theological Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 291.
- 43 Hultgren, *From the Damascus Covenant to the Covenant of the Community: Literary, Historical, and Theological Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 229.
- 44 Massey, *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation*, 1–4.
- 45 Jesurathnam, “Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics: Rereading the Psalm of Laments,” 1–4.
- 46 Sukanya Shantha, “Bahujan Women Asked to Leave ‘Reclaim the Night’ March in Mumbai,” *The Wire* (Mumbai, 17 August 2024), § Rights, <https://thewire.in/rights/bahujan-women-asked-to-leave-reclaim-the-night-march-in-mumbai>.
- 47 Catherine M. Murphy, *Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community*, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 37.
- 48 Murphy, *Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community*, 102.
- 49 Anand Teltumbde, “Ambani Event Exposes the Vulgarly of India's Plutocracy,” *The Leaflet* (Mumbai, 21 July 2024), <https://theleaflet.in/ambani-event-exposes-the-vulgarity-of-indias-plutocracy/>.
- 50 Murphy, *Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community*, 38.
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Characteristics of Major Critical Editions of Greek New Testament: Critical Texts

*H. Joseph Lalfakmawia**

We have dealt with *Textus Receptus* (TR) based critical editions, also known as ‘Majority Text’ in our previous article published last year (IJT, Vol. 65, No. 1, 2023). Scholars were reluctant to depart from the TR as it had long been regarded as a standard text which has to be followed both by scholars and lay people. The Byzantine text-type manuscripts were quite plenty that it outweighs the other text-types. The counterpart text-type, that is, the Alexandrian texts are rather minimal in terms of quantity. Additionally, the discovery of one of the most outstanding manuscripts, Cod. Sinaiticus, was also late. Therefore, Majority Text (Byzantine) reigned for a long time without proper contender.

With the discovery of more manuscripts., scholars became more confident and keener to argue for more ancient and reliable sources that would probably be closer to the autograph. The beginning was lonesome and enterprising. But some scholars broke the ice. However, those textual scholars had been considered liberal and were accused of deserters. More surprisingly, the friction was intensified rather than waning down.

The text that left the TR is known as the Critical Text. With the introduction of *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) and its method, Coherent Based Genealogical Method, has made a significant

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change especially in the debate between the Majority Text and Critical Text. In this article, we will deal with thirteen critical texts.

1. Edward Wells, *An Help for the more Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures*. Oxford, 1709-1719

Edward Wells (1667-1727) was an English mathematician and geographer. He is the earliest textual scholar who apparently abandoned the TR. His new edition is also known as the first attempt to represent a critically-revised Greek text.¹ He boldly inserted his emendations not simply in the marginal notes but in the text itself.² He published his edition in ten parts within 1709-1719, beginning with 1-2 Thessalonians and Galatians (1709). Wells deserted Elzevir's TR 210 times.³ He made use of John Mill's edition (in fact, Mill's text is a reprint of Stephanus' 3rd edition 1550), especially the textual apparatus.⁴

This edition is a polyglot edition with three columns: his Greek edition, Authorised Version and Paraphrase (English). He explained his approach within the title pages:⁵

- i) The original or Greek Text amended according to the best and most ancient readings.
- ii) The common English translation rendered more agreeable to the original.
- iii) A paraphrase, wherein not only the difficult expressions and passages are explained, but also the design of the Apostle, and the method used by him in prosecuting his design, are set forth by proper divisions into sections and paragraphs.

In spite of his contributions, Wells' work has been overlooked by many historians of the Greek NT.

2. Johann Jakob Griesbach, *Novum Testamentum Graece*

Johann Jakob Griesbach (January 4, 1745–March 24, 1812) was a German biblical scholar who studied under Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791). His contribution towards textual criticism is

quite profound. It can be said that his Greek editions (1775-1806) are the true landmarks in the history of critical text. His approach and Wettstein's (1693-1754) approach are contrasting especially their view on the older manuscripts. His general principles of criticism are:⁶

- i) No reading must be considered preferable, unless it has the support of at least some ancient testimonies.
- ii) A shorter is to be preferred to the longer one.
- iii) In a variant reading, the more difficult and obscure reading is preferred.
- iv) The harsh reading that is unusual is preferred.
- v) The less emphatic unless emphasis may be expected is preferred.

Griesbach paid attention to Origen's biblical quotations. He divided the manuscripts into three classes of text:

- i) **Western text:** These texts were circulated early. Copyists made errors and therefore, corrections are needed.⁷ This text is found in Latin Fathers as well as in Cod. D.⁸
- ii) **Alexandrian text:** He opined that this text was an attempt to revise the old corrupt text (Western).⁹ These texts are chiefly found in Origen's quotations and in codices A B C and L.¹⁰
- iii) **Constantinopolitan text:** This text emerged from the western and the Alexandrian texts.¹¹ This text is found in the mass of the Greek manuscripts.¹²

Griesbach studied and used *Textus Receptus* (Elzevir) as a base text, but boldly departed from it. He went farther than his predecessors in doing this. In fact, Wettstein too wanted to depart from the TR but dared not do so.¹³ One notable ideology he had is that **he openly rejected the popular belief that the individual words of the New Testament were divinely inspired**. But he defended the apostolic authorship of most of the New Testament,

the historicity of miracles, and the importance of biblical theology as the foundation of church doctrine.¹⁴

Griesbach's Greek new edition, *Novum Testamentum Graece* was published in 1775-77 at Halle. Another edition was published in 1796-1806.

3. Karl Lachmann, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 1831 and 1846

Karl Konrad Friedrich Wilhelm Lachmann (1793-1851) is not a theologian proper but a classical scholar and philologist. Unlike his predecessors, he did not begin with the TR and departed from it, but based his edition on a handful of Greek manuscripts. In fact, he ignored the TR. Like Griesbach, he **valued the oldest evidence above all else** in reconstructing a text.¹⁵ He published his first edition in 1831. His principles in reconstructing his text are:¹⁶

- i) He has selected a text in agreement with the custom of the most ancient Eastern churches.
- ii) Where there was uncertainty about their text, he has given preference to the agreement of Italy and Africa (i.e., to the Old Latin manuscripts)
- iii) In cases where there was still uncertainty, he has indicated this by brackets in the text and marginal notes on alternative readings.
- iv) He disregarded the TR text.

Lachmann distinguished only two main classes of tradition, Eastern text and Western texts. He usually followed the Eastern text, because very often the Western readings were transmitted in Latin only.¹⁷ **He ignored all the previous Greek editions as well as the minuscule manuscripts, but based on no more than four Greek manuscripts (codices B, A, C, and T [a fifth century Greek-Coptic manuscript containing parts of Luke and John]).** He received criticism as he based on minimal manuscripts, ignoring hundreds of manuscripts. He was also criticised because he was not even a theologian to work on biblical text.¹⁸

Lachmann published a small edition in 1831 containing only the Greek text (without preface), with a list of the readings at the end wherein he differs from that of Elzevir.¹⁹ He was not too ambitious to find out neither the original reading nor even the earliest, but to find out the one most widespread in the fourth century CE. He wanted to use the documents in use in the early Eastern churches at the time of Jerome.²⁰ For that purpose, he used codices B, A, C, and T. He gave importance to Latin Vulgate. Though he was one of the noteworthy pioneers of textual criticism, he was also criticised as his text was established on a very narrow basis, sometimes on one or two manuscripts. such as Cod. Alexandrinus. He too put less critical apparatus.²¹ He cited from codices A B C P Q T and Z in the Gospels as primary, and D as secondary. He neglected all other majuscules/uncials and all minuscules. When he cited Latin versions, he used *a*, *b*, *c* and *d*. He entirely neglected other versions such as Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic and Aramaic. Among the church Fathers, he used Origen (in the Gospels) as primary authority; Irenaeus, Cyprian, Hilary, and Lucifer as of secondary, and lastly Vulgate of Jerome.²²

Cod. κ (Sinaiticus) has not been discovered during this time, and Cod. B and C were also not critically studied. Despite that lacking, scholars regarded that he annihilated the reign of the TR and instead, the value of the older uncials are added.²³ In spite of his great contributions, he too faced sharp criticisms, firstly because he was not a theologian proper. The so-called liberal critic, De Wette even said that Lachmann had wasted his time and labour. However, one of the greatest editors of the Greek NT, Tregelles commented him saying, "He led the way in casting aside the so-called Textus Receptus, and boldly placing the New Testament wholly and entirely on the basis of actual authority."²⁴

4. Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament*

Henry Alford (1810-1871) was an English scholar, a churchly man and song composer. His Greek edition is usually not included among the critical edition probably due to the approach he

employed or his arrangement of the text. His Greek NT is in 4 vols. and inserted commentary. He put a comprehensive preface on every Gospel/Letter. The upper portion of each page is the Greek text. Numerous notes are within the margin. Critical apparatus is put in the middle portion of the page, and the critical and exegetical comments are in the lower part of the page. In one way, his book can be categorised as a critical and exegetical commentary.

It appears that Alford did not have a fresh approach. He pointed out Lachmann's and Scholz's names very frequently. In one way, it can be said that he followed the tracks of these two scholars. Though he boldly criticized the TR, yet he showed respect to a great extent. He neither directly discarded it totally nor was in favour of it. He seemed to go in the middle course between two extremes. His approaches can be summarized as follows:²⁵

- i) Wherever the primary manuscripts. (codices A, B, C, D, P, Q, T, Z - according to him, these are first class authority)²⁶ are unanimous, he opted that reading rejecting the TR.
- ii) Where the primary manuscripts are divided, he retained the TR text but marked it as 'doubtful' with asterisk mark (*) or bracket [].

As mentioned above, according to Alford, codices A, B, C, D, P, Q, T, Z (all uncial) are *first class authority* manuscripts and codices E F G H I K L M N O R S U V W X Y G D Q L are *second class authority* manuscripts. He also mentioned 469 minuscules, but did not study by himself. Rather he depended on Scholz who studied them before.²⁷ He made use of the ancient versions (Old Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic and Armenian) as well as the Church Fathers' quotations. In spite of his great efforts and comprehensive sources, he did not claim his edition as the best nor most correct attainable; rather, as a provisional text only.²⁸ Though his four volume books are not pure Greek NT edition due to multiple parts especially commentary due to which his text is always left out among the critical editions. However, his approach

and efforts qualified his text to be included among the list of Greek NT critical editions.

5. Konstantin von Tischendorf, *H Kainh Diaqhkh: Novum Testamentum Graece, 1862*

Konstantin von Tischendorf (1815-1874), a professor of theology at Leipzig University was one of the greatest textual critics of the 19th century CE. He was extraordinarily hard working in search of manuscripts, deciphering and collating the manuscripts which he found. He traversed Europe and the East in search of new manuscripts. Fortune seemed to favour him too as he found twenty uncials, amongst them the famous *Cod. Sinaiticus* (Ⲁ or 01) which he edited carefully. Other manuscripts he edited are *Cod. Vaticanus* (B or 03), *Cod. Ephraemi Rescriptus* (C or 04) and *Cod. Claromontanus* (D or 06).²⁹

Tischendorf's eight editions of Greek NT were renowned and mostly reprinted many times. In the first three editions (1841 - 42), he departed only slightly from Lachmann's text, and in the next four, he moved backward to TR, but in the last, the 8th edition, *The Editio Octavo Maior* (1869-72), which is also very famous, he radically changed his perspective and closely followed *Cod. Sinaiticus*. The critical apparatus of this edition is still essential today for NT textual criticism.³⁰ This edition (8th) is often called Tischendorf's Greek edition. The textual critical apparatus he put in this edition is so comprehensive and valuable that it is still essential till today. His patristic quotations are also more complete than the editions proceeded by him.³¹

Tischendorf is the discoverer of *Cod. Ⲁ* which is a copy of a Septuagint on a parchment (leather) which he discovered at the foot of Mt. Sinai, in the Convent of St. Catherine in May, 1844. There was a heap of old parchments (many of which had been burnt up) in the middle of a hall. Among these parchments, Tischendorf found about 43 pages that contained ancient writings. After sometimes, he returned to the convent and found out the full

version of that manuscripts in 1859, and with much difficulty, he took it out and consequently published the copy in 1862.³²

The first printing of a splendid edition of 300 copies of this manuscript was sponsored by the Russian Emperor Alexander II in memorial of the 1000th anniversary of the Russian monarchy. Of the 300 copies, 200 copies were given out as presents from the Emperor to various public figures and a few learned people. The rest were given to Tischendorf for sale.³³ The final publication was an exact reproduction of the original (facsimile), and about 1232 copies of four folio volumes each. Each book contained four volumes. The original codex was housed in the Imperial Public Library at St. Petersburg and became known as *Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus*. In 1933, the Soviet government, in dire need of cash, sold the codex to the British Museum for 1,00,000 pounds.³⁴ This codex is known as *Cod. Sinaiticus* or *Cod. Ⲙ*.

Cod. Ⲙ is an Alexandrian text-type manuscript. **It is one of the best and the earliest complete copy of the NT.**³⁵ *Cod. Ⲙ* has thrown a great light and development in the Greek NT textual studies. However, it does not persuade those who do not endorse Alexandrian text-type.

Although Tischendorf exerted his best, he could make use of only 64 uncials (while we have nearly 300 manuscripts), only one papyrus (while we have about 136 today) and knew only small number of minuscules (while we have nearly 3000 manuscripts today).³⁶ In fact, he gave extreme significance to the *Cod. Ⲙ* due to which, some scholars readily criticized. Moreover, scholars argued that in spite of his extensive contributions, Tischendorf did not contribute to the improvement in ‘method’ of NT textual criticism.³⁷ His excessive dependence on the *Cod. Ⲙ*, according to some scholars, indicates his lacking in the field of textual criticism.³⁸

The digital copy of the Codex is accessible at <https://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx>

6. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *The Greek New Testament*. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1857-1879

Tregelles and Tischendorf were contemporaries, but lived a contrasting life situation. Tischendorf was richly blessed with financial resources, and was backed up by influential figures while Tregelles was opposite to that. Hence, he could publish his works only once, shortly before his death, and therefore, not a celebrated edition as Tischendorf’s. However, his great work made him one of the brightest stars in the NT textual studies.

Like Lachmann, Tregelles did not have theological degrees. He got his degree from Falmouth Classical School. While he earned his livelihood at an ironworks, he managed in his spare time to learn Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and Welsh by himself. After he acquired some knowledge in textual history, he was determined to prepare an edition based only on the evidence of the earliest witnesses. Slowly he worked out in the collation of manuscripts. and travelled throughout Europe for his purpose. Due to his careful and systematic examination of the then known majuscules/uncials and several important minuscules, he could make correction of many erroneous citations made by previous editors.³⁹ Despite poverty, opposition and ill-health (stroke of paralysis in 1870) that hindered him to complete some of his findings, he overcame all such difficulties and his lifetime’s meticulous work was published at London in six parts between 1587 and 1872.

Tregelles employed several manuscripts to edit his text. His Greek NT is a diglot, his Greek text and Jerome’s Vulgate side by side. He put marginal note beside the text and a comprehensive critical apparatus at the bottom of the page. Since he was a contemporary of Tischendorf, he hardly got chance to utilize Tischendorf’s *Cod. Ⲙ*; as well as the critical edition of *Cod. B* physically. It is said that he intended to visit Vatican library to make use of the *Cod. B*, but he was not permitted to inspect in Rome by the jealous authorities⁴⁰ and therefore, could not transcribe it.⁴¹ He

suffered from paralysis while he was working on the last chapters of Revelation in 1870.⁴²

Tregelles valued the former editions and collations of others. However, he made his own efforts collating all the manuscripts he could obtain. He personally inspected as much as possible. He collated the following manuscripts:⁴³

- i) Gospels: E G H K M U X 1, 33, 69
- ii) Acts: G H, 13, 31
- iii) Pauline letters: D (prior to its publication) F J, 17, 37, fragment of 53
- iv) Revelation: 14

Apart from these, Tregelles examined and made facsimile of almost all the manuscripts which had been published, and he also collated the printed texts. He employed the ancient versions in his editing works. But he considered versions later than 6th century as possessing no value as witnesses to the ancient text.⁴⁴ In his opinion, 4th century manuscripts were the oldest obtainable witnesses. After his extensive studies, he formulated his principles as follows:⁴⁵

- i) The most authoritative texts are the oldest manuscripts and versions, aided by the earlier citations of the Church Fathers.
- ii) In cases where there are *certain proofs*, he used the data so as a correct text.
- iii) In cases where the oldest documents agree in certain, undoubted, transcriptural error, he explained the correct text (according to his finding) and did not follow it. He gave another reading which he preferred to follow.
- iv) In matters altogether doubtful, he stated distinctly the conflicting evidence in the textual apparatus, and thus he **approximated towards a true text.**

7. Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. Cambridge and London, Macmillan & Co.; New York, Harper & Brothers, 1881

Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort were natural science scholars. In fact, Westcott was Hort's tutor. Both were also pastors of the Church of England. Philip Schaff, the writer of *Introduction to the American Edition of the New Testament in the Original Greek (Westcott and Hort)* praised Hort by saying, "he is probably more familiar with the textual history of the Greek Testament than any other man living."⁴⁶ In his opinion, Westcott and Hort were the best Greek and biblical scholars in England. Westcott and Hort began their work in 1853 and finished in 1881. Critical rules that were more or less designed and accepted by textual scholars (which even Westcott and Hort too followed) are there. Some of them are:⁴⁷

- i) Knowledge of documentary evidence must precede the choice of readings.
- ii) All kinds of evidence must be taken into account.
- iii) The sources of the text must be carefully sifted and classified, and the authorities must be weighed rather than numbered. One independent manuscript may be worth two dozen which are copied from the same original.
- iv) The older reading is preferable to the later, because it is presumably nearer to the source. In exceptional cases, later copies may represent a more ancient reading.
- v) The shorter reading is preferable to the longer, because insertions and additions are more probable than omissions.
- vi) The more difficult reading is preferable to the easier (Bengel's first rule).
- vii) That reading is preferable which best suits the peculiar style, manner, and habits of thought of the author.

- viii) That reading is preferable which shows no doctrinal bias, whether orthodox or heretical.
- ix) The agreement of the most ancient witnesses of all classes decides the true reading against all medieval copies and printed editions.
- x) The primary uncials, \aleph , B, C, and A—especially \aleph and B—if sustained by ancient versions and ante-Nicene citations (Church Fathers), outweigh all later authorities, and give us presumably the original text.

Westcott and Hort Greek NT was published in two volumes. Vol. 1 consists of the Greek text and ‘a brief and general introduction’ appended at the end of the Greek text. Vol. 2 was published by Hort in 1882, that is, the comprehensive ‘introduction and appendix’ of the Greek text. They clearly confessed that they based exclusively on documentary evidence (manuscripts only), and were not taking any of the printed editions into account. In the simplest sense, documentary evidence tends to mean that ‘good manuscripts should be trusted.’⁴⁸ The documentary evidence consists of manuscripts dating from 4th to 16th century, of ancient versions in different languages (such as Old Latin, Coptic etc.), and of quotations found in the extant remains of the early Church Fathers written in Greek, Latin and to a small extent in Syriac. Patristic quotations and early versions are highly regarded because the earliest extant Greek NT manuscripts do not carry us back further than to the middle of the 4th century.⁴⁹ Wherever there are variant readings, two classes of evidence are employed for making decision: internal evidence and external evidence.⁵⁰

Internal evidence: Internal evidence means comparing the readings of manuscripts. on the variant readings. There are two kinds of internal evidence: consideration of what the author is likely to have written, and the consideration of what the copyist is likely to have made him seen to have written.

External evidence: External evidence means comparing the authority of the manuscripts. which attest the variant readings.

Westcott and Hort classified manuscripts into four types of texts:

- i) **Western Text:** This text seemed to be the earliest of the four types of texts, that was already circulated before the middle of the 2nd century.
 - a) The first clear evidence of such texts was Marcion and Justine the Martyr’s quotations.
 - b) The quotations in the writings of Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Methodius are considered as Western readings.⁵¹
 - c) Old Latin version of earlier forms and Old Syriac are also western.⁵²

The major characteristic of this text is extreme use of paraphrase. Words and even clauses are changed, omitted, and inserted with surprising freedom, wherever it seemed that the meaning could be brought out with greater force and definiteness.⁵³ Additions from sources extraneous to their immediate source are also plenty.⁵⁴ Hence, Westcott and Hort opined that the parent copy or copies of the western text may have differed from the originals.⁵⁵

- ii) **Alexandrian Text:** They considered this text as less prominent than the western texts. Quotations in the writings are Clement of Alexandria and Origen belong to Alexandrian type. However, Origen’s writings have flavours of western readings too.⁵⁶ Although this text is less important and less numerous than the Western text, it showed care and skill in the use of language. It was believed that the manuscripts unaffected by the Western readings were used and preserved by the Alexandrian scholars.⁵⁷
- iii) **Neutral Text:** This text sometimes simply opposed to the western or to Alexandrian readings, or occasionally opposed to Western and to Alexandrian readings alike. B

and \aleph are neutral texts. Among the version, Memphitic and Thebaic, Old and Jerusalem Syriac and African Latin are also neutral. Minuscules 61 and 13 also belong to this group.⁵⁸

iv) **Syrian or Antiochian Text:** It is the latest of all. Sometimes it is the combination of Western and the neutral readings. The exclusive Syrian readings are counted as editorial revision, and therefore, none of them have the stamp of genuineness to attest the use of extraneous and purer sources.⁵⁹ This text appeared after the fourth century when a mixture of texts prevailed everywhere. It is no doubt that numerous variations occur in which the decisive evidence is lacking. It is difficult to decide which reading has to be preferred to the other or others. In such cases, though they boldly said that they strictly depend on documentary sources other than the printed editions, yet, in order not to simply depend on a single text, they crosschecked with the editions of Griesbach, Lachmann, Tregelles and even Tischendorf's latest edition.⁶⁰ They followed a very bold method. They employed various marks in the texts. Interpretation and verses classified as such can be seen in the appendix of the book. For instance,

- i) [] - This mark indicates that the word or words enclosed in them are omitted in secondary readings. For example, Mt 7.24 of WH reads τὸς λόγους [τούτους]. This means that τὸς λόγους τούτους is the primary reading whereas τὸς λόγους (without τούτους) is the secondary reading (later insertion).
- ii) [[]] - Indicates that word or words or clause or even sentences within the double square brackets are rejected readings. [[Longer ending of Mark (16.9-20)]]; Pericope Adulterae (Jn 7.53-8.11) is not within the text, even within [[]];

iii) *Ap* † in the margin – Primitive error

iv) Pericope Adulterae (Jn 7.53-8.11) is in a marginal note within [[]] because it has inferior textual support. Since it is also an independent narrative, it is kept at the end of the Gospel.⁶¹

Order of books:

- i) Four Gospels
- ii) Acts
- iii) Catholic Epistles (7 letters)
- iv) Paul's letters (Hebrews between 2 Thess and 1 Tim)
- v) Revelation

WH Greek NT is regarded by many scholars as one of the most significant critical texts. Leading textual scholars such as Metzger and Ehrman commented, "The year 1881 was marked by the publication of the most noteworthy critical edition of the Greek Testament ever produced by British scholarship."⁶²

8. Nestle, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 1906

Eberhard Nestle published Greek NT in 1898 with the title *Novum Testamentum Graece*. This is the first edition of this Greek NT. The three earlier and scholarly editions such as Tischendorf, Westcott & Hort and Weymouth are the basis. He revised it in 1901 in which he replaced Weymouth's version with Bernhard Weiß's 194/1900 edition. Though this edition is the product of a scholar, but critical apparatus is not comprehensive enough. Where textual decisions differed from each other, Nestle chose his own text which was supported by the two editions, and the third variant, he put in the textual apparatus.

Erwin, son of Nestle published the 13th edition in 1927 in which sufficient critical apparatus basing on manuscripts, early translations and patristic citations were inserted. Though there were improvements, but these are mostly from citations from the editions mainly from von Soden's.⁶³ Whatever it is, it became a significant milestone in the development of NT critical texts.

9. Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed., 2012

The chain of Nestle's Greek NT seems to be unbroken. But a great leap happened in 1950s when Kurt Aland appeared. He made a significant upgradation by checking the apparatus entries against Greek manuscripts and editions of the Church Fathers. He finally published the 25th edition of Greek NT with the same title, *Novum Testamentum Graece*. The printings of this edition carried the brand name "Nestle-Aland" on the book covers.

The 26th edition (NA²⁶) appeared in 1979. This text included early papyri and other manuscripts discoveries. This edition was so elated that it represented the situation of textual criticism in the 20th century. The text of Nestle-Aland 26th edition (NA²⁶) was identical with that of the 3rd edition of the UBS Greek NT (GNT) published in 1975 (which we will elaborate below) because both these editions (NA²⁶ and GNT³) were parallel works. Kurt Aland (the general editor of the NA²⁶), Matthew Black, Bruce M. Metzger, Alan Wikgren and Arthur Vööbus (later Carlo Martini, and from 1982 Barbara Aland and Johannes Karavidipoulos) were the editors of the GNT³ also written as UBS³.

The NA²⁷ appeared in 2006. The text of NA²⁶ was adopted and remained the same for the NA²⁷ while there was an extensive revision in the textual apparatus. However, more development in the Greek text led the revision of the NA²⁷ too especially due to the publication of ECM of the Catholic Letters (which we will study below). Then appeared NA²⁸ in 2012, published by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, Germany. This is the latest and current version of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*. The NA²⁸ was resulted by two motifs: i) the apparatus had to be revised thoroughly to give it more clarity and make it easier to use. ii) Due to the text-critical insights and decisions resulting from the *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) of the *Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung* (Institute for New Testament Textual Research), University of Münster, Westphalia, Germany. The editors are

Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidipoulos, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce M. Metzger.

We can generally say that the NA²⁸ and the GNT^{4/5} (sometimes, we write it as UBS^{4/5} which we will elaborate below) are two of the major texts for NT studies especially in India, as well as around the globe.

10. The United Bible Societies, *The Greek New Testament* (GNT or UBS GNT)

This edition is used by the Bible Society of India. It was published by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (Germany), American Bible Society and United Bible Societies (New York). The first edition was published in 1966 with the title *The Greek New Testament* (GNT). Its text was established along the lines of WH and differed from the NA^{25,64}. To bring out GNT¹, various textual scholars were appointed from American Bible Society, The National Bible Society of Scotland, and the Württemberg Bible Society in 1955. These three societies were later joined by Netherlands Bible Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society.⁶⁵

GNT¹ had some special features:

- i) Critical apparatus are primarily meant for translators and therefore, significant variant readings are incorporated.
- ii) An indication of the relative degree of certainty for each variant adopted.
- iii) A full citation of representative evidence for each variant selected.
- iv) A second apparatus giving meaningful differences of punctuation.

The Committee carried out its work in four principal stages:⁶⁶

- i) Westcott and Hort's edition of the Greek New Testament was used as a base. But comparison was made with various editions such as Nestle, Bover, Merk, and Vogels, Tischendorf and von Soden.

- ii) Printed editions, commentaries, unused papyri, uncials, minuscules and lectionaries were used.
- iii) Punctuations are improved.
- iv) The degree of certainty was estimated, and decisions were made whether or not to include a set of variants in the apparatus.

The GNT² (1968) contained only few textual changes. The principal differences between GNT¹ and GNT² are revisions in the degree of certainty, that is, A, B, C and D ratings. The 3rd edition (GNT³, 1975) contains more thorough revision of the Greek text. The committee, sponsored by the United Bible Societies, established a single text for the GNT³ and NA²⁶. So, the GNT³ and NA²⁶ text are identical. The celebrated book, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (1971), edited by Bruce M. Metzger on behalf of the Committee, is based on this Third Edition.

The text of the GNT⁴ was identical to GNT³/NA²⁶. GNT⁵ was published in 2014. This edition differed from GNT⁴ and NA²⁸ due to the influence of the publication of ECM on General Epistles. Recent discoveries on papyri, i.e., P117-P127 were consulted. The manuscripts employed to produce GNT⁵ is quite tremendous. About 208 uncials were classified as category I, II, III and IV. Among the minuscules, all category I and II, about 10 category III and some few from category V are employed. About 87 minuscules are used according to the list displayed. Most importantly, the texts of the GNT⁵ and NA²⁸ are identical.⁶⁷ Like the NA²⁸, GNT⁵ is based on *Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung (Institute for New Testament Textual Research)*, University of Münster, Westphalia, Germany.

The critical apparatus of GNT^{4/5} is more reader friendly and comprehensive than NA²⁸. As we have said, ECM has already published the Catholic Epistles. It is predictable that the whole GNT text will be assimilated by the ECM once the whole NT is completed.

11. Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition, 2010*

The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition (SBLGNT) was jointly published by the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) and Logos Bible Software in 2010. An electronic version is freely available at <http://sblgnt.com> for students, teachers, translators, and scholars in a wide variety of settings and contexts. The publishers were not dissatisfied with the previous critical texts such as NA and UBS GNT, but understood that these texts are not easily accessible for scholars and students who are in under-resourced regions. Hence, they try to bring out the critical text at the fingertips of those who are having fewer opportunities. This spirit is praiseworthy because it is known to all the biblical students, especially in poorer regions, that the NA and GNT are too expensive to buy. This also means that it is out of reach for lay people. (However, the Bible Society of India is giving handsome subsidy for students; thanks to the BSI). The publisher is very generous to notify that “the SBLGNT is available in electronic form so that any scholar or student may freely download all or portions of the text for personal study and research as well as for limited use in scholarly publications... In short, a contemporary, critically edited text of the Greek New Testament is now widely and freely available.⁶⁸ The publishers of the SBLGNT deserve honour.

SBLGNT acknowledges and respects NA and GNT as ‘standard text’ of the Greek New Testament.⁶⁹ However, it has variations in more than 540 units.⁷⁰ In fact, the SBLGNT is the new edition of the Greek NT, established with the help of earlier, in particular, four editions:⁷¹

- i) **WH:** Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, vol. 1: *Text*; vol. 2: *Introduction and Appendix* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1881).
- ii) **Treg:** Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *The Greek New Testament, Edited from Ancient Authorities, with their*

Various Readings in Full, and the Latin Version of Jerome (London: Bagster; Stewart, 1857–1879).

- iii) **NIV**: Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). This edition presents the Greek text behind the New International Version. This version differs from the NA and GNT at 231 places.
- iv) **RP**: *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform 2005*, compiled and arranged by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont (Southborough, Mass.: Chilton, 2005).

The starting point of this edition was that of the WH text which was compared and contrasted with other three editions (Treg, NIV and RP) in order to identify points of agreement and disagreement between them. Where all four editions agreed, the text was tentatively accepted as the text of the SBL edition. But where there are disagreements, the editor determined which variant to print as the text. Another peculiar characteristic is that even when all these four editions were in agreement, the editor still determined whether to accept that reading or to adopt an alternative variant as the text. There are about 56⁷² (Elliot counted it as 18⁷³) such variation units in the SBLGNT according to the determination of the editor. The editor abbreviated these texts as 'Holmes' after his name. They consulted the ECM (Catholic Letters) too. But they stood firm in their findings, and therefore, the SBLGNT differs from the ECM at 39 places.⁷⁴ The editor's courage is commendable, probably more than the editors of NA and GNT.

12. *The Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge, 2017*

The Greek New Testament (THGNT) was published by the Tyndale House, Cambridge. The editors were Dirk JonGreekind and Peter Williams. Based on Tregelles' (1813-1875), it employs a documentary approach that "aims to present the New Testament

books in the earliest form in which they are well attested."⁷⁵ *The goal of the THGNT is to give the text of the original Greek as accurately as possible.*⁷⁶ JonGreekind wrote, "The THGNT started off by digitizing a Greek New Testament published in the nineteenth century by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. That text was then thoroughly compared to the earliest manuscripts and many later ones."⁷⁷ The editors changed Tregelles's text wherever they saw fit, and the revisions proved so extensive that the text evolved into a completely new work.⁷⁸ *Since the base text is Tregelles' Greek NT, there are several differences from NA²⁸ and UBS GNT⁵.*

In terms of order of books, unlike many other editions and translations, Acts is followed by Catholic Epistles in the THGNT. The reason for this order is that in the manuscript tradition, Acts and the Catholic Epistles frequently go together and also appear in the manuscripts before the Pauline Letters.⁷⁹ Some of the outstanding features of the THGNT are:⁸⁰

- i) The text of the critical edition is "attested in two or more Greek manuscripts, at least one being from the fifth century or earlier. As their goal is "directly verified antiquity," the THGNT relies on the earliest manuscripts wherever feasible from the fifth century and earlier, to provide a text that is anchored in the early textual history of the New Testament.⁸¹
- ii) The order of the books is as follows: Gospels – Acts – General Epistles (James – Jude) – Pauline collection (Romans – Hebrews) – Revelation.
- iii) Due to a focus on the text and early manuscript features, the THGNT, in contrast with NA²⁸ and GNT⁵, does not include marginal notes, headings, quotation marks.
- iv) The minimal apparatus on each page is because they believe that this edition's chief significance lies not in its apparatus but in the text itself.

- v) Since their principle is “directly verified antiquity,” they did not employ minuscules, versions, or patristic citations as their sources.
- vi) They consulted only about two minuscules.⁸² Therefore, they included longer ending of Mark (Mk 16.9-20) but with a note. *Pericope Adulterae* (Jn 7.53-8.11) is relegated to the footnote but not in the text.
- vii) It is very particular in orthography (spelling, breathing marks, accents), paragraph markings and the order of books. It replicates the ancient tendency to use εἰ for ἰ, and ι for ἱ in certain books (e.g., γέινωμα instead of γίνομα in Mark).
- viii) Greever made a very significant comment on the THGNT: “The TGNT is not intended to replace but to compliment the NA and UBS editions, and it should stand alongside of them as yet another outstanding critical edition of the Greek NT.”

13. *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior*

Editio Critica Maior (ECM) is one of the latest critical editions. It is the critical edition of the Greek New Testament **for text-critics and exegetes**.⁸³ It is edited by Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF)/The Institute for New Testament Textual Research. Today more than 5500 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament are known. All known manuscripts have been recorded and catalogued by the INTF which owns microfilms or photos of more than 90% of them.⁸⁴ This is an ongoing project. The ECM project is supported by the Union of German Academies of Sciences and Humanities. It is estimated that this project will be completed by the year 2023. The text can be read online from the *Virtual Manuscript Room* of the INTF.⁸⁵ This gigantic project is under process. As far as my knowledge is concerned, Catholic Epistles, Acts and Mark have been edited and published.

- i) The first of its kind, *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior*, vol. 4, on Catholic Epistles, was published in 2013 with two parts (text and supplementary material). The editors were Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Gerd Mink, Holger Strutwolf and Klaus Wachtel.
- ii) The second publication was *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior*, vol. 3 (Acts of the Apostles) which came out in 2017. Editors were Holger Strutwolf, Georg Gäbel, Annette Hüffmeier, Gerd Mink and Klaus Wachtel.
- iii) The third publication was *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior*, vol. 2, Mark which came out in 2022 in three sets.

Editing work on John, the Pauline Epistles and Revelation is going on.⁸⁶ Each volume of the ECM includes “Text,” “Supplementary Material,” and “Studies”. This edition, right from the beginning, has been extremely influential that the earliest published books, that is the Catholic Letters, were also immediately incorporated in the NA²⁸ and GNT⁵. The whole series of the ECM is under way. It is believed that eventually its text will be adopted in its entirety in the NA,⁸⁷ and no doubt, even in UBS GNT.⁸⁸

The editors discarded the homogeneous manuscripts. that form the bulk of the tradition of the High Middle Ages (CE 1000-1300). The results were documented in the series “Text und Textwert.” This also indicates that the manuscripts they authorised for doing their textual research are primarily of the first millennium. It is a fact that manuscripts from Late Antiquity (4-6th century CE) and Early Middle Age (5/6-10th century CE) are few in numbers. Therefore, they included additional sources such as the quotations of the early Church Fathers and the old translations such as Latin, Coptic, and Syriac.⁸⁹ Then they digitalized these materials and made a full collation. The results are entered into databases, enabling the computer-based analysis of the entire material.

It is a known fact in the field of textual studies that only few extant manuscripts are ancient enough. Due to scribal errors or deliberate changes, numerous variant readings were born in the process of transmission of manuscripts. These changes/errors are nothing but contamination, i.e. the scribes have always incorporated readings which were not part of their master copy, but which they knew from other manuscripts.⁹⁰ This habit created immeasurable problem in the textual studies as to find out what might be the most original reading. In other words, we can say that due to contamination of the newly made copies from the sources, it is nearly impossible to know which extant manuscript is more authentic or ancient, which one is the source and which one is the copy. The INTF is developing computer-based programme to carry out this task. The method they employ is called **Coherence-Based Genealogical Method**.⁹¹ This new method seems to be so effective and convincing that it has brought a number of changes from the current editions (such as NA and UBS GNT). In the Catholic Epistles, there are thirty-four such changes and in Acts, there are fifty-two changes.

Unlike the former editions, Byzantine texts were significantly re-evaluated and given more weight than in the past. They acknowledged that the Byzantine manuscripts have early roots, and in some cases preserve the earliest reading in isolation from the rest of the tradition.⁹² In the meantime, let us remember that the ECM is taking only manuscripts of the first century millennium seriously. The new and significant outcome of the ECM is a reconsideration and abandonment of the concept of 'text-types' altogether. To them, classifying manuscripts into text-types such as Alexandrian, Byzantine, Western, Caesarean text-type etc. is not feasible. Instead, the relationships and value of individual textual witnesses are more significant. "Because the computer can keep track of all these witnesses and their place in the transmission, there is no need to group them into a few text types. Moreover, by focusing on individual witnesses, the difficult problem of defining

text types and their boundaries is bypassed."⁹³ However, this is not conclusive. This seems to be an open debate in which scholars will have a serious review even on the ECM approach (CBGM) and its finding. Wasserman himself commented, "It is important to keep in mind that the CBGM is far from perfect and does not solve the problem of contamination once and for all. Nonetheless, in my opinion it is currently the best way of dealing with it."⁹⁴

Conclusion

From the above studies, readers must realize that we do not pick up all the Greek NT editions that had been published so far. We might also miss some editions which others consider as critical editions. One of our aims here is to view the two types of critical editions, firstly the *Majority Texts*, basing on the so-called *Byzantine text-types* (usually known as Textus Receptus and the tradition thereof such as KJV, NKJV etc.) and secondly, *Critical Texts*, basing on *Alexandrian Text-types* (usually editions that are deviated from the TR and its tradition) together side by side in order to compare and contrast. This approach can partly be apologetic too.

Now we can understand to a great extent why **KJV/NKJV/TR (Greek) text** and **RV, RSV, NRSV/UBS GNT or NA Greek text** differ from each other in various places. The main factor is variant readings in Greek manuscripts throughout the process of transmission. Scholars classified these Greek manuscripts according to their form of witnesses into text-types. Therefore, it is almost impossible to avoid clashes. This problem however is neutralized by the ECM and its method, CBGM, to a great extent because the CBGM replaces the text-type classification into generalization, 'considering the relationships and value of all the individual manuscripts.' Probably the ECM is the answer to this textual debate until other more coherent method is discovered.

Furthermore, this wide-ranging study of the history of publication of critical editions (of both sides) throws light to illuminate the starting point of a collision between the TR and its tradition as an anointed tradition and the Critical Texts as the

creation of liberal scholars who tampered and removed ‘word or words or clause or sentence or sentences or even some pericope’ from the autographs of the NT. Some conservative people consider that Westcott and Hort Greek edition is the culprit of the text that opposes TR/majority text. But history proves wrong. We can understand that both the TR and critical texts are the outcome of an attempt to find out and construct Greek NT text as close as the autograph.

The ECM and its method of research enlighten us on how useful modern technology (digitalization) can be to have critical studies on the biblical texts. In the meantime, the previous method of classification of manuscripts into text-types cannot be ignored quickly. Not all the scholars are convinced quickly. More debates may come up.

Endnotes

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- 3 Eldon Jay Epp, “Traditional “Canons” of New Testament Textual Criticism: Their Value, Validity, and Viability— or Lack Thereof;” in *The Textual History of the Greek New Testament: Changing Views in Contemporary Research*, ed. Klaus Wachtel and Michael W. Holmes (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 81n7; Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Erhman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 155.
- 4 Metzger and Erhman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 155; Epp, “Traditional “Canons” of New Testament Textual Criticism,” 81n7.
- 5 Edward Wells, *An Help for the more Easy and Clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures* (Oxford, 1709-1719).
- 6 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 88f.
- 7 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 84.
- 8 Lake, *The Text of the New Testament*, 62; Schaff, “Introduction: American Edition,” lxxix.
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- 12 Lake, *The Text of the New Testament*, 62; Schaff, “Introduction: American Edition,” lxxix.
- 13 Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text*, 74.
- 14 Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text*, 75.
- 15 Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text*, 75.
- 16 Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text*, 76.
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- 20 Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 146.
- 21 Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 146.
- 22 Alford, *Greek New Testament*, vol. 1, *Prologomena*, 67.
- 23 Schaff, “Introduction: American Edition,” lxxxi.
- 24 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 99.
- 25 Henry Alford, *Greek New Testament*, vol. 1, 69-71.
- 26 Henry Alford, *Greek New Testament*, vol. 1, 76-79. He said that the uncials of second class authority are E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, G, D, Q, L.
- 27 Henry Alford, *Greek New Testament*, vol. 1, 76-82.
- 28 Henry Alford, *Greek New Testament*, vol. 1, 70.
- 29 Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 147.
- 30 Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 147.
- 31 Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 147f.
- 32 Tischendorf, *Codex Sinaiticus*, 23f.
- 33 Scrivener, *A Full Collation of the Codex Sinaiticus with the Received Text of the New Testament*, ix, xi.
- 34 Peterson, “Tischendorf and the Codex Sinaiticus: The Saga Continues,” 129.
- 35 “What is Codex Sinaiticus?” <https://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/> (accessed October 8, 2023).
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- 38 Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 148.
- 39 Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 173.
- 40 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxxv.
- 41 Tregelles, *Account of the Printed Text of the Greek NT*, 156.
- 42 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxxv.
- 43 Tregelles, *Account of the Printed Text of the Greek NT*, 172.
- 44 He made use of the following versions: **1) Latin:** a) Old Latin - *Cod. Vercelensis, Veronensis, Colbertinus*, b) *Cod Brixianus*, c) *Cod Bobbiensis*, d) Jerome's *Vulgate*; **2) Syriac:** a) *Curetonian*, b) *Peshito* (MS 7157), c) *Harclean* (published by White), d) *Jerusalem Syriac* (lectionary); **3) Coptic:** a) *Memphitic*, b) *Thebaic* (Sahidic); **4) Gothic** (Gabelentz and Loebe published); **5) Armenian;** **6) Ethiopic.** Cf. Tregelles, *Account of the Printed Text of the Greek NT*, 170-172.
- 45 Tregelles, *Account of the Printed Text of the Greek NT*, 173.
- 46 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," ix.
- 47 WH, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, lxiii-lxiv.
- 48 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 541f.
- 49 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 546.
- 50 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 541f.
- 51 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 548.
- 52 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 548.
- 53 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 548.
- 54 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 549.
- 55 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 549.
- 56 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 548.
- 57 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 549.
- 58 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, vol. 2, 171.
- 59 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 547.
- 60 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, vol. 2, 289.
- 61 WH, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, vol. 2, 300.
- 62 Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 174.
- 63 NA²⁸ introduction, 46*.
- 64 NA²⁸ introduction, 47*.
- 65 "Preface to the First Edition," *GNT*⁵, x.
- 66 "Preface to the First Edition," *GNT*⁵, xi.
- 67 UBS⁵, Introduction: The Fifth Edition, 1*.
- 68 Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*, vii.
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- 71 Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*, ixff.
- 72 Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*, xi.
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- 74 Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*, 515.
- 75 *The Greek New Testament*, vii.
- 76 Dirk Jongkind, *This introduction to The Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 20.
- 77 Jongkind, *This introduction to The Greek New Testament*, 20.
- 78 Paulson, Review of *The Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House Cambridge*, 112 –116
- 79 Jongkind, *This introduction to The Greek New Testament*, 35.
- 80 Greever, *Review of The Tyndale Greek New Testament*, 182-184.
- 81 <https://www.thegreeknewtestament.com/> accessed on February 7, 2024.
- 82 Paulson, review of *The Greek New Testament*, 114.
- 83 J. K. Elliott, "Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior. Vol. 4: Die katholischen Briefe/Catholic Letters. Part 1: Text. Part 2: Begleitende Materialien/Supplementary Material. Second edition. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013) by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Gerd Mink, Holger Strutwolf and Klaus Wachtel," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 64, no. 2 (October 2013): 636.
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- 87 Elliot, "Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior, vol. 4," 636.
- 88 Wasserman, "Manuscripts and the Making of the New Testament," 432.
- 89 <https://www.uni-muenster.de/INTF/ECM.html> (accessed February 8, 2024).
- 90 <https://www.uni-muenster.de/INTF/ECM.html> (accessed February 8, 2024).

- 91 In 1982, Gerd Mink of the INTF described a new method called the CBGM to survey the genealogical structure of the manuscript tradition. Then the same method was developed and was applied by the INTF in their on-going work on a major critical edition called the *Editio Critica Maior*. This edition will be the basis for future NA editions. Cf. Tommy Wasserman, "The Coherence Based Genealogical Method as a Tool for Explaining Textual Changes in the Greek New Testament," *Novum Testamentum* 57 (2015): 208-09.
- 92 Wasserman, "Manuscripts and the Making of the New Testament," 433.
- 93 Wasserman, "Manuscripts and the Making of the New Testament," 434.
- 94 Wasserman, "Manuscripts and the Making of the New Testament," 434.

Exploitation of the Flesh: A Christian Ethical Response to Human Trafficking

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Introduction

Human trafficking,¹ abuse or misuse of women and children in such a way that their human dignity, as beings created in God's image, is often ignored or denied. They are not valued in and of themselves (as subjects), women and children are the objects of sexual lust and violence. Trafficking for sexual exploitation has emerged as one of the most profitable² illegal trades next to illegal trade in arms and narcotics. It is estimated that the industry – the sale and purchase of human beings for exploitation, generates 151 billion dollars per year for those at the top. Those at the bottom of the industry: the victims, number over 40 million people around the world, annually and it is suggested that there are more Modern-Day Slaves in the world today than there have ever been, at any time in history.³ Slaves are bought, sold and traded for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, labour exploitation, organ removal, forced begging and forced criminality.

The US State Department has estimated that a child goes missing every 30 seconds for exploitation in India alone.⁴ According to the United Nations Population Fund report on 'State of World Population,' India has emerged as a key destination and transit point for global trafficking of women and girls.⁵ There has been a significant increase in the number of missing young girls

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and women since 1996. On average, fifteen thousand are reported missing every year in Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai. In fact, of the large number of women and children reported missing every year neither returned nor are they ever located.⁶ The failure of the family members, neighbours and civil society, in general, to maintain strict surveillance, stand by the suffering of women and children and bring the matter to the notice of the police may be the reasons for trafficking being unknown and secretive.⁷

1. Rationale and Methodological Standpoint

Trafficking in human beings is increasing in both magnitude and reach.⁸ It affects vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children, in every region of the world and has become a major human rights concern. This has been identified as ‘the dark side of globalisation’ by a communiqué from the G-8 countries on combating transnational organised crime.⁹

It is an undeniable fact that huge moral problems are associated with human trafficking. Trading in human beings is a conspicuous violation of human rights. It often resulted in forced labour and slavery. The fundamental reason for the immorality of trading in human beings is clear from the second part of Kant’s Categorical Imperatives, “*Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as means only*”¹⁰ which says that humanity in the person of each individual must always be treated as an end and never merely as a means. But trafficking in women is an example of reducing people to a mere means.¹¹ Central to Kant’s “categorical imperative” of morality were the correlated ideas that an action is good only if the agent could will the principle behind it to become a universal law for everyone; and that we should always treat others as ends in themselves.¹²

Human trafficking negates respect for persons in the Kantian sense because their autonomy is infringed. People are not given the full freedom to exercise their autonomy when they are lured

into prostitution on the promises of marriage, better jobs and life in cities. They are forced to make decisions which they would not have made if they knew the whole picture and the real motive. Thereby by hiding the motives the perpetrators are making the ‘would-be victims’ to act with diminished autonomy and not in full awareness as they would have acted if they knew why they were being taken.

2. Ethical Issues and Challenges in Human Trafficking

2.1. Human Trafficking as Sexual Violence

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is one of the most lucrative sectors of the trade in human beings. Women are disproportionately the victims of human trafficking, particularly trafficking for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and marriage. The greatest likelihood of trafficking occurs when women and girls are denied property rights, access to education, and economic rights. They are particularly vulnerable to trafficking because of their low social status and the lack of investment in girls. *The view in some societies that females can be used to advance a family’s economic position results in girls in many societies being sold off to repay a family’s debt. Therefore, discrimination against women is a major causal factor of trafficking.*¹³ Human trafficking occurs when a woman agrees to a false job offer in another place – often outside her home country. She is then transported; she is coerced into working as a prostitute and held in this place through violence, debt bondage or other forms of coercion.¹⁴

Human trafficking for prostitution is sexual violence. Buying a woman in prostitution gives men the power to turn women into a living version of their masturbation fantasy. He removes those qualities that define her as an individual, and for him, she becomes sexualized body parts. She then acts the part of the thing he wants her to be. A sex buyer said prostitution was like ‘renting an organ for ten minutes.’ In the case of trafficking for prostitution, the same-sex buyers who purchase sex from allegedly ‘voluntary’ prostitutes are also purchasing sex from trafficked women.¹⁵

The acceptance of the right of men to buy whatever they want to meet their felt needs could also be one of the main causes of human trafficking. Tellan Hermansson says, “Men that buy sex believe that they have the right to buy sex from women, without questioning why these women are selling sex or under what conditions these women are forced to live. These men and their demands create the main problem.”¹⁶ Men with disposable income have a greater capacity and a greater incentive to buy sexual services. Like any industry, prostitution is based on supply and demand. In this gendered system of supply and demand, little or no attention is paid to the legitimacy of the demand. The ultimate consumers of trafficked and prostituted women are men who use them for entertainment, sexual gratification, and acts of violence. The demand side of sex trafficking remains the least visible and the least mentioned. It is thus easy to forget that people are trafficked into the sex industry not to satisfy the demands of the traffickers but of the buyers. It is this demand that makes the trafficking trade so widespread and lucrative.¹⁷

2.2. Reification

Martha Nussbaum opines that in the trafficking of human, the denial of autonomy is the most complex notion since it involves further aspects of reification. Axel Honneth opined that reification concerning other people means excluding their previous acknowledgement, which further means obliviousness to recognition - where someone is denied recognition as an equal - in the sense of the same human being with equal rights - and as a human being in his/her uniqueness and specificity. Nussbaum also states that the formation of social hierarchies based on gender leads to problematical forms of reification. The danger of reification is increased when there is an imbalance of power in a relationship. The empowered sexual desire which turns women into objects for consumption and the reifying tendencies of a society imbued with consumerism, come together in the trafficking of women. This is made possible by putting women into a powerless position and

turning them into objects for consumption, by taking their papers, by violence, and by threats to their families.¹⁸

Therefore, it is necessary to do something to ensure that these women who have been rendered invisible are seen. Conversely, it would seem possible to breach reification only by reinforcing the relation-to-self, and by striving for and realizing values and goods that contribute to our selfhood. The two-fold perspectives of breaking down the reification of other people are: *it is essential to see women who have become victims of trafficking in people as human beings in their particular context, and along with their particular history.*¹⁹

2.3. Slavery

Slavery has been held up as the worst possible exploitation in human history and although old forms of slavery may be rare incidences today,²⁰ *human trafficking is modern-day slavery that ensnares between 12 million and 27 million people into lives of forced labour or sexual exploitation, depicting that more people are enslaved today than at any other point in human history*²¹ and as the 21st century begins, the degrading institution of slavery continues throughout the world. *Trafficking in persons is the largest manifestation of slavery today*²² where the desperate and vulnerable human beings are taken advantage of and treated as commodities.²³ Slaves are raped, tortured, starved, humiliated and drugged during transportation, both for the pleasure of traffickers and also to break the slaves to make them more submissive upon sale, to ensure that they will service clients submissively and never try to escape.²⁴ *Human trafficking is a gross injustice to those, usually women, the poor and desperate, who are caught in its web.*²⁵ Slavery occurs when one person completely controls another person, using violence or the threat of violence, to maintain that control, exploits them economically and they cannot walk away. This happens in human trafficking.

2.4. Human Trafficking as Forced Prostitution

It is pertinent to note that trafficking in women and children is assuming dangerous proportions threatening the fabric of our society in the region for prostitution.²⁶ At times, an argument is put forward that as everybody has a right to earn in one's own way, prostitutes and trafficking are a part of it. But this theory needs to be rejected with the contempt it deserves for the obvious reason that an overwhelming majority of girls and women have not joined this trade by their free will but have been pushed into it by force or through the devices of socio-religious sanctions.²⁷

Forcing women into prostitution is one of the most heinous forms of violence against them which combines its crimes in seines ranging from seduction, kidnapping, abduction, rape, bartering, confinement, and compulsion to sell their bodies. As a result, women's human rights are trampled with impunity, and they are finally reduced from human persons to commodities for sale. It has been said that it is primarily poverty that drives them into this profession. However, that is also not very true because it is not poverty *per se*, but the exploitation, of that poverty by anti-social elements that drives the innocents into this vice.²⁸ The commercialisation of women's bodies through pornography, advertising, entertainment and the media also contributes to demand.²⁹

2.5. Human Trafficking as an Outcome of Gender Discrimination

In countries with patrilineal family systems, daughters are seen as a liability and their families are obliged to ensure their sexual purity, marry them well, provide substantial marriage expenses and continue to offer material resources to the daughter's marital family on auspicious occasions. If an opportunity arises, families may trade undervalued females with little thought for their rights or future well-being, hence sales into prostitution or marriage to men who make no monetary demands predisposing them to

trafficking. Women are therefore manipulated by consumerism and family loyalty to fulfil family needs and consumption in the name of cultural tradition-duty, care, gratitude – even if it means they're becoming engaged in pornography or prostitution.³⁰ Trafficking involves deep-rooted processes of gender discrimination, lack of female education, ignorance of rural folk, poverty and lack of economic opportunities.³¹

3. Methodological Framework Towards Human Trafficking from Kantian Ethics

3.1. Categorical Imperative

The supreme principle or moral law, as emphasized by Kant, is the fundamental principle one recognizes (consciously or unconsciously) whenever one accepts an action or judgement as one's moral duty.³² It says: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that *my maxim should become a universal law*,"³³ and Kant himself calls it the "categorical imperative."³⁴ Kant's categorical imperative did not advise on how to reach some prior end that is based on what one happens to want but instead it commands oneself on how to act irrespective of their wants or contingent ends. Its rational bindingness is therefore not conditional on setting any prior end.³⁵ It is categorical because it admits no exceptions and is binding. It is imperative because it instructs how one ought to act.

The supreme principle, which Kant calls the categorical imperative, commands simply that our actions should have the form of moral conduct; that is, they should be derivable from universal principles.³⁶ Kant continues: "There is, therefore, only a single categorical imperative and it is this: *act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*."³⁷ The categorical imperative formulates the obligation or command to obey this unconditioned principle, a formal principle, or universal law as such. What the categorical imperative bids us to do is to act for the sake of law as such,

and this means that the maxim of our action (whatever else may be) should be to obey universal law as such. There is thus only one categorical imperative, and we may call it ‘the categorical imperative.’³⁸

Kant clarifies this basic moral law - the very condition of morality by drawing an important distinction between a categorical imperative and a hypothetical imperative. A hypothetical imperative tells us what we must do provided that we already have certain desires or interests, and it is not a moral imperative. Whereas categorical imperatives are objectively necessary without reference to any purpose, and it tells one what must be done whether or not one wishes to act. It prescribes which maxims are binding regardless of the circumstances.³⁹

3.2. The Principle of Humanity as an End-in-itself

Kant, in his second part of the *Categorical Imperative* states, “So act as to use humanity, both in your own person and in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end, never simply as a means.”⁴⁰ This formula applies to the agent’s treatment of himself (sic) as well as of others. By using persons merely as means, Kant has in mind using them as means to the satisfaction of inclination or to the attainment of ends based on inclination.⁴¹

This imperative insists that one must treat other persons as having their own autonomously established goals and that one must never treat others purely as the means to one’s self-determined goals. It demands that we treat other people with all the respect and moral dignity to which every person is entitled at all times, including those times when they are used as a means to the ends of others. According to Kant, to treat persons merely as means is to disregard their personhood by exploiting or otherwise using them without regard to their own thoughts, interests and needs.⁴² It also means to reject a person’s considered judgements or to deny the person the liberty to act on those judgements. To respect persons is to see them as unconditionally worthy agents, and so to recognize that they should not be treated as mere conditionally

valued things that serve our ends. The notion of respect for the human being demands that we allow persons the freedom to form their own judgements and perform whatever action they choose.⁴³

This shows that Kant’s philosophical central theme states that every human being is an end in himself or herself, not to be used as a mere means by others; that respect for one’s own humanity finds its fullest expression in respect for that of others.⁴⁴ Kant argues that humanity contains our rational capacity to set ends and devise means to them, and our rational self-love, giving us grounds for forming a conception of our happiness and pursuing it. He further claims that humanity is an end in itself, possessing the absolute objective worth those grounds our obedience to moral laws.⁴⁵

4. Towards a Christian Ethical Response: Beyond Kantian Ethics

4.1. Drawing from the Doctrine of *Imago Dei*

All humans are gifted with the creational gifts of the Spirit. These gifts enable humans to fulfil their calling to be partners in creation. The *imago dei* has thus everything to do with human relationships – the relation between God and humankind and between humans. Humans are created as relational beings. They relate to God, to each other and the rest of creation. They are representatives of God in this world to care for his work as stewards. The *imago dei* should be manifested not only in a few human characteristics, as early Christian theology argued, but in the totality of human existence. The Biblical teaching of human dignity, founded in the doctrine of *imago dei* has direct implications for all situations where human relations are at stake. The concept offers an answer to the violation of the human rights of women and a positive response to the current ideologies of intolerance. It teaches humankind that all people should be treated as bearers of human dignity that is granted by God.⁴⁶

According to Kant, the fact about persons has a substantial impact on our moral conduct because once we recognize that

human beings have objective worth, we cannot treat them merely as instruments to promote the common good or any other purpose. This means that we must respect the fact that the other persons have ends, i.e., interests, goals, projects, etc.⁴⁷

The lack of any opportunity for self-determination, which often ends in a complete lack of control, is a decisive criterion for detecting human trafficking. The traffickers abused the image of God that is in the trafficked person in various ways and means.⁴⁸ Traffickers both defy the International Charter of Fundamental Human Rights and disregard the dignity of the human person. They are devoid of solidarity or a sense of justice, incapable of feeling sympathy or compassion for their victim, uncaring of the pain they are causing. Human beings are treated as purchasable objects, as in slavery, their autonomy is denied.

Human trafficking dehumanizes the person. When any person is treated as a commodity, all of humanity is diminished. The victims lose their free will and control over their bodies. They are deprived of their freedom. Their rights are denied. They are used as a means for other persons' wealth or well-being and abused for other persons' sexual desires.⁴⁹ Trafficking not only traps its victims in a complicated web of poverty, migration, and globalization, but it dehumanizes those who use and exploit them. Trafficking not only robs people of their human rights and basic freedoms, subjecting them to physical and emotional abuse and threats against themselves and their families, but it also damages the health of human society as a whole. It weakens communities, fragments nations, increases global health risks, feeds a network of organized crimes, worsens levels of poverty, and impedes integral human development. Victims of sex trafficking are stripped of their dignity in a most humiliating way and can even suffer stigmatization.

4.2. Towards a Theology of Personhood

The exploitation of women and children is a theological problem. Women and children ask: "Why has God allowed this to happen to

me?" According to Denise Ackermann, "Violence is a theological problem, for it calls into question the very nature of humanity and it raises doubts about God's presence in and care for this world. It has ethical, doctrinal and pastoral dimensions. The victims of violence cry out for healing." Sexual violence has to do with issues of justice and power: "Victims of sexual violence are abused for the gratification of those more powerful than themselves. Rape is, therefore, the unjust, evil abuse of coercive power and as such it is a theological problem."⁵⁰ The dignity of every human being is laid down as a common ideal for all people and all nations, not only out of moral or religious propriety but with a view to a peaceful and just development of the human community.

Kant's Categorical Imperative says one is to act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end. This is often seen as introducing the idea of respect for persons, for whatever it is that is essential to our humanity. This formula gives humans inherent value. Everyone is valued, not on what they can do, but on that fact that they are persons. Treating them as means to an end does not give them the individual freedom they deserve. Treating them as an end looks at what would be best for that person.

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has highlighted the link between the abuse of women and children and distorted theological teachings.⁵¹ In a booklet published by the Umtata Women's theology group in South Africa, it was stated:

*The Church has used the creation story to subordinate women to men and to blame women for sin and evil. The Church has encouraged the dominance of husbands over wives rather than encouraging a theology of loving responsiveness to the needs of each other. The Church has focused on the value of suffering, easy forgiveness and self-denial which results in the destructive abuse of God's image as found in women.*⁵²

A challenge must also be mounted against the misunderstanding of suffering. Christians may indeed be called upon to experience trials and suffering (1 Pet 2:18-23 and Heb 12:1-11). But such texts have been misinterpreted to mean that victims of violence, whether they are adults or children, ought neither to complain nor to resist acts of violence. Together with the emphasis on female submission, this has led to women believing that they ought to suffer in silence. Consequently, many fail to question, expose, or resist violence against themselves and their children.⁵³

Equally, a misunderstanding of forgiveness needs to be submitted to critique. A Christian ethics which stresses an uncritical attitude of love which bears and endures “all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7) and forgives up to “seventy-seven times” (Matt 18:21-22) can provide a legitimating for compelling victims to accept their sufferings passively. A distinction needs to be made between genuine and false repentance. If the person asking for forgiveness does not recognise their sinfulness or intend to change their behaviour, can they even ask for forgiveness—let alone demand it?

4.3. Engagement in Culture and Society

Both “de-construction” and “construction” are necessary, and the efforts of the churches must not be restricted to ecclesial structures. They need to work with government, civil society, overseas agencies, businesses, and labour movements to bring about concrete changes in the lives of women and children to prevent them from human trafficking. One of the steps is to break the culture of silence. Women (and all other victims) must be allowed to tell their stories in small groups in which they can be genuinely heard and assisted. Silence prevents the exposure of evil, pain, or suffering, protects the perpetrators, and prevents the first stages of liberation and healing. Churches can assist all those who are working with children to identify and expose child abuse, teach children to say “no,” and seek help when they are threatened. In

essence, the dignity of all people, and the dignity of women and children in particular, needs to be upheld by the church.⁵⁴

This is to say that the church needs to affirm the worth of every individual and take concrete steps towards safeguarding the vulnerable section of society. One of the best defences against trafficking is education: so, the first major task was that of raising awareness. Therefore, Patriarchy and sexual immorality need to be challenged. Women need to understand that they are not merely there to serve in subsidiary roles. There remain a vast number of believers who are still unaware of the serious moral issue that is part of our society everywhere. The church needs to provide teaching tools, and we need to come to the rescue of victims who may be captive in our neighbourhoods.

4.4. Affirmation of Justice

The first act of justice, the moral duty human beings owe to each other is to render respect and protection of the dignity and personhood of each and all. Human trafficking is injustice and violence against women in such a way that their dignity and personhood are rejected and devalued.⁵⁵ Justice in sexual ethics moves us to enter into the chaos of those whose dignity is compromised by sexual inequalities. Establishing God-given equality of women requires us to recognize, support, and promote the equality of the genders.⁵⁶

To despise one’s neighbour, to exploit the humble and poor worker and to delay the payment of wages is to offend God. Inversely, to know to love Yahweh is to do justice to the poor and oppressed. The Lord feeds the hungry and sets the prisoner free. The Lord restores sight to the blind and straightens backs which are bent; the Lord gives heart to the orphan and widow but turns the course of the wicked to their ruins.⁵⁷

Immanuel Kant has a theory of justice that is strictly based on the fact that all humans have dignity, and each person should be an end in themselves. It has emphasized that all humans have the same rights, and these must be respected. Therefore, persons

are worthy of respect and should never be used solely as means to an end to which they do not consent. Human beings have value, even if no one cares about them, even if their behaviour is despicable. Thus, they have what Kant calls objective worth and must be treated with special respect.⁵⁸

The roots of the problem lie with the sexual attitudes we have towards one another, the way we see each other, and the way we understand our sexual relationships. If we are to tackle human trafficking, we need to recognise that there is no quick-fix legal solution. A commitment to the equal dignity of women, and children and men, is something that must be fostered within society. And that inevitably is a long-term goal. But if our response is to be a genuinely humane one then it cannot be forced (through law, for example), but must be nurtured within us.⁵⁹ Human trafficking dehumanizes everyone - not only the victims, but the traders, the buyers, the corrupt officials, and even those who look on and don't want to get involved. The sale of human beings is against justice and charity. Our commitment to Christ mandates us to denounce injustice wherever we find it and the challenge of combating trafficking in human persons is ours.

4.5. A Theology of the Neighbour

The term neighbour designates, "all the needy, whoever they may be, and not only Christians."⁶⁰ Human beings are destined to total communion with God and to the fullest brotherhood with all their fellow human being. Gutierrez argued that the neighbour is not he/she whom I find in my path, but rather he/she in whose path I place myself, he/she whom I approach and actively seek.⁶¹ Acceptance is the foundation of all brotherhood among human being. To sin is to refuse to love, to reject communion and brotherhood, to reject even now the very meaning of human existence. To abstain from serving is to refuse to love; to fail to act for another is as culpable as expressly refusing to do it.

It is not enough to say that love of God is inseparable from the love of one's neighbour. It must be added love for

God is unavoidably expressed through love of one's neighbour. Moreover, God is loved in the neighbour. It is in the Temple that we find God, but in a temple of living stones and God's Temple is human history. We find the Lord in our encounters with human, especially the poor, marginalised, and exploited ones. An act of love towards them is an act of love towards God. This is why Congar speaks of "the sacrament of our neighbour," who as a visible reality reveals to us and allows us to welcome the Lord: "But there is one thing that is privileged to be a paradoxical sign of God, in relation to which men (sic) can manifest their deepest commitment - our Neighbour. The sacrament of our neighbour."⁶² However the neighbour is not only human viewed individually. The term also refers to man/woman considered in the fabric of social relationships, to man/woman situated in his/her economic, social, cultural, and racial coordinates. It refers also to the exploited social class, the dominated people, and the marginated race.⁶³

Kant holds the idea that the moral worth of an action consists not in the consequences that flow from it, but in the intention from what the act is done. This means that all that matters is what the motive of the person doing the act is, so in the case of human trafficking, the motive is the exploitation of one's neighbour for money. Our encounter with the Lord occurs in our encounter with our fellow humans, especially in the encounter with those whose human features have been disfigured by oppression, despoliation, and alienation and who have no beauty and no majesty. Our attitude towards them, or rather our commitment to them, will indicate whether or not we are directing our existence in conformity with the will of the Father. That is the reason why Christ reveals to us by identifying himself with the poor. We are called to bring good news, be signs of hope in what appears to be a hopeless situation, bring new vision, form community, build broken communities - in other words, live the principle of solidarity.⁶⁴ The crime today is being insensitive to the cries of the suffering. Jesus always identified with the suffering and spoke on behalf of the vulnerable.

4.6. A Spirituality of Liberation

Spirituality is a concrete manner, inspired by the Spirit, of living the Gospel; it is a definite way of living “before the Lord,” in solidarity with all human beings, “with the Lord,” and before humans. Spirituality means a reordering of the great axes of the Christian life in terms of this contemporary experience. Where oppression and the liberation of human beings seem to make God irrelevant - a God filtered by our long-time indifference to these problems- there must blossom faith and hope in him who comes to root out injustice and to offer, in an unforeseen way, total liberation. This is a spirituality which dares to sink roots in the soil of oppression-liberation.⁶⁵ A spirituality of liberation centred on a conversion⁶⁶ to the neighbour, the oppressed person, the exploited social class, the despised race, and the dominated country. Our conversion to the Lord implies this conversion to the neighbour.

To be converted to tackle the problems of human trafficking, we have to break with our mental categories, the way we relate to others, our way of identifying with the Lord, our cultural milieu, with our social class, in other words, with all that can stand in the way of a real, profound solidarity with those who suffer, in the first place, from misery and injustice. The Christians have not done enough in this area of conversion to the neighbour, to social justice, to history. We have not perceived enough yet that to know God is to do justice. A spirituality of liberation must be filled with a living sense of gratuitousness. Communion with the lord and with all others is more than anything else a gift, which calls and demands a vigilant attitude. It presupposes attention, active disposition, work and fidelity to his will. Living witnesses will point out the direction of a spirituality of liberation.⁶⁷

4.7. Experience of the trafficked as Text

According to Miguel A. De La Torre, ethics cannot be reduced to a personal choice or an individual morality; it must instead remain a communal action guided by the relationships established in

koinonia. *Koinonia* is based more on the relationships within the faith community than on precepts or principles. Because morality is communal, ethics from the margins must engage with listening critically to the stories of the marginalised, who are trafficked and committing to work in solidarity with them in their struggle for full liberation, both spiritually and physically. Failure to incorporate the voices of the voiceless makes ethics useless for the vast majority of the world’s people, who struggle each day for the basic necessities of life. Critical application of the biblical text to the ethical situation faced by the marginalised is a must. For Christians, the concept of justice is rooted in the life and acts of Jesus Christ as articulated in the biblical text.⁶⁸

In this process, ethics becomes the process by which the marginalized enter a more human condition by overcoming oppressive or controlling societal mechanisms. For them, the starting point is not some ethical truth based on church doctrine or rational deliberation; instead, the starting point is analysing the situation faced by the disenfranchised of our world, our nation, and our workplace and then reflecting with them theoretically, theologically, and hermeneutically to draw pastoral conclusions for actions to be taken.⁶⁹ We need to listen to their stories and experiences, in order to understand better what trafficking entails, and what it calls for from the church, civil societies, and governmental institutions. Therefore, ethics becomes the process by which the marginalized enter a more human condition by overcoming oppressive or controlling societal mechanisms.

Conclusion

Human trafficking is heavily affected by the complex set of worldwide processes we collectively label globalization. They are facilitated by the mobility of capital, the openness of political borders, and the deregulation of trade. They are complicated by the transient nature of many exchanges and the lack of adequate enforcement personnel and policies. Globalization impacts trafficking with both “push” and “pull” factors.⁷⁰ Impoverishment

in the supply countries is a push factor that forces people to seek ways to improve their economic situation. Many trafficked persons begin their ordeals with the expectation that they will get respectable employment, only to discover the deception after it is too late. The spread of “global culture” serves as a pull factor, raising expectations of a better life elsewhere. Like the global drug trade, trafficking is a mammoth economic enterprise, providing traffickers with financial resources and technological capabilities to enhance and shield their activities from public scrutiny or interference.

As the arena of human trafficking is global in scope, the traffickers from around the world target the desperate, and poor and the vulnerable. Trafficking not only violates human rights, subjecting them to physical and emotional abuse but also damages the health of human society as a whole. It weakens communities, fragment nations, increases global health risks, feeds networks of organized crimes, and worsens levels of poverty. As a result of this, we must take the challenge that would address the wounds inflicted upon the innermost being of its victims and their struggle to rebuild their lives to rediscover what it means to live freely as human beings created in the images and likeness of God.

Endnotes

- 1 The Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children (also referred to as the Palermo Protocol) define the term ‘human trafficking’ as: *the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.* See Trilok Singh, *Menace of Trafficking in Women* (New Delhi: Cyber Tech Publications, 2012), 83.
- 2 It has become a multi-billion-dollar industry run both by individuals and by small and large organized crime networks.
- 3 _____, “Cork says ‘No’ to Human Trafficking,” accessed 5 October 2024, <https://www.aptireland.org/cork-human-trafficking-caht-running/>.
- 4 _____, “Cork says ‘No’ to Human Trafficking,” accessed 5 October 2024, <https://www.aptireland.org/cork-human-trafficking-caht-running/>. The largest number of victims are trafficked from Southeast Asia annually. Cross-border trafficking is prevalent in the Mekong region of Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Southern Yunan province of China. See Meenakshi Malhotra (ed), *Dimensions of Women Exploitation* (Delhi: Isha Books, 2004), 40.
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- 26 Due to the unawareness of the traps of traffickers and enticed by money, parents encourage their daughters to leave home to accept elsewhere or the girls themselves may leave home to find work to help and to support their family back home. Often, traffickers falsely promise parents that their daughters will be taken to work at a factory to provide financial support for the family. In some cases, parents unwillingly marry their daughters off to traffickers. See AK Singh, SP Singh, SP Pandey, *Domestic Violence Against Women in India* (Gurgaon: Madhav Books, 2009), 342-343.
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- 35 Allen W. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 67.
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- 39 He writes, "if the action is good only as a means to something else, the imperative is hypothetical; but if it is thought of as good in itself, and hence as necessary in a will which of itself conforms to reason as the principle of this will, the imperative is categorical... The former present the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else which one desires (or which one may possibly desire). The categorical imperative would be one which presented an action as of itself objectively necessary, without regard to any other end..." See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Lewis White Beck, trans. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959), 30.
- 40 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*,
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- 46 J. M. Vorster "The contribution of deontological Christian ethics to the contemporary human rights discourse" in *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*; Vol 43, No 3 (2009), 497-518
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- 48 They are forced to work in agriculture and construction, food processing and contract cleaning, in sweatshops and restaurants, in domestic work and entertainment, and in prostitution and the sex industry.
- 49 In the context of dealing with sexual violence, the American sociologist Kathleen Barry has used the concept of 'victimism' to describe the mechanism by which victims are characterized as deprived of choice and possibilities of action; and this status of existing without any choice is prolonged beyond the violent situation itself by attaching certain expectations and prescriptions to the victim. She explains that victimism denies the fact that throughout the experience a woman is still a human person whole and entire. Instead victimism provides a framework for other

- people by which they come to know her not as a person but as a victim, as someone who was treated with violence. The term 'victim', which was intended originally to evoke an experience of sexual violence, becomes a label determining the identity of the person in question. Victimism is an objectifying term that introduces new rules for defining experience. These rules exclude any question of will and deny the fact that a woman, even when she suffers sexual violence, is a living human being, and an individual who changes, develops, and exists in a socially interactive state. (Hille Haker, Lisa Sowle Cahill, and Elaine Wainwright (eds), *Concilium* 2011/3, 69).
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- 59 Suzanne Mulligan "Sexuality and Justice" accessed 31 July 2024, http://aptireland.org/?page_id=1175.
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- 62 Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 201-202.
- 63 Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 202.
- 64 Solidarity is a response to the fact of 'radical inter-dependence' and, when applied to the context of trafficking, refers to a firm commitment to the common good of all individuals and ethnic groups. Solidarity helps us see the other not simply as a factor of production that can easily be 'discarded when no longer useful, but as neighbor, a "helper", to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God. It also helps us move toward collaboration with other faiths/religions/governments, NGOs, etc. because of our mutual interest. Donal Dorr further adds that solidarity is not just about the strict fulfillment of justice but goes beyond this because it involves generosity as well, care for others, and warm friendliness- the practice of the virtues that favour togetherness and which teach us to live in unity. Solidarity finds its ultimate inspiration from our being images of the Triune God, 'the primordial solidarity of divine Others', which is also the model of a community where equality, difference, mutuality, fecundity, and unity are simultaneously recognized and affirmed. (See A.K. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004).
- 65 Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 203-204.
- 66 Conversion means a radical transformation of ourselves; it means thinking, feeling, and living as Christ-present in exploited and alienated human being. To be converted is to commit oneself to the process of the liberation of the poor and oppressed, to commit oneself lucidly, realistically, and concretely. It also means to commit oneself with an analysis of the situation and a strategy of action.
- 67 Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 207-208.
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Deothering the Body for Envisaging a Disability Theology: A Tribal Reading from North East India

*Chenijan Patton**

Introduction

Persons with disabilities¹ are among the marginalized communities that continue to face the brunt of human society owing to their physical orientations. They suffer from physical and mental harassment due to their non-conformity to the so-called abled bodies. The othering of the human body as abled and disabled, perfect and imperfect, and that of figured and disfigured bodies lingers to haunt the lives of the disabled bodies. The othering of individuals in religious and public spaces has caused harm throughout human civilizations and it continues, to dehumanize, differently-abled individuals. Such a reality calls for the need to deother the PWDs and converse the concerns and life situations that impact the living reality of the PWDs. Therefore, there is a need to delineate the dimensions of disability theology to envision a liberative space for all individuals where the human body is affirmed as an instrument for knowing God's grace. This essay attempts to articulate the challenges the PWDs face in the public space and mitigate musings to show how the faith community could open its spaces as a sanctuary for the people in the margins. To such end, tribal perspectives will also be engaged to affirm the vocation of the faith community towards PWDs in India.

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1. Disability: Understanding its Concepts

Disability can be defined as an impairment that prevents an individual from exercising the human ability to the fullest. The World Health Organization asserts, "Disability is an umbrella term that includes impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions that result from the interaction between an individual with a health condition and that person's contextual factors (such as the environment in which they live)."² Also, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) notes that "disability is a complex and evolving concept, and that people with disabilities include those whose participation in society, education, health, and employment is limited because of the interaction between their long-term impairment and certain barriers in society."³ From the above definition, one can notice the dynamics of the binary which is the abled and the disabled, which at times contributes towards the marginalization of the PWDs. In everything, humanity's quest for the abled and the perfect body has caused more harm than good for the PWDs in the church and society.

In India, the challenges faced by the PWDs include political, religious, social, cultural, and medical dimensions. Among all the issues and challenges, one of the demeaning realities was that PWDs were excluded from the population census until 1981. Today, they are rightfully enumerated in the national population census.⁴ According to The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, "as per Census 2011, the number of Persons with Disabilities in the country is 2.68 crore, which is 2.21 percent of the total population of the Country."⁵ The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 defines a Person with disability as:

- (i) Blindness; (ii) Low vision; (iii) Leprosy-cured; (iv) Hearing impairment; (v) Loco motor disability; (vi) Mental retardation; (vii) Mental illness. As per Section 2

(t) of the PwD Act, person with disability means a person suffering from not less than forty percent (40 percent) of any disability as certified by a medical authority.⁶

Disability highlights the issue of “malfunctioning, disturbance or loss in the normal functioning of physical, mental or psychological processes, or a difficulty in the ability to learn, or adjust socially, which interferes with a person’s normal growth and development.”⁷ While discussing PWDs, one could also see the shift from the medical model towards the social model of understanding disability. The medical model looks at disability as pathologic or physical that prevents an individual from performing bodily function. The social model “emphasizes social conditions which disable a group of individuals by ignoring their needs of accessing opportunities in a manner conducive to their circumstances.”⁸ In this way, discussion about disability encompasses the whole spectrum of individual interaction with the community and society.

Marginal Experiences of PWDs

A person with a disability occupies a marginal position in the social order owing to society’s negative attitude toward them. The fact that their physical and anatomical orientations do not conform to the mainstream affirmation of the human body has dehumanized them in society. For instance, it has led to body shaming resulting in a hegemonic situation that stigmatizes a disabled body by its assertion of a perfect or abled body. Further, humanity’s quest for perfect beauty and body has alienated PWDs because disabled people fail in the category of beauty and perfection as defined by the abled bodies. There is also an aspect of marginalization when one raises the category of the abled and disabled through the binary scale of measuring an individual’s physical and mental ability.⁹ Such a reality dehumanizes individuals who do not fit into the social norm of a perfect human body. Marginalization of the disabled is also perpetuated by friends, kin, and families of the disabled. There are also times, when, “the greatest obstacle to

participation and equity is the prevalence of deep-rooted negative attitude on the part of non-disabled people in the family and community.”¹⁰ Hence, there is a need to break such stereotypes towards PWDs and foster inclusivity, justice, and fraternity in society.

According to D. John Samuel, the binary distinction between the abled and disabled emerged from the perspective of looking at the incapacitated bodies as hindrances to the communities.¹¹ Physical impairments were considered an abnormality that needed eradication at any level. In some situations, PWDs are prevented from participating in the cultic elements, especially, the privilege of offering sacrifices on the altar¹² thereby, negating their participation in corporate worship. Such practices ostracized the PWDs from the social and religious domain¹³ and they are projected as “second-class citizens, objects of charity or even abandoned.”¹⁴ At times, society ascribes names and tags to PWDs reducing them to an object of charity. For instance, PWDs among the Lotha Naga tribe are called by the names like *mhyikchung* (blind), *jojang* and *khejang* (handicapped), *chenkungo* (hunchback), etc. The name itself has a negative and dehumanizing character in nature.

Stereotyping and dehumanizing disabled bodies contradict the message of the Christ who came that all may become one. Such necessitates the need to revisit theological narratives and interpretation of scriptures when it manifests an exclusion of a section of people in the church. It is of concern that medical and physical impairments limit the potentiality of disabled individuals but the practice of affirming negativity and derogatory terms has made society take a backstage in addressing the problem associated with it. Hence, instead of redeeming disability, one has taken pessimism over the word. The othering of human beings as that of abled and disabled, perfect and imperfect bodies has created inhuman conditions for the PWDs for which there is the need for the deothering of the body to affirm a substantive space and life in its fullness.

2. Body Theology: De-Othering the Persons with Disabilities

Body theology locates the physical human body as a site for delving into a narrative to affirm inalienable human rights for all lives. It declares the body as an epistemological site for doing theology by looking at the divine in the eyes of the violated and abused human bodies with the affirmation that it can transmit the mystery of life because of its ability to see, touch, and feel things. Body theology asserts that the physical being is intrinsically linked to the spiritual realm, and one “cannot divorce the physical and spiritual world. If we do, we lose the meaning of human life. The source of both the physical and spiritual world is God.”¹⁵ Therefore, any action that “separates the person from his or her body or treats the body only as an instrument to be used by the person, ultimately denies a fundamental truth of human existence.”¹⁶ For there is an inherent goodness in the body as it is created in the likeness and image of God. The human body can manifest the mystery of God and make visible the things that are not observable without the body. It can display the invisible mystery of the divine as the body “makes visible the nature of the person.”¹⁷ The human body has much to offer toward the comprehension of life mysteries and existence. Such theologizing made a Copernican leap toward a body theology by locating the suffering and the exploited body as a site for articulating a theology of justice and rights. Traditional Christian anthropology negated the body while glorifying the human soul and “invariably oriented the Christians to a body-denouncing... alleviates the superior soul over the inferior body.”¹⁸ In this way, the human body has been considered as something corrupt and sinful in Christian thinking giving rise to spiritualization of the soul and spirit. Here, the dualistic binary of the body and soul seems to have sidelined the body throughout the ages. Dualism marginalized the body leading to sacralization and vandalizing of the human bodies¹⁹ necessitating the need for a theology from the perspective of the marginalized bodies.

A theology of body seeks to affirm universal human rights for all humanity in a world where the bodies of PWDs are considered indecent, uncharacteristic, and vulgar. It highlights how God’s unconditional love transcends all humanity irrespective of physical orientation, identity, and appearance. In a milieu, where abled and perfect bodies are adorned and exalted, PWDs continue to face dehumanization and acts of violence, challenging the sanctity and integrity of human life. A theology of disability articulates the gospel to construct a comprehensive theology through the experience of PWDs. It identifies the message of Christ for the individual with different physical orientations on the ground that “the body of Christ is a place of unity and diversity.”²⁰ For Thomas Reynold, the “cross is the inclusive solidarity power of solidarity”²¹ on the ground that crucifixion declares God’s power of healing and grace. It is in that state of vulnerability the work of healing and reconciliation is being fulfilled in the world. God’s compassion towards humanity was revealed as invulnerability towards tragedy and suffering.

Nancy L. Eiesland affirms the church as the place where the disabled should be affirmed as the people of God.²² As the manifestation of the body of Christ, society should be an inclusive community for transformation through genuine interaction with people of diverse orientations. Disability theology and ethics question the binary syndrome especially that of the abled and the disabled, which negates spaces for the PWDs in the public square. The exclusion is based on physical infirmities and orientations, illness, sickness, and other physical conditions that negate the requirements of the abled body. However, there should be no segregation in the faith community because Christ died to take away the shame and sins of the world. The marks of nails demonstrate Jesus as the disabled God. “In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God.”²³ Eiesland on Christ as the disabled God held it as “a clear recognition of the limits of our bodies and an acceptance of

the limits as the truth of human being.”²⁴ Such narratives challenge stereotypical attitudes, prejudices, and stigmas associated with disabled bodies and enable one to accept the diversity of bodies. It helps in transgressing boundaries, challenging human-made segregation, and the binary distinction between the abled and the disabled bodies. The challenge is to break any stereotypes towards the PWDs and foster inclusivity in the church.

Image of God in the Others

Imago Dei has seen misinterpretations when God is seen as intangible without limitation. It has led to the negation of the PWDs in the life and the ministry of the church. “The human made in the image of God is usually thought of as the image of the perfectly normal human, but raised to an even higher level of perfection.”²⁵ At times, the alienation of PWDs sprouts from misinterpretation of scriptures, traditions, and theologies.²⁶ Aquinas’s “Image of God”²⁷ underlines the grading of creation with human beings as superior in hierarchy, hence enjoying the benefits of superiority over other creatures. Such postulation manifests thinking where “any form of disability makes a person less than human are not created in the Image of God.”²⁸ In such a context, there is a need to re-affirm the crucified God who dwells amidst the suffering people. Jesus Christ became the “disabled God”²⁹ and struck down the barriers of “dehumanization, deprivation, denial, invisibilization, custodialization and stigmatization”³⁰ of persons with disabilities. Also, “it is through our relationship that we most concretely reflect God’s image.”³¹ Therefore, solidarity with the PWDs would mean “entering into their struggle for justice”³² and affirming tenets of human rights that are “creedally centred in public theology and socially centred in the churches.”³³ The quest is for the inclusion of all segments of the people without hypocrisy.

The image of God is misconstrued when “illness or any form of disability is considered as an outcome of God’s punishment due to one’s sin or disobedience. Those who had illness not only suffered the pain of the ailment but also suffers being labelled

as sinners.”³⁴ A legalistic reading of the Hebrew Bible adds judgemental views toward the disabled. The covenantal law between Yahweh and the Israelites sanctioned punishment and ailments when sins and wrongdoings were committed by the people. For instance, Miriam was struck with leprosy for revolting against Moses (Num 12: 10), and King Uzziah was also inflicted with leprosy for disobedience (I Kings 13: 4).³⁵ However, the New Testament reading of sin, punishment, and judgment is from the Hebrew Bible as the crucified God atoned the world’s sins. The crucified God became a co-sufferer with the suffering community of the world. “Jesus becoming disabled is a total contrast with the understanding of equating sin with disability. The broken disabled body paves the way for a new methodology that is life-affirming, inclusive, and dignity of all in the establishment of the kingdom.”³⁶ Thus, in the new covenant, the cross replaced all the requirements of the law and also removed the stains and the sins of the ancestors.

Ecclesia: Community of Differences

The church as the foretaste of the kingdom of God must acknowledge all its members without judging their physical orientations. It cannot marginalize anyone based on physical infirmities, purity, and beauty. The church as a “communion of saints”³⁷ is after all a fellowship of believers through divine experience. One of the liberating works of the disabled God is the sacrifice on the cross for the redemption of the world. It is in that suffering and brokenness of Jesus on the cross that one could derive life-enhancing articulation for PWDs. It is in that brokenness of Christ on the Cross, that one finds healing and reconciliation in the divine sanctuary. It “opens up new vistas on God, church, and being together”³⁸ by challenging the binary of abled/disabled and normal/abnormal. It also calls for a renewal of modern-day mythologies that dehumanize PWDs through their norms and ideological framework.³⁹ The assertion is that the image of God is not limited to that of the abled bodies rather it is

in brokenness that one experiences God. Jesus as the disabled God transgresses human-induced barriers in a context where society makes individuals disabled rather than just physical ailing.⁴⁰ For Nancy Eiesland, “People with disabilities in the church announce the presence of the disabled God for us and call the church to become a communion of struggle.”⁴¹ It is through the ability to relate to people with different physical orientations that we can learn to understand the meaning of love which is essential in our endeavor to worship God.⁴² The church as the body of Christ needs to manifest vulnerability towards each other’s burden, joy, failure, tragedy, success, etc. Jesus’ incarnation is a symbolic expression of God’s vulnerability towards the creatures.

The church as the body of Christ is a community brought to a fellowship by the grace and mercy of God. As a community of saints, it is marked by the celebration of diversity and plurality of race, culture, ethnicity, and orientation. Further, as a body of Christ, it recognizes that “contribution to diversity that is brought by the incorporation of disabled bodies is both good and necessary if the body is truly to be whole. The body of Christ is a place where the disabled should feel at home.”⁴³ Church needs to manifest the wholeness of the ‘family of God’ by dispensing solidarity among its members. There should be an awakening that all people including of abled, disabled, and deprived are indispensably required for the life of the church without which the church will not be truly Christian.⁴⁴ For which any isolation of people in the social communion abrogates full participation of the faith community.⁴⁵ The church cannot exhibit the image of God without the realization of unity in differences. It is through the affirmation of all segments of people in the community that the Church could realize the ministry of freedom, liberty, and humanity for all.

The church needs to identify, nurture, and mold the gifts of people in the community by transgressing structures so that the gospel is materialized in the world.⁴⁶ In such a way, PWDs would feel included in the fellowship. “If we want church renewal, we

will have to renew thinking in the church”⁴⁷ for “major convictions are shaped in thoughts.”⁴⁸ The renewal of the faith community is required to bring in positive thoughts, narratives, and articulation toward marginalized communities. The church could move beyond its traditional notion of being a sympathizer or caretaker to that of a harbinger of hope for marginalized people. All sorts of negativity and dehumanizing attitudes towards PWDs (induced by faith, culture, and traditions) could be transformed if there is renewal in the minds and hearts of the people. Ecclesia should become a place for embracing differences⁴⁹ without prejudices. The Church of Christ should not sanction boundaries and division and brand anyone as that of being disabled within the community. The way forward is to celebrate each other differences and weaknesses and accept each other without hypocrisy.

De-Othering the Other: Solidarity, Inclusivity, and Differences

‘Disability’ is a victim of ‘binary syndrome’ especially that of good/bad, normal/abnormal, abled/disabled, fit/unfit, etc. Hence, inclusivity and solidarity would mean a platform for transformative space for the PWDs to showcase their ability. Such liberating endeavours would make them less conscious about their physical infirmity. Incarnation of Christ highlights the climax of inclusivity because it opened human access to the divine, through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It exemplifies God’s way of reaching out to the creatures out of love and grace. While discussing the plight and struggles of PWDs, it is also pertinent to conscientize the people with the lived realities of the PWDs. As such a disability narrative is “imperative and urgent.”⁵⁰ Further, negating any discussion on disability limits “the scope of our articulation and appropriating faith.”⁵¹ Ezamo Murry speaks of “ministry to, with, and of the PWD,”⁵² rather than ministry to the PWDs.⁵³ Solidarity and inclusivity would be manifested when one removes stereotypes towards any segment of individuals in the

community. It is in such spirit that one can celebrate dissent and differences in the life and ministry of the church.

The process of marginalization in any culture begins when one starts the process of othering groups or individuals that do not conform to the majoritarian ideology. The same is true for the PWDs when they are othered owing to the binary of the abled and disabled. Such a phenomenon betrays the very notion of the body of Christ and the spirit of unity in diversity. Paul's analogy of the body of Christ in 1 Corinth 12:12-27 asserts how the faith community should not "negate its caring ministry to PWDs due to their Otherness as all are one in Christ... Church as the communion of Saints entails bleeding with the vulnerable others in the fellowship."⁵⁴ The image of God gets negated when one attempts to categorize the disabled as others and individuals who always need help from the community. There is a need to transcend such stereotypes and affirm the church as a communion that celebrates differences of orientations. The Church as the body of Christ should be a place "for all, where the contribution of person living with impairment is valued, where they are respected for who they are, and find support in their communities."⁵⁵ The task of a redeeming community begins with the process of affirming each other dissent and differences of identity and realities.

De-othering of the other in the context of the PWDs would mean the following:

- A community that celebrates differences in physical orientation while denouncing the spirit of hierarchy and superiority attitudes.
- A community that celebrates diversity and embraces each other's weakness and strength.
- A community of abled and disabled people living in harmony with the body of Christ.
- A community where everyone is encouraged to participate in the life and ministry of the church.

- A community that recognizes the importance of inclusivity in liturgy, sermons, church structure, and places of worship.
- A community that affirms the image of God in all humanity.
- A community that challenges stereotypical attitudes towards the PWDs.
- A community that celebrates the fullness of life in all human beings.⁵⁶

The call for de-othering of others affirms the task of humanizing the oppressed and the marginalized people in society. It would also mean seeing the image and the beauty of the divine in the face of marginalized people like the PWDs. And, that it is through participation in suffering that a meaningful relationship is established.

3. Tribal Worldview, Spirituality, and Ethics for Inclusive Community

Tribal worldview occupies a central place in the tribal community and serves as the moral and ethical anchorage for sustaining the lifestyle, culture, practices, and tradition of the people. Its significance for ingenious identity includes the way it looks at the creation and the world as one by affirming a symbiotic understanding of the religious and the political, the sacred and secular, and locating the supreme being within the creation. Tribal worldview asserts a correlation between the divine, nature, and human beings and this is what makes it different from the other mainstream/traditional worldviews. The 'theo-anthropos-cosmos' perichoresis underlines the ingenuity of tribal thinking and public living. Such a relationship exhibits similarity with the trinitarian understanding of perichoresis especially the stance where individual maintains their identity while partaking in the space of the other.⁵⁷ Maisuangdibou opines that "In the tribal worldview, if human beings and the world/nature are in bondage, God too, is

considered in bondage. With such an interrelational cosmovision of the tribal world, God is integrally part of the whole world.”⁵⁸ In this way, the worldview of the tribes advocates a creation-centric way of life for the community making space as one of the starting points of theology for the tribes. The way tribal people see reality is guided by the nuance of the God-People-Nature interface, leaving less place for manipulating any one of the entities in the triangle of theo-anthropos and cosmos.

Communitarianism and PWDs

Tribals “identify themselves in relation to the community. They live in the web of relations in the community.”⁵⁹ The community spirit is vibrant and takes care of the conduct of the individual in society. In this way, “individual’s identity is found in the village community and the age group. The village is the guardian of the individual.”⁶⁰ Further, “Community was the main factor to their development and safety. Almost all the works were done by the community-based system of work where everyone participated sincerely for the good of the community.”⁶¹ Every tribe had an ethical principle that acted as the yardstick for maintaining the village’s religious, social, political, cultural, and economic behaviour. These moral codes include “traditional etiquette, social manner, honesty, oneself for the sake of the community or lose oneself for the common cause.”⁶² Thus, the “spirit of oneness and the corporate faith of the community as a whole made them good citizens of the village-states.”⁶³ Since time immemorial, communitarianism has guided the people in the events of death and funerals, wartime, celebrations, and festivals in the tribal village.

In the tribal society, the welfare of the citizens was taken care of irrespective of their status and position in the village. Such an understanding of morality and spirituality offers a space for all individuals including PWDs. The good of the village was found in the welfare of all the citizens inclusive of the poor, weak, orphans, widows, disabled, and others. Ekonthung Ezung notes, “very

rarely a person with a disability is left unattended and uncared for by the Naga families or is found loitering in the streets...this is because of the strong cultural and social system that protects the vulnerable one in society.”⁶⁴ The communitarian ethos made sure that “allegiance to the family, clan, and tribe is a strong unifying factor that propelled the members to think for each other’s welfare and the wellbeing of the vulnerable ones in society.”⁶⁵ Today, such ethical principles and moral codes of conduct are in decline at the expense of the people in the margins like that of the PWDs. Hence, the quest is to reaffirm those liberating principles to assert human-centric solidarity towards the PWDs. The spirit of solidarity and fraternity includes breaking stereotypes and human-induced barriers in accepting everyone without judging on their physical orientation. Such practices will help usher in a sense of acceptance for any marginalized community in the public space.

Disabled God in Tribal Spirituality

Tribal spirituality posits a perichoretic interface between the creator, humans, and nature where one exists for the good and the welfare of the other. Such a worldview and spirituality offer a liberating interface space for humanity. Hence, such a worldview could serve as a paradigm for a meaningful meeting point for the abled and disabled. Also, it will help enable the PWDs to be less conscious about their physical well-being and infirmity. In such a context, a disabled God asserts, “Jesus subjects himself to a disability, his resurrected body continuing to bear his scars as a sign of God’s solidarity with humanity.”⁶⁶ The need to reiterate such an embodied body lies in affirming a God who dwells amid the suffering community. The disabled God also finds a similar figure in the Lotha Naga community of Nagaland whose deity *omon Sukhyingo* is a disabled godling with a crooked neck.

Because of his crooked neck, he blesses most of those he happens to see. When omon, meaning spirit, precedes the name Sukhyingo (omon-sukhyingo) it becomes the

*name of the omnipresent godling. There is no time and space where this omon-sukhyingo is not present and seeks justice in all human dealings and relationships. He becomes sad when people fail to practice love, justice, and compassion due to disability, poverty, and misfortune.*⁶⁷

Disabled godling like *omon Sukhyingo* is a reminder for the faith community about the crucified God whose sacrifice opened the way for the reconciliation of humanity with God. Christ's pierced body and the marks of the nail declare the love and mercy of God for humanity irrespective of physical orientation. The disabled God becomes a source of hope for the PWDs in their quest for struggle and inclusivity in the community. While articulating narratives for an inclusive ecclesia one can be enriched by insights from a tribal deity like *omon Sukhyingo* "whose disability did not prevent him from bringing blessings and protecting the vulnerable ones."⁶⁸ The disabled godling showering blessings on humans speaks for itself about the need for breaking any stereotypes and conscientizing society towards an inclusive mindset, attitude, spirituality, and worldview. Tribal godlings like *omon Sukhyingo* offer pointers towards fostering an inclusive community by trespassing human-induced barriers. Normative social practices that are detrimental to the PWDs need to be revisited in the light of affirming a disabled God whose ministry in Nazareth focused on setting the captives free and liberating the oppressed people. Thus, comprehension of a disabled deity should enable the community to transcend culture, tradition, and customs to foster solidarity, and justice in society. It also asserts the possibility of seeing transcendence in the eyes of marginalized communities like the poor, beggars, widows, orphans, disabled, and others.

Tribal Ethics for Inclusivity

Tribal ethical principles like *Tlawmngaihna*, *Khankho*, *Sobaliba*, and *Sukhying* offer substantive space for all citizens in tribal

society. The Mizo's *Tlawmngaihna* is the principle of helping others and the process of denying oneself to help others. It is also the act of self-emptying for the sake of the community while caring for others in need.⁶⁹ The Kuki's *Khankho* as an ethical principle underlines a moral yardstick for community living. It highlights how one is expected to behave with the divine, humans, and nature.⁷⁰ The Ao's *Sobaliba* denotes "the traditional etiquette, social manner, honesty, integrity, virtues and much more than that forces a person to deny oneself for the sake of the community."⁷¹ The Lotha's *Sukhying*⁷² denotes an ethical principle governing the Lotha Naga village. Such ethical principles have existed in the tribal community since time immemorial. Tribal ethical and moral codes are conducive to affirmative action towards sidelined groups like the poor, orphans, widows, the weak, and the disabled. The care for others through its concern for the welfare of the community has sustained the tribal village. It is a shame and a curse to the family when one abandons the sick, elderly, and disabled on their own without caring for their food and shelter. The societal bond and customs made sure that begging and homeless individuals were absent in the tribal society. Hence, tribal ethical principles of sharing each other's burdens and concerns would help enrich the faith community to foster an inclusive ecclesia in the context of the PWDs.

In the Lotha community, *Sukhying* acts as the regulatory principle in the village. Such moral values regulate the public space by shielding the village against violence, fraud, and other social ills to maintain peace. *Sukhying* strives for the pursuit of justice in the community and could be considered as a yardstick for manifesting human rights in society. In the village, it acts as the regulatory principle to care for kinship, inclusive of the rich, poor, weak, disabled, and the powerful. According to Ezamo Murry, the reverence and fear of upsetting the *omon Sukhyingo* prevents the community from dehumanizing the disabled person in the community. Such practice is visible when one shares their

food with the poor, children, PWDs, and elders to win favor and blessing from the *omon Sukhyingo*.⁷³ The solidarity is best exemplified when the spoils of hunting-fishing are shared among the community without neglecting the poor, widows, orphans, disabled, and the less privileged.⁷⁴ These acts were done out of reverence for *Sukhying* with the understanding that blessing happens when one practices hospitality and generosity.

*Sukhying becomes an inclusive space when the other is de-othered. It invokes space to listen to multiple voices. Sukhying becomes a meeting ground for all the diverse sections of the people in the society to celebrate life and claim their dignity and personhood. Sukhying affirms all human beings as subjects and not objects because of their gender, disability, sexual orientation, status, age, and social, political, and religious affiliations.*⁷⁵

Such cultural practices assert solidarity for society's poor, powerless, and marginalized. A solidarity that would delegate the inalienable human rights to all human beings⁷⁶ in the struggle for justice.

Conclusion

Persons with disabilities occupy the unreached cluster of people in the church and society. Various conditions continue to marginalize them owing to their physical and medical circumstances. At times, theological articulations have also negated the plight, experience, and narratives of PWDs. A theology that does not comprehend God's relational activity with the creation negates a section of people. Sometimes, they are viewed from the perspective of charity and the spirit of benevolence by the so-called abled bodies. Thus, comprehending God with concrete attributes will make the articulations of the PWDs more liberating and redeeming, as it is in that brokenness of Christ on the cross that the suffering community finds refuge. While discussing the church's vocation towards the PWDs one could also draw insights from the tribal perspective

whose worldview is conducive to divine-human relations. The fact that tribal spirituality does not assert the characterization of sacred and secular interface offers a narrative to mitigate space between the abled and disabled divide.

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Religion and Politics with Special Reference to Naga Churches and Naga Nationalist Movement

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Introduction

Religion and Politics in the Naga context can be considered a very complex issue because unlike other contexts, the Nagas have a unique history wherein the situation surrounding the relationship between religion and politics has multiple complexities. Attempt will be made in this essay to identify the main factors namely, Political parties under the Indian Government, the Naga Nationalist movements, and the Church (religion) and how they share an inconvenient relationship. This will be done by examining some important historical sources in brief in order to trace the beginning of how the three entities are interlinked and propose a possible means for dealing with the involvement of the triangular (Tripartite) relationship. Joseph Fletcher's understanding of 'Agape Love'¹ and M. M. Thomas' understanding of 'Living Theology'² will also be used as a response to the relationship between Politics and Religion in the Naga context.

1. Terms and Terminology

Naga National movement is the political and armed movement started as early as 1946 which was originally known as Naga National Council.³ The term 'Insurgency' was also given to the movement and other offshoots of the movement by the

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Government of India and its Armed forces which also gave the ground for the infamous Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, by declaring Naga areas as disturbed area. The Constitution drew its draconian laws based on Article 355 of the Constitution of India which gives the Central government the power to deploy the armed forces to maintain public order once the President of India finds that the situation cannot be handled by the state government alone. The Naga National movement challenged the law by taking its stands on Article 14 (Right to Equality), Article 19 (Freedom of speech and expression), Article 21 (Right to Life and Liberty), Article 22 (Protection against arrest and detention). Thereby, instead of using the term 'insurgency', which is literally translated as, "To be in the state of revolt against government,"⁴ the Naga movement prefers to address to themselves as Naga political movement. To be fair and square, the Naga national movement or Naga political movement will be used interchangeably wherein, one must understand that some people's nationalist movement is someone else's separatist.⁵

The term 'politics,' when used for the Indian union election for various houses or representation to the Government of India, is used as to represent those political parties under the Union of India. The Church is basically used to represent the majority religious representation of the Naga areas without denominational division, unless required to identify the denominations. When the term Nagalim is used, it represents the present state of Nagaland under the Indian Union and also those who are identified as Nagas belonging to other states of the Indian union and Burma/ Myanmar.⁶ Whereas the term Nagaland is used to only represent the present Nagaland state under the Indian Government.

2. The Beginning of Nationalism among the Nagas

Nagas were not a united front or representation to claim its identity as one body or entity, but due to its relationship as kins and sharing identical cultural or traditional values, they were brought under the umbrella named as 'Naga' with various interpretations

attempting to search for its root. As Nagas, we prefer to identify ourselves with our tribe names and therefore use identities such as Ao Naga, Lotha Naga, Poumai Naga, etc. The credit for the creation of belongingness and identifying ourselves as one under the nomenclature Naga can be given to the British who colonized Naga areas. The year 1918 marked a notable change in the political understanding of the Nagas, and the Naga Club⁷ which was initially formed by those educated⁸ (western education) Naga leaders⁹ changed the whole worldview of the Nagas as they got exposed to the outside world in a much larger platform.

Two major factors can be attributed towards the growth of the sense of belongingness or unity which grew among the Nagas. First, the World Wars impacted the Nagas in a major way, in the First World War, Naga members of the Labour Corp were involved in bringing money and dresses but World War II was fought in Naga area itself. The war coming to its own land and the introduction to modern guerilla warfare and the arms and ammunitions left by the retreating Japanese army provided materials and ideas which could be used for armed revolution against any security forces who oppose the interest of the Nagas. C.R. Pawsey, the then British Deputy commissioner of Naga Hills, took the initiative to establish Naga Hills Tribal Council in 1945 which later on came to be known as Naga National Council.¹⁰ The second factor can be attributed to the British colonial policies. Nagas frequently fought among themselves as independent unit against foreign or neighbour's intrusion, excluding few who fought against larger forces by calling out and helping those who have close relationship in terms of language and identity to oppose such attempt to intrude the Naga jurisdiction.¹¹ This lack of a united front to confront the intrusion of outsiders was considered to be an advantage for the then British of India and therefore many were slowly annexed into the Queen's side. The British India of the time realized that the Nagas were different from the other inhabitants of the region and therefore needed a tactful and humane approach. Thus, Christian

mission and education were used as means of peacemaking with the Nagas which eventually led to the creation of a new feeling of unity among the Nagas.¹²

By 1946, the Nagas formed a political organ known as the Naga National Council under Angami Zapu Phizo. The insertion of the word 'national' made a huge impact as to consider that Nagas considered themselves to be a separate nationality.¹³ Both the newly formed Indian Union and the Nagas could not come to an agreed position due to the geopolitics situation of Indian politics and foreign affairs, such as creation of new countries like East Pakistan and West Pakistan and the conflict between world powers based on communist ideology and the democratic west conflict.

2.1. The Aftermath

In the year 1947, with the sense of unity and identity, the Naga National Council led by Angami Zapu Phizo declared that Nagas will cease to be a part of India with the departure of the British.¹⁴ In the same year a Naga delegation visited Gandhi and Nehru and got the affirmation that they (Gandhi and Nehru) have no intention to force the Nagas to join the new nation India. But due to the prevailing situation among the princely states and especially the creation of Pakistan, the Indian government hardened their stand due to the fear of more secession elsewhere in the newly created India.¹⁵ Therefore on the 14th of August 1947, the Nagas declared themselves as independent nation. The political issue therefore turned ugly and armed confrontation began to take place between the Nagas and India which also led to the boycott of the general election under the Government of India in 1952, and Naga National Council eventually established a parallel government in 1956.¹⁶

On 11th November, 1975, the Naga political movement led by Angami Zapu Phizo¹⁷ came up with the 'Shillong Accord' which was opposed by many Nagas and led to the formation of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland led by Isaac Swu and

T. Muivah, which further led to the creation of more nationalist movements due to various factors¹⁸ which in itself will be a very large topic to be covered. Therefore, the aftermath of the creation of New India and the British leaving India can be summarized in a nutshell by stating that the Nagas got the idea of unity and nationalism from the shifting geopolitics of the world and the religion and education provided by the then British India. This further led to political awareness and social movements.

3. The Church and Its Roles in Reconciling the Political Issues

The Nagaland Baptist Convention (NBC) in 1964 was the pioneer to first come up with the idea of reconciliation. NBC took the help of Jaya Prakash Narayan, Shankar Rao Deo, Bimola Prasad Chaliha and Rev. Michael Scott (British Missionary) and with that began the first attempt to have Indo-Naga¹⁹ talk.²⁰ But after series of discussions, a proposal was made to give Nagas certain reservations but not sovereignty. This proposal was met with various disagreements among the Nagas and violence erupted among the villagers and even among the church members. The Federal Government, the offshoot of Naga National movement led by Imkongmar of the Ao Naga region proposed that the best solution for the Nagas will be to accept and settle the Naga political problems within the Indian Constitution. His idea was supported by many from the Chakhesang Naga and Lotha Naga areas. But majority rejected it and demanded complete sovereignty.²¹ Thus the first attempt made by the church for a political solution failed.

Some notable attempts made by the church for reconciliation were organized in various levels which included the Naga Peace Council of Baptist Churches of 1974.²² But such attempts failed due to various issues involving bias or self-vested interest. This eventually led to confusions and break away groups among the Naga people. Even the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland merged with the Border Security Force and became a part of Indian armed forces. Therefore, the attempts made to unite and

reconcile failed due to various church movements who played the politics of mixing mission and one sided politically vested interest who in the name of peace contributed to confusions among the Nagas and created political factions/divisions.²³

3.1. Church and State

The Naga Churches have two different approaches towards the involvement in politics. The conservatives prefer non-involvement believing that the church is sacred and therefore needs to separate from the world.²⁴ The other group believes that the church and state cannot be separate entity, V.K Nuh writes,

*Do not the member of the church possess citizenship in the state? Do Christians not cast vote in political election for good service? If so, are they good Christians and faithful citizens if they keep their mouth shut while people go on killing, stealing and bribing?*²⁵

Nuh also further notes that the Nagas face the reality of political instability where broken promises, political revenge and exploitation of the poor are an accepted way of life.²⁶ The involvement of Naga National movement in politics also cannot be ignored since they are also Christians and falls under the nomenclature Nagas. As noted earlier, the Naga National movement is involved in the boycotting of general election in Naga areas as it directly leads them to be involved in political issues. Therefore, while discussing the relation between the Church and the state, one cannot deal with the role of church and politics without understanding the Naga national movement.

3.2. The Tripartite Relationship

To understand Church and politics in the Naga context, we must consider the tripartite relationship between the three major players, the Church, Political Parties under India and the parallel government established by the Naga national workers. This triangular relationship can be seen as an inconvenient relationship

where all the three parties contribute towards various issues arising within the Naga communities.

V.K. Nuh pointed out that 85% of the Naga voters come from Christian families, he considers that it is a great failure from the part of the church since Christians voted for their leaders and those leaders are a part of corruption and they involved in exploiting the people.²⁷ At the same time, a very shocking statistic brought out by Kuldeep Nayar stated that within a span of 25 years the central Government of India had spent ₹30,000 crores in a state like Nagaland where the population is just 12 lakhs which in turn meant that every individual should be a beneficiary of 25 lakhs. This indicated that everyone is either being victimized or involved in some sort of economical corruption.²⁸ Furthermore, the attempt of Naga Churches to bring about a clean election has failed immensely as the Naga Christian voters justified the taking of money from the politicians for votes.²⁹ The justification varies from a particular individual to the other but the most common excuse is the justification that politicians/candidates who are running for elections earn through corruption and public money received for developmental works and so the public/voters have the right to demand money for votes. Such attitudes are developed due to the lack of church teachings on such issues resulting from the fear of speaking up against politicians or public leaders.

The Naga National Movement on the other hand which voiced against the Indian Constitution is now showing interest in reserving leadership roles in the Indian constitutional rights of representation in the State Legislative Assemblies and also even at the Parliamentary level. Even non-Naga writer has observed that the Naga National movement and various factions under them are either directly or indirectly linked with the politics in Naga inhabited areas.³⁰ With such interference in the democratic political exercise by armed nationalist, its influence becomes a very strong participation and manipulation of exercising one's political rights to choose leaders. The Naga Nationalist are also

all Christians and therefore, needs to be approached by the Church and religious leaders for promoting the idea of expression and selection of leaders on one's own will and interest.

The political parties in Naga areas also play the role of using Christian cards to those parties who don't show favour to Christians. At the same time political parties also play the identity and community-based politics in order to gain political mileage. Such approaches directly lead to civil society organizations from the village to tribe and collective Naga apex bodies to force someone to vote for them in their favour. For instance, in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election, due to party ticket issue and the involvement of Naga Nationalist in the election the Poumai Naga Union, the apex body of the Poumai Naga people had to take up its stance against its members to not vote for any other candidate apart from our Poumai candidate using the tribal card.

When such triangular relationship exists, the relationship becomes inconvenient and therefore the idea of dominance and ruling over the rights of the citizen become prominent. Shimreingam Shimray writes, "The Indian Government and the Naga Nationalist wrongly believe in the power of weapons."³¹ Therefore, in such a context the church needs to respond to the problem theologically and ethically.

4. Theological Response

The theological imbalance in the Naga society also largely contributes towards the inconvenient relationship between religion and politics. The prophetic voice of the church is lost due to its inability to voice against injustice in the society. V. K. Nuh points towards six major theological imbalances in the Naga society, *first* is the imbalance between too much preaching and too little teaching, *second* is regarding too much singing and too little reading of the Bible, *third* is regarding the issue of too much of inspiration and too little perspiration which is to say that we try to inspire others but don't want to sweat, *fourth* is with regard to too

much of listening and too little study, *fifth* is too much of revival and too little fruits, and the *sixth* and the most important point is with the issue of too much of imitation of man/woman and too little looking unto Jesus.³²

While understanding and acknowledging the lack in attempting to build a healthy environment from the Christian perspective in understanding the role of church and politics one needs to develop theological response to such issues.

Living Theology of Love

This theological reflection is developed using Joseph Fletcher's 'Agape Love' and M. M. Thomas' 'Living theology'. A deontologist who supports the Kantian divine command and secular positivism holds that specific acts are moral or immoral. The attention is given to an action; the action that decides us from choosing between what is morally required of us to either act or refrain from taking action.³³ Joseph Fletcher argues that instead of being morally required to act, we are actually morally required to follow a rule. The rule which he proposes is that one must unconditionally love our neighbor.³⁴ Many Christian scholars have come up with various ideas on love. Paul Tillich, for example, writes, "Love is the ultimate law."³⁵ When we discuss about love, we intend to have the idea of not acting upon it. Rather we intend to look at it from the point of faith and just as V. K. Nuh mentioned, many of us intend to inspire others but we do not want to sweat. Therefore, Joseph Fletcher's idea about love is a very interesting and effective way of looking at love alongside justice. Joseph Fletcher writes,

"Some Theologies treat faith-work as faith versus works, some as faith or works, some as faith and works. Christian situation ethics says faith is work, i.e., simply put, that faith works. In the same way various systems of Justice: Love versus justice (opposites), Love or justice (alternatives), Love and justice (complements).

*We (situation ethicists) say, however, very positively, that love is Justice or that Justice loves. They are one and same. To be Loving is to be just, to be just is to be loving."*³⁶

Joseph Fletcher is therefore of the view that the agape love does not differentiate between love and justice. To love means to be just. Many Naga Christian scholars have come up with theories to reconcile the political issues within the society in various ways. To mention some, they wrote about forgiveness,³⁷ Unification,³⁸ Peacemaking.³⁹ But without considering love and justice as one, forgiveness will be just a lip service, unification will be artificial and peacemaking will not be lasting. One can also not just end there by preaching about love alone and not act upon it. Therefore, M. M. Thomas' idea about a living theology needs to be combined with agape love.

M. M. Thomas is of the view that a living theology must be 'situational' or 'contextual'.⁴⁰ It must speak to the questions of men and women of Asia in the midst of their struggles and must contain the discernment of what God-in-Christ will respond to the situation.⁴¹ He also further his argument by mentioning that living theology must include the life and witness of both the lay and laity and bring about a new understanding of what is orthodoxy and heresy acknowledging that the best theological definitions of faith are necessarily fragmentary, one sided, situation bound and inadequate to express the plentitude of God in Jesus Christ.⁴² Therefore, to sum up his views on the living theology, he is discussing the possibility of multiple realities and therefore must acknowledge it and respond to it by understanding the situation and struggles of the people.

Conclusion

To conclude, putting together the ideas of Joseph Fletcher and M. M. Thomas, we can use the synthesis of the two by addressing the triangular inconvenient relationship between the three relational

issues between Politics, Religion and Naga Nationalist by coining the term 'Living theology of love' and applying it in situations where any inconvenient relationship exists. In this, the approach of both the ministers and laity must come to an understanding of the reality of the relational issues within the various political aspirations existing within the Naga communities and come in good terms with each other by showing the agape love which is not superficial love but acknowledging that love and justice cannot be separated.

Endnotes

- 1 Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1997), 69.
- 2 M.M. Thomas, *M.M. Thomas Reader*, edited by T. Jacob Thomas (Tiruvalla: CSS, 2002), 60-62.
- 3 Peter Haokip, "The Tribal People of the Northeast: A Liberation Quest for Identity, Equality and Respect in North East India," *No More Guns! People's Struggle for Justice*, Tribal Study Series No.7 (Jorhat:TSC, 2000): 6.
- 4 "Insurgency", Paperback Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition, eds. Catherine Soanes, Sara Hawker and Julia Elliot (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- 5 Namthiubuiyang Pamei, *Fifty Years into the Naga National Movement* (Tamenglong: Gironta Charitable Foundation, 2006), 28.
- 6 In the present scenario many are voicing and supporting voices of the Nagas depending largely on tribal lines and geographical lines which have shifted due to various reasons. The term Nagaland therefore is used instead of the term Nagalim which also carries similar interpretation. 'Lim' is used to mean land by some Nagas who believe in Nagas without borders.
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- 8 Nagas also has its own way of education system which is widely known as Morung system but having different names according to the various tribes. Therefore, education here is mention to point to western education especially introduced by the then British India.
- 9 Especially, those who worked in the District Commissioner's office and those under the influence of such leaders.
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- 15 This is what the Nagas believe but no proper documentation is available due to only verbal discussion without any documentary proof was declared by both sides.
- 16 An account narrated to me by Ex. MLA, Athuibou Daimai, my maternal grandfather.
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- 19 India and Naga delegations to come and seat down for a political solution and not armed conflict.
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- 24 Shimreingam Shimray, *Theology of Human Rights: A Critique of Politics* (Jorhat: Ruth Shimray, 2002), 265.V. K. Nuh, *Nagaland Church and Politics* (Kohima: V.Nuh and Bro, 1986), 212.
- 25 V. K. Nuh, *Nagaland Church and Politics* (Kohima: V.Nuh and Bro, 1986), 212.
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Manipur Conflict: The Plight of Kuki-Zo Tribes in Churachandpur District

*K. Laltlankima**

Introduction

Since May 3, 2003, Manipur has witnessed repeated inter-ethnic clashes primarily between two local ethnic communities, the Meitei and Kuki-Zo. Among several factors that contributed to this conflict, the demand for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes list by the Meitei community headed by Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) can be considered as the immediate cause. Opposing this demand, the All Tribal Students' Union, Manipur (ATSUM) organised Tribal Solidarity March with the theme "Come Let Us Reason Together" in tribal dominated hill districts¹ on May 3, 2023. The rally concluded peacefully in Churachandpur. However, a gruesome tragic event unfolded. Some miscreants, believed to be members of the Arambai Tengol, set fire at the foot of the Anglo-Kuki Centenary gate at Torbung village in the afternoon.² Violent confrontation erupted between Meitei and Kuki-Zo community resulting in the killing of a few and injuring many Kuki-Zo people. Manipur Police commandos were seen aiding the Meitei mob during the confrontation.³ The violence spread to all parts of Manipur, thus begun what the

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Kuki-Zo community called the ethnic cleansing pogrom of Biren Singh's government.

The Kuki-Zo statistics stands at 199 deaths, more than 200 villages burnt, more than 7000 houses torched, 360+ churches and synagogues burnt, and 41,425 displaced⁴ till the writing of this essay. The valley districts dominated by Meitei is rid of Kuki-Zo tribes. Similarly, the hill districts dominated by Kuki-Zo tribes is cleared of Meitei population. Thus, demographically the hill-valley divide was completed. What remains now is for the central government to officially recognise this division. This is the main reason that prompted the Kuki-Zo people to demand separate administration, i.e. Union Territory with Legislature.

1. The Plight of Kuki-Zo Community

All the records of the immense suffering of the Kuki-Zo community cannot be contained in this essay. Therefore, only some areas will be selected for our analysis.

1.1. Education

One of the most vulnerable victims of the conflict are the children. There are around 80 private schools and 10 colleges in Churachandpur. Out of these, 24 schools, both government and private, are used as relief centres.⁵ It is estimated that over 8,000 children are now in relief camps in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi.⁶ Union Minister of State for Education, Annapurna Devi, stated that 14,763 school-going children have been displaced as a result of the ongoing situation in Manipur.⁷ A significant number of students from the Kuki-Zo community, particularly in Churachandpur district, remain out of school as many schools are used as relief centres. Since no formal classes could be conducted during the initial and the ensuing period, students are roaming the streets of Churachandpur.

The harsh conditions of the State have impacted education for a significantly long duration. Schools have been shut in Churachandpur since May 3, 2023, and some schools reopened

from September, 2024 on a trial basis for classes to appear board exams. Schools reopen in the morning and classes are conducted for two to three periods depending on the schools. As situation stabilizes, schools started to gradually reopen for other classes as well. But learning has not been easy in an environment of unrest. Children see guns, hear news of violence. "Their mind has become corrupted. Even two-year-old kids are playing with imaginary guns."⁸ School children, who have seen extensive violence with their own eyes, are filled with anger, helplessness and are traumatised. Many students, who ought to be preparing for their board exams, are now taking up "arms to protect their land."⁹ Situation compels them to be trained in handling arms and go to the frontline of Churachandpur and Bishnupur districts to "repulse attacks from Meitei mobs."¹⁰ All three Principals interviewed admitted to the signing up of class IX and X students as village volunteers and undergoing basic training in warfare.¹¹ Their involvement in such activities severely hampered their interest and focus in studies.¹² This further resulted in poor performance in their studies.

The conflict has negatively impacted the character and discipline of the students extensively. They have become difficult to discipline and are unable to concentrate and focus on their studies.¹³ Teachers have to give extra effort to maintain discipline in schools and also to help students cope with their lessons. Some schools even employed counsellors as they have students who are traumatised and mentally disturbed by what they have been through. Employing counsellors and referring traumatised and mentally disturbed children prove very effective. Ramsiemzo expressed her desire that other schools should also engage counsellors¹⁴ as it proves beneficial for students.

All the three Principals interviewed also admitted to losing children from relatively privileged families as they had gone to other States to continue their education.¹⁵ Situations compelled many good students, who are expected to give good name to the

school, to leave Churachandpur. This in turn becomes a blessing to IDPs children as it creates vacancy for their admission in these schools.¹⁶ There is also decline in admission to Kindergarten class as parents feel insecure to send their children to school due to the chaotic condition of the state.¹⁷ This clearly indicates that the safety of their children becomes the primary concern while education becomes secondary in a conflict torn state like Manipur.

Private schools have done their best to accommodate children of IDPs. Some schools exempted IDPs children from admission fees, supplied text books and stationeries, and relaxed school uniforms. As for monthly tuition fees, those having regular income were expected to pay, but not made compulsory. Students from relief centres were exempted for the whole year.¹⁸ Other schools, such as The Dawn School, charged admission fees but exempted them upon applying for exemption due to financial constraints.¹⁹

One unfortunate thing observed by the Principals interviewed is that substance abuse became prevalent among school children. One major reason could be the easy availability of the substance. After the conflict, jobs become scarce and many people who do not have proper job engaged in easy money making. Some schools have noticeable number of students who indulges in substance abuse after the conflict.²⁰

In the midst of the State being rippled by ethnic violence, it is noteworthy that St. Paul's School in Churachandpur, which turned into relief camp and sheltered over 100 IDPs, is among top performing Institutes under CBSE. It has a success rate of 95% which far exceeds Guwahati zone's pass rate of 82%.²¹ Churachandpur has, in the past, a record of good performance in board examinations, both class X and class XII. It is heart-warming to learn that the district could keep up its performance even in such trying times.

1.2. Health Care

Manipur's healthcare system is backed by Regional Institute of Medical Sciences - a State Hospital, seven district hospitals, one sub-district hospital, sixteen community health centres, eighty primary health centres, 413 sub-centres and 33 private hospital/clinics.²² Since the outbreak of conflict, patients from the hills are avoiding valley-based health institutions and vice versa.²³ It is very unfortunate that the referral and patient transfer systems cut-across ethnic enclaves.

The ethnic conflict and creation of human-made borders have severely impacted access to health care. The Kuki-Zo community in Churachandpur suffers inability to access quality medical care available within the State capital and a high number of deaths among patients seeking health care outside the State and travelling under extremely difficult conditions. Churachandpur's District Hospital, the only one in the area, was overwhelmed and lacked necessary facilities and specialists. Patients requiring specialized care such as MRI, Echocardiography, Urology intervention, dialysis etc. must travel to other States.²⁴ This adds the burden as it is not always financially feasible for the patients.²⁵ Many patients' health condition also does not allow long distance travel by road to reach Lengpui Airport, Aizawl, Mizoram.

The District Hospital faced shortages of resources due to disrupted supply chains leading to the suspension of elective surgeries.²⁶ The supply of basic medical supplies such as cotton rolls, disinfectants etc. are irregular. As there is no supply from the State Government, Hospital management have to procure these basic items by themselves. Prior to the conflict, Hospital authorities go to Imphal every Friday to take these supplies but after the conflict they received the supplies only three times.²⁷ This adds to the grievances of the Kuki-Zo community.

Medicine supply for terminal illness such as Tuberculosis comes irregularly affecting the health condition of the patients. Kidney failure, also called end-stage renal disease, affect patients

as they cannot be cared for due to lack of dialysis facilities in District Hospital, Churachandpur. They have to go to other States as their access to Imphal has been cut-off by the conflict. HIV/AIDS patients are rerouted to Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, for Antiretroviral Therapy (ART).²⁸ This is very unfortunate as the medicine is to be taken every day to treat the virus and reduce the risk of transmission. Irregular consumption of the medicine puts the patient's life at risk and also enhances the chance of transmission of the virus.

Before the conflict, District Hospital, Churachandpur has about 15 Meitei doctors. They have to be relocated due to safety concerns resulting in shortages of doctors. Kuki-Zo doctors relocated from Imphal number around four only. This is insufficient to fill in the vacancy. Doctors have to take more shifts for duty.²⁹ They had to work overtime as the lives of the people are in their hands. Authorities of District Hospital, Churachandpur have no official coordination with Mizoram Health Department. However, they received huge quantities of medicines from Civil Hospital, Aizawl. The Mizoram Health Department also helped in procuring ART for HIV/AIDS patients. Moreover, Civil Hospital, Aizawl gave priorities to patients referred from District Hospital, Churachandpur. Surgeons of Civil Hospital, Aizawl would even undertake surgery on Saturday, which is officially holiday for them.³⁰ The support received from Mizoram saved the lives of many Kuki-Zo patients whom they considered kindred.

One very interesting and surprising fact is that in spite of shortages of medicine and other facilities, it is observed from monthly comparison that death rate did not increase. Hospital authorities also do not have explanation for this.³¹ This can be considered as the powerful hand of God working among the people in conflict situation.

In order to mitigate the issue, there is a need for establishing humanitarian corridors and humanitarian ceasefires for enabling safe passage of patients and medical transports, ensuring

unhindered safe passage for medical supplies throughout the State and ensuring safe access to Imphal Airport for cases of medical evacuation and critical emergency cases. Thus, it is clear that there is urgent need for interventions to restore and protect health services in conflict zones.

1.3. Impact upon the Church

All the Kuki-Zo churches in Imphal and other valley districts of Manipur are completely wiped out. Many of them are burnt down and others either demolished or ransacked, either partially or fully.³² Imphal Pastorate under the Tuithaphai Presbytery, which comprises of four churches, is completely abandoned.³³ The Imphal division of the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church which has seven churches is also completely abandoned. Most of the churches are either burnt or looted.³⁴ The Presbyterian Churches under Zou Synod in Imphal, Sugnu and Mangjing are burnt.³⁵ Phaipi Presbytery under Tangphai Provisional Synod is completely wiped out. Under this presbytery there are four pastorates— Imphal Pastorate, Leilon Pastorate, B. Phainuam Pastorate, and K. Saronphai Pastorate.³⁶ The members are scattered in Churachandpur, Mizoram, Assam, Meghalaya, and other cities in central, north and south India.

The headquarters of Kuki Baptist Convention (KBC) and Kuki Christian Church (KCC), along with churches in Imphal are burnt down by Meitei mob led by Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leepun. As a result, KBC had to arrange makeshift offices in Kangpokpi, Churachandpur and Moreh town.³⁷ KBC is yet to decide whether it can have a single headquarters or not as it did prior to the conflict.

Pastors and other church workers are also not spared. They too had to abandon their post reluctantly. However, pastors of some churches rented a house in Lamka, Churachandpur district, and continued their ministry by visiting and attending to the spiritual needs of the members scattered in different localities of Lamka town.³⁸ Pastors are also involved in rendering other

services like counseling, taking care of the physical needs, and the overall wellbeing of their church members. The task is strenuous and demanding as the members are no longer staying in compact geographical location. Therefore, pastors had to go long distances responding to the call of ministry, sometimes under perilous environment.

Many are disturbed mentally and traumatised, particularly those who are chased out from Imphal and its surrounding foothills.³⁹ The church employs trained counselors and also engages pastors for counseling sessions. Due to shortages of trained counselors, counseling sessions could not be conducted on regular basis. Some churches, whose members were raped by Meitei, not only conducted counseling sessions but also continue to monitor the victims. The counselor guides the victim in all walks of life thereby ensuring the victim's safety and keeping watch over the mental health of the victim.

In spite of the decline in offerings in some churches, the church cannot but engage in relief works. Some churches formed Relief Committee. Under their initiatives, the church bought groceries and other essential commodities and distributed them to those in need.⁴⁰ In some cases, local churches are assigned to take care of a particular relief center. Some churches procured rice in large quantities and distributed to every household members. The church also collected utensils, clothes, and other household items and distributed them to different relief centers.⁴¹ Tangphai Provisional Synod constructed a number of houses for the IDPs in the plot of land purchased by the chief of Sugnu thereby relocating IDPs from Sugnu and helping him retain his chieftainship in the new village.⁴² Zou Synod, though having deficit in its budget, sought out its members who are displaced and distributed Rs. 2000/- to every household. It also constructed ten houses in collaboration with United Zou Organisation, a philanthropic organisation of the Zou community. It also took charge of four relief centers with the same philanthropic organisation mentioned

above. Furthermore, it distributed 80 copies of Holy Bible and 100 pieces of audio Bible to those in need.⁴³

1.4. The Plight of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The violence, arson, and killings in Manipur have led to a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in temporary shelters both in the valley and the hills. These shelters are set up in any available space, such as schools, hostels, godowns, places of worship, or community halls.⁴⁴

In 2023, India saw nearly 6 lakh IDPs. Of these, 67,000 (about 11%) are from Manipur. The remaining displacements in other parts of the country are due to floods, storms, earthquakes and other disasters.⁴⁵ The report by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) termed it the highest number of displacements triggered by conflict and violence in India since 2018.⁴⁶ Of the estimated 67,000 IDPs, 17,911 IDPs are living in 115 relief camps across Churachandpur District.⁴⁷ Relief materials are sent by the Union Government via Mizoram.⁴⁸

In Churachandpur, medicines and medical services were provided through the office of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and drinking water through Public Health Engineering Department (PHED). Besides, other welfare measures such as imparting skills/human resources mobilisation, recreational activities and more importantly, the much needed moral and humanitarian care and supports are extended to them.⁴⁹ However, the distribution of essential commodities is neither sufficient nor regular. Due to problems unknown to the people, there frequently was a hiatus in the distribution of essential commodities. Sometimes the inmates have to manage with meagre ration for a number of days.

The Kuki Students Organisation (KSO) lamented the budget 2024-2025 proposed by the Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, stating that "apropos to the anticipation, the budget has no special package that can provide relief and hope to the internally displaced persons due to the ongoing conflict."⁵⁰ It further stated that "IDPs are becoming victims of not the

atrocities and torture of the culprits of the ethnic cleansing and their enablers but also the victims of gross human rights violation, economic injustice and deprivation of developmental programme. Nutrition deficiency, unemployment, poverty, health issues and drop-out children from schools are the realities that exist in the relief centres...⁵¹ The delay by the State Government to solve the grievances of the IDPs in relief centres even after sixteen months is a grave concern.

1.5. Plight of Village Volunteers

Since the conflict started, every adult male in the villages is expected to volunteer themselves to guard their villages. Even abandoned villages are guarded by volunteers. They were given basic training ranging from one week to a month. They were then sent to the frontlines to protect their people and their villages.

Many of the volunteers are students. Some of them could not give up their passion of academic learning and had to even prepare themselves for examinations while guarding their village. One such individual is Mr. Andrew⁵² whose picture of studying in a bunker, preparing for job-oriented examination conducted by Staff Selection Commission (SSC) went viral. Before the conflict, he applied for the post of Head Constable (Ministerial) and succeeded in the written text from Imphal centre. But due to internet shut down in Churachandpur, he was not aware of the declaration of the result. When he came to learn that he got through the written examination, only fifteen days remained for the typing test. As he could not go to Imphal, the centre allotted to him for the typing test, he had to apply for change of centre. Accordingly, he was allotted Silchar centre in Assam. But due to limited time and distance, he had no other option but to surrender his chance.

Many Central Police Officer aspirants from the Kuki-Zo community from Churachandpur had to travel either to Aizawl centre or Silchar centre as Imphal centre is inaccessible. Most candidates from Churachandpur opted Aizawl centre but

unfortunately all could not be accommodated at Aizawl centre. As a result, many were allotted Silchar centre. For those who are allotted Aizawl centre, there is no problem with regards to security. But for those who are allotted Silchar centre they feel their safety is at threat as there are thousands of Meitei residing in Silchar. Moreover, the challenges faced by candidates from Churachandpur, who are mostly village volunteers, are both financial and distance. They had to spend a minimum of two days to reach Silchar and one whole day to reach Aizawl. Many could not afford to travel to such long distance as it required heavy expenditure.⁵³

Other volunteers are daily wage labourers or farmers. Life is increasingly difficult for them as they had to guard their village and at the same time earn their livelihood. For both skilled and unskilled labourers the problem remains the same. The village defence committee assigned 7-15 days of duty to all volunteers. When their turn comes, they had to leave their works and head towards the bunker that awaits them in the frontline. Many of them are bread winner of the family. They tried their best to keep their families from starvation. When the family financial position becomes really difficult, some volunteers have to ask permission to go home and work for a day or two and then return to the frontline to continue their duty.

This is not all. The ITLF, a conglomerate of different Kuki-Zo tribes, funded the ration/mess of village volunteers during the initial period of the conflict. Voluntary contribution pours in from individual, philanthropic organisations, churches etc. With this, ITLF managed the mess of the volunteers. ITLF distributed 97 bags of rice (50 kgs per bag) and 23 bags of Dal per week for volunteers' mess. But as the period of conflict prolonged, voluntary contribution gradually decreased. Now it has become really difficult for the ITLF to meet the village volunteer's mess. It could somehow manage to distribute rice as it is collected by its women wing from every willing household.⁵⁴ On many days

village volunteers have to manage with rice alone. Sometimes they receive help from Mizo Youtubers like Alpha Mizo Production and Rainbow Mizo Channel for purchase of non-vegetable items. So far, Alpha Mizo Production raise about ninety lakhs and Rainbow Mizo Channel raise seventy-five lakhs.⁵⁵ This contribution comes from crowd funding.

The plight of village volunteers is added by the fact that ITLF could no longer give financial support to those injured during the fight. As it is a gun battle, every village volunteer is always at the risk of both death and injury. For some time, ITLF took care of the wounded volunteers by paying all their medical expenses. But due to lack of funds, it could no longer continue. Since May 20, 2024, ITLF requested each tribe to take care of their respective volunteers.⁵⁶ Each tribe does its best to meet the medical expenses of their volunteers wherever they are hospitalised— be it Aizawl, Guwahati or Delhi. The tribe's apex body made an appeal to the people and the response is positive till today. At times, fund raising activities are also organised for the said purpose.

2. Jangnadop Project

Jangnadop Project,' initiated by Kuki Women Organization for Human Rights (KWOHR), is a project to compensate all the victims of the conflict. The organization is compelled to launch this project as the compensation announced by Amit Shah, Union Home Minister, and the State Government during the former's visit to the conflict torn State failed to reach the Kuki-Zo victims till today. During his four-day trip to Manipur, Amit Shah visited Imphal, Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Moreh, the areas most affected by the ongoing violence and declared that the central and state government will give compensation of Rs. 10 lakh to those who lost their lives due to the conflict. He further promised to give government job to a member of the family of those who died in the conflict.⁵⁷ According to official statement, the financial burden is to be shared by both the State and Central governments.

However, the promise of the Union Home Minister did not materialise for the Kuki-Zo tribes till today. Under such compelling situation, compensation to the victims is initiated by KWOHR under the name "Jangnadopna Project." The first phase of the project was launched in June 15, 2024. Here, it distributed compensation to 15 (fifteen) individuals. In the second phase, distributed on 2nd August, 2024, 16 (sixteen) individuals or victims are compensated at a solemn programme held at M. Songgel Community Hall.⁵⁸

The project is noteworthy as it is solely the initiative of KWOHR. The funds were donated by Kuki women from around the globe. The project is scheduled to continue until all affected individuals and volunteers are compensated. The project underscores the Kuki-Zo community's capacity to support itself independently and sends a strong message to both the Central and State Government about the Kuki-Zo community's ability to "self-govern without reliance on the biased Manipur Meitei administration."⁵⁹ Moreover, the project also highlighted Kuki-Zo women's strong commitment to honouring and supporting the victims of the ongoing conflict. It is painful to learn that the government's inaction compelled the womenfolk to step up and take the bold step of compensating the victims with donations from their fellow women.

3. Theological Reflection

Upon seeing the plight of the Kuki-Zo tribes, the question of hope and humanization immediately comes to mind. The crucial question is of the relation between the gospel of salvation and the struggle of the people everywhere for their humanity. How can we assist the dehumanized to have hope in the midst of their suffering? Offering meaningful and relevant theological answer to such people, in such situation can be a challenging task.

For the Kuki-Zo tribes, the present conflict and the sufferings that come with it are the most destructive forces they ever met in the past many decades that threatened their humanity and society.

These difficult circumstances enabled many in the Kuki-Zo communities to acknowledge their limitations and to seek solace, guidance, and deeper connection with God.⁶⁰ Moreover, the conflict has presented an opportunity to repent, reflect, and realign one's relationship with God. It also presented an opportunity to examine where they might have gone wrong individually, as a church and also as a community.

M.M. Thomas' "salvation and humanisation" which argue in favour of making the human genuinely and fully human, liberated from all social, political and religious dehumanisation⁶¹ become important and relevant as we reflect on the plight of Kuki-Zo tribes in Manipur. Thomas argued for the humanisation of the oppressive structures which, according to him, are mainly religion, politics and history. All of these comes into play when we analyse the causes of the conflict. Thus, the socio-political system and structures need to be humanised because they perpetuate marginalisation and discrimination. If politics can be humanised, it can be people-oriented and work towards a just and fair society that will enhance the life of the people.

The history of Christian mission in India reveals the close integration of salvation with humanisation.⁶² This is because it sees the possibility of humanisation in and through Christ,⁶³ as Christ is the source and foundation of true humanisation.⁶⁴ One may argue that salvation is eschatological. However, the historical responsibility within the eschatological framework cannot but include the task of humanization of the world in secular history. The mission of salvation and the task of humanization are integrally related to each other, even if they cannot be considered identical.⁶⁵ Salvation is the spiritual inwardness of true humanization, and that humanization is inherent in the message of salvation in Christ.

The Manipur conflict reminds us how crucial it is for the church to become an agent of humanisation. The action of the church in the midst of the suffering of the people enables us to see and understand salvation as a present reality and eschatological in

nature. It further highlights that salvation is not only emphasizing inward spirituality and neglecting the physical need of the people, and also that helping the dehumanised to rise from oppressive structures is the church's response to various forms of oppressions and injustices. Jesus' own action of leaving his divinity and taking the form of humanity is a representation of this.

At the same time, it is equally important to inculcate hope for a better future amidst their sufferings. Due to their sufferings, many would have given themselves in to despair and lost any desire to look to the future. Here, Moltmann's theology of hope can be used as our point of reference.⁶⁶ Moltmann is significant because he had experienced life in a prisoner of war camp at the end of World War II which led him to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in which hope played a great part. Moreover, he was a person who refused to give in to the resigned belief that the world would always be this way because he had experienced a God who brings fresh hope in the midst of suffering and injustice. We can learn from Moltmann that hope is based in what God has promised to do in the future, and it calls us to witness to those promises in actions of healing and justice in the present, that hope do not strive after things that have no place, but after things that have no place yet but can acquire one, that the world is not a fixed body of facts but a network of paths and processes.⁶⁷ Additionally, his understanding of hope as something which "takes things not as they happen but as progressing, moving things with possibilities of change"⁶⁸ can be expected to rekindle the fire of hope in the hearts of those who suffer.

Moltmann's theology of hope enables us to understand that it is hope which sustains and carries every believer through life. In hope we find not only a consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering.⁶⁹ What the theology of hope implies is not simply to interpret the world, history, and human relations differently but to change them in the expectation of God's transformation.⁷⁰ His call for 'the realization

of the eschatological hope of justice, the humanizing of man, the socializing of humanity, peace for all creation⁷¹ is concrete evidence that he is providing something more than a mere rhetoric of change to the church in its effort to exercise its hope responsibly in modern society and in its confrontation with particular issues. His belief that God's promise to act in the future is more important than the fact that he has acted in the past is fundamental for the Kuki-Zo tribes to sustain their faith and belief in God amidst their sufferings. What is implied is not withdrawal from the world in the hope that a better world will somehow evolve, but active participation in the world in order to assist in the coming of that better world. To affirm this he said, "Hope set everything in motion and keep it in a state of change."⁷² Hope goes its way through the midst of happiness and pain, because in the promise of God it can see the future also for the transient, the dying and the dead.⁷³ That is why Moltmann equates living without hope as no longer living.

Another significant point made by Moltmann in relation to hope is endurance. He explained that without endurance, hope turns superficial and evaporates when it meets first resistances. What we have started with hope, only endurance helps us persevere. In fact, it is tenacious endurance that makes hope sustainable. When hope is lost, endurance turns into acceptance of what happened. But hope enables us to "affirm the pain that comes with endurance, and learn to tolerate it."⁷⁴ When we are tempted to lose heart because of all we see in the present, we are called to remember the future that God has promised and press forward in hope.⁷⁵ Even when the world is not what it should be, we must find strength in the Christian hope to press forward for the sake of the one who encountered us on the cross.

Conclusion

It has been over 16 months since ethnic violence erupted in Manipur, involving the majority Meitei community and the Kuki-Zo tribes. The on-going violent conflict has led to the loss of lives and widespread displacement, severely impacting the health

system and causing short- and long-term consequences. The resulting divide is so severe that an unofficial border has effectively separated the two communities within the State. As the violence carries on, efforts by the State and Central governments to resolve the crisis appear minimal, and the future remains uncertain. There is no doubt that the entire onus is on the present day government of the State which has failed miserably in preventing the violence when it first occurred and then failed again in controlling the spread of violence on a wider scale.

Both parties suffered grievously due to the conflict. The government must ensure non-discriminatory relief and rehabilitation. Government must also take full responsibility for running all camps, including the provision of proper nutrition, safe drinking water, and sanitation. The future of Kuki-Zo tribes is bleak as there are many students among their volunteers. There are chances that Kuki-Zo tribes may lose one generation of their youth due to the conflict. This calls for immediate and serious attention to redress the damage caused to them by the conflict.

A close observation shows that socio-cultural, political and economic factors are embedded in the conflict. There is a growing mistrust between the two communities, preventing any real reconciliation or lasting peace. This highlights the importance of confidence-building measure. Therefore, the urgency of restoring peace cannot be overstated. Addressing the sufferings of the people must be given priority at least on humanitarian ground before solving the conflict through political dialogue.

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Book Review

Patton, Chenijan. *Tribal Theology Revisiting Empire, Culture, and Ethnicity*. Bangalore: Omega Book World, 2024 (147 pages).

Khiangnunfima*

This book presents a compelling collection of essays that engage in theological reflections and analyses from postcolonial tribal perspective. By adopting an indigenous viewpoint, the author scrutinizes the complex interactions among empire, culture, and ethnicity, thereby elucidating how societies shaped by colonialism articulate their faith and traditions. In this process, the author challenges the faith community to critically reevaluate and reconceptualize faith and theology within the intricate and evolving landscapes of postcolonialism, with a particular emphasis on Northeast India, especially Nagaland.

The first chapter provides a comprehensive and nuanced examination of postcolonial studies, systematically articulating its core concepts and theoretical frameworks. The author effectively delineates clear connections between postcolonial studies and theology, demonstrating a profound understanding of their interdisciplinary intersections. Through the incorporation of diverse perspectives and experiences from colonized nations, the analysis gains depth and complexity. Ultimately, the thought-provoking examination of faith, culture, and empire yields valuable insights into the dynamics of power and identity in postcolonial.

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The rewritten text exhibits a clear, concise, and formal academic tone, effectively conveying the chapter's strengths. The language is precise, and the structure is logical, making it suitable for academic audiences.

Chapter 2 endeavours to foreground the importance of postcolonial perspectives in Northeast India (NEI), shedding light on indigenous narratives shaped by lived experiences of exploitation and external control. While the chapter sets the stage for subsequent explorations of postcolonial frameworks, its potential impact is somewhat diminished by an overly cursory examination of the complex interplay between indigenous theology and postcoloniality. These critiques provide constructive feedback on enhancing the chapter's clarity, depth, and overall academic rigor.

Chapter 3 offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities surrounding Christianity in Nagaland, arguing that the prevailing societal ills, including corruption and electoral malpractices, necessitate a critical re-evaluation of faith, worship, and cultural practices. The author's call for self-examination resonates strongly, highlighting the imperative to reimagine Christianity's role in addressing Naga society's contemporary challenges. The author exhibits unwavering conviction and prophetic fervour in bold critique of the contextual realities, driven by a profound sense of social responsibility and a burdensome concern to transform societal norms, thereby compellingly exposing entrenched malpractices and advocating for transformative change.

Chapter 4 offers a timely exploration of hermeneutics from a tribal perspective, seeking to decolonize theological discourse in Northeast India. The author argues that prevailing methods of theological articulation, spirituality, and worship often perpetuate anthropocentric and otherworldly orientations, neglecting the region's indigenous heritage. By foregrounding the people's worldview, the chapter presents a compelling case for reorienting

theologizing towards a more contextually-relevant and culturally-sensitive praxis.

Chapter 5 examines the complex power dynamics of repatriation by emphasizing indigenous perspectives and presenting a distinctly Naga epistemology that challenges prevailing colonial narratives. To achieve this, the author critically analyzes the Naga repatriation process through a postcolonial lens, focusing on the collaborative efforts of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation and the search team RRaD in their endeavour to repatriate ancestral remains from the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, London, to Nagaland. This analysis could benefit from more explicit engagement with existing scholarship on repatriation, decolonization, and indigenous knowledge systems to further contextualize the Naga experience and underscore its broader implications.

Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive examination of William Carey's enduring legacy in Northeast India (NEI) by skilfully illuminating the profound impact of Serampore College on the lives of the region's tribal populations. It highlights Carey's strategic outreach to hill communities through missionary deployments, Bible translations, and the establishment of mission centres in the Khasi Hills and Brahmaputra Valley.

Chapter 7 thoughtfully explores the tension between preserving traditional practices, such as hospitality, and promoting a culture of tolerance and inclusivity. This chapter provides a timely examination of the pressing issues confronting Naga society today, delving into the intricate intersections of faith, culture, and politics within the public sphere.

Overall, this book provides a profound and incisive examination that challenges entrenched perspectives, thereby expanding the epistemological horizons of individuals beset by cognitive biases. By employing postcolonial critique, this book serves as a catalyst for critical awareness, dispelling illusions and

revealing the complexities of reality. Its significance lies in its capacity to foster a deeper understanding of the tribal experiences.

However, building on the outstanding scholarship demonstrated throughout, I would like to offer a critique for further consideration. While the book presents a compelling framework for re-examining hermeneutics through a tribal lens, the discussion could benefit from more nuanced engagement with existing scholarship on decolonial theology and indigenous epistemologies. The critique of colonial-influenced theological articulations is well-taken, yet the proposed solution—centering the people’s worldview—requires further elaboration and concrete exemplification to fully convince. Moreover, the analysis would gain depth by exploring the complex power dynamics between missionary legacy and indigenous cultural resurgence in Northeast India.

In light of the author’s meticulous analysis, perhaps exploring or to enhance the text’s rigor and impact, incorporating concrete case studies, addressing potential criticisms, and clarifying the scope and limitations of the analysis would be beneficial. By doing so, the text would provide additional depth and nuance to the discussion.

Above all, the author’s use of postcolonial narratives serves as a powerful counter-narrative to dominant hegemonies, challenging the enduring legacies of colonialism. Nevertheless, despite their importance, it is essential to scrutinize both the macro and micro levels of domination. When examining local experiences and epistemologies, certain groups or clans may be overlooked, raising essential questions: whose experiences, voices, and clans are being represented? Within the Tribal community, comprising diverse clans and communities, the postcolonial narrative may inadvertently mask internal power dynamics, where dominant hegemony persists even among the oppressed. As the author also quotes Gayatri Chakravorty who stated, “the subaltern cannot speak” due to the complexities of representation and

power¹. This concern resonates within the Tribal context, where internal clan dynamics may replicate dominant hegemony. For instance, the dominant narratives of larger clans may overshadow the experiences of smaller or marginalized clans. Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “subaltern secularity” highlights the tension between dominant and marginalized groups within postcolonial societies.² This perspective underscores the necessity of interrogating internal power structures within the Tribal community. To truly decolonize knowledge and narratives, it is essential to centre the voices and experiences of smaller clans and communities. By acknowledging and addressing these internal dynamics, postcolonial narratives can become more inclusive and effective in challenging dominant hegemony.

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