

DOING MISSION IN CONTEXT

Edited by

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PREFACE

The Centre for Mission Studies was inaugurated in 1982 while the Union Biblical Seminary was still in Yavatmal. Yet the Centre could not develop for some years, primarily due to the absence of a director. Since 1989, when a director was appointed, several programmes such as full-fledged academic courses in Missiology (M.Div./M.Th), Summer School of Communication for Lay Leaders, Refresher Course for Full-time Workers, Research, Consultation, and Occasional News Letters have been launched and are successfully functioning. The Centre's major aim is to serve the Indian churches in their mission of extending God's kingdom in the world. One of the objectives is to publish missiological books and periodicals. Thanks to Dr. Sunand Sumithra and the Theological Book Trust, the first CMS book has now become a reality in this present volume. We hope to publish at least one book every year which would fulfill the urgent demand for indigenous books on missiology.

The chapters in this book are papers presented in the first CMS consultation held in 1991. The book covers a very broad spectrum of mission-related topics, and divides itself into four natural parts. Starting with the principle of relevance in the first two chapters, the book then zeroes in on the question of the contexts of the local church and religious pluralism in the third and fourth chapters. The fifth and sixth chapters concentrate on the recipients – women and dalits respectively, both oppressed groups in the Indian churches, while the last two chapters conclude with the broader issues, of rural and ecological concerns.

Ashish Chrispal says in *CONTEXTUALISATION* that contextualisation, the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one's own situation, is a theological necessity demanded by the incarnation. He

distinguishes between two types of contextualisation – existential type (e.g., liberation theology and the theologies of religious pluralism) which over-emphasises the context leading to theological syncretism which tends to relativise, universalize and reduce Christian truth and lead to a progressive absorption of Christianity into naturalistic and humanistic ideas and practices. The second type, Dogmatic contextualisation, on the other hand, begins with a basic commitment to the authority of the Bible and the supra-cultural factor of the Good News. However, it takes context seriously, is missiological, incarnational and multi-dimensional, emphasizes transformation rather than conversion and guards against the imperialism of theology.

In *INDIGENISATION OF CHRISTIANITY*, J.W. Gladstone warns that indigenisation is not going back to Hinduism but going forward to a new relevant expression of faith. Hence the challenge of indigenisation to the church. Missionary work in India which was done during the colonial era led to a western form of Christianity. The need for indigenisation was felt as the identity of the Christians was questioned. Indigenisation is exclusive neither to India nor to twentieth century. Many Indians like Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chunder Sen, Lal Behari Dey and P. Chenchiah emphasised the fact that the Christian community was very much un-Indian in its organization, nature and leadership. This was substantiated by the revival of many religious movements and founding of several periodicals. However, indigenisation has its difficulties, the author concludes, the fear of returning to Hinduism and secondly the very composite nature of Indian Culture.

The concern of F. Hrangkhuma in the *LOCAL CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN MISSION AND EVANGELISM* is to answer questions such as, How should a local church be effective in missions and evangelism? But he covers a broad gamut of key theological issues besides the church - its relationship with the kingdom of god, mission, evangelism...The author suggests that a combination of large congregation and small group/house churches will be most effective to carry out

missions that include - evangelism, social concern and environmental concern. to enhance this, local churches should be structurally liberated.

Plamthodathil S. Jacob points out in *MISSION AND PLURALISM: A REDISCOVERY* that today mission is existing in the context of pluralism. People around are becoming more and more aware of their own religious thought and culture. Communication, facilities, literacy drive, education, etc., have paved the way for Pluralism. Therefore, pluralism is inevitable and it has a definite implications for missions today. This leaves the Christian Missions with the situation of dilemma into opportunity. Missions today has to be rediscovered in such a context and the mission's emerging task has to be outlined very clearly.

In *WOMEN IN MISSION*, Sakhi Athyal points out that by examining the themes of conferences, consultations, books and articles on the subject that prominent issues concerning women in mission are uncovered. From a study of these issues in biblical perspective, we can conclude that, broadly speaking, Asian women are on the right track as far as their emphasis on the mutual dependence of men and women and on the full humanity of women are concerned. and also in their desire to work for social justice and changed attitudes. However, in their self-sacrificing love, which is characteristic both of Christianity and of Asian culture, Asian Christian women should not lose their sense of distinctive Christian identity. they should also recognise the importance of the ministry of women in evangelism and Bible teaching, rather than being pre-occupied with social issues, that mission may be wholistic.

In *MISSION AND THE DALIT ISSUE*, after discussing the meaning of the term Dalit and their extreme pathetic, oppressive, exploitative situations, M.E. Prabhakar suggests methodologies and strategies for doing mission with the dalits which would involve understanding afresh their spatial location, dispersion, their caste structure, Ambedkarism among educated dalit youth, Hindu RSS and VHP attempt to win the dalits, creating dalits, engaging in dialogues and

interaction between dalit spirituality with other Bhakti traditions, forming ecclesial communities with the leadership and team work of people and clergy in social formation and church planting, and promoting studies of socio-cultural and religious movements in India. The inclusion of Christian dalits in the SC list by the government is imperative for the spiritual vitality and economic stability.

Vishal Mangalwadi argues in *MISSION TO RURAL INDIA* the enormous diversities of Rural India - historically, Geographically and in its infra-structure pose a challenge to the Mission to Rural India. Desire for religious conversion, new political movements and the quiet migration to the city slums are evidences of the disintegration of Rural India. Casteism, oppressive economy, etc. are the major problems facing the Rural India and Brahmanism is the chief cause for these problems. The internal weakness of the church has perpetuated this plague. But Rural India is more open to the Gospel now than it has been since 1930. The Gospel is the only answer to Rural India's problem and it remains with the Church as to how the church would get Rural India excited about the Gospel.

In the last chapter, *George Samuel* suggests in *ECOLOGY AND MISSION* that according to the Scriptures, we are living in God's world. The Christian attitude to nature, then, must be one of responsible stewardship. We do not have license to plunder nature or to worship it for we believe that nature also is freed from decay and restored in Christ. Missionary work includes "earth-keeping", but this is no substitute for presenting Christ relevantly to all people everywhere. Being crucified with him will set an end to our selfish greed, and only in his power can we protect nature and bring it to fruitfulness.

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Editors