

Chapter 6

MISSION AND THE DALIT ISSUE

by M.E. Prabhakar

Christian faith understands mission, both conceptually and contextually, as the process of 'reconciliation' of broken relationships between God, humans and nature and the renewal of all creation to become integrated and whole in accordance with the purpose of God's will. As Christians we believe that the author of our faith, Jesus Christ is God incarnate who redeems and restores the fallen humanity together with the creation in bondage and brings them into his 'new creation'.

The Dalit issue concerns the millions of 'broken' victims of the unique system of 'caste-class' oppression in Indian society and the thousands of them who find themselves discriminated against even within our churches.

Christian calling or vocation for Mission has to be done amidst this Indian reality, with the realisation of our 'dis-jointedness', both as Indians and as Christians (Indian Christians), set in the context of our fragmented Church and nation.

The perspectives for Mission are primarily drawn from the New Testament and the understanding of 'Dalit' is mostly based in the Old Testament.

The Gospel Meaning of Mission

Reading together the various texts on the ministry and teaching of our Lord, in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and their pastoral Epistles, the meaning and goal of mission can be enumerated as follows:

1. Mission is of\from God, through Jesus Christ (God's Son) and in the Spirit (God's Holy Spirit). God's mission (*Missio Dei*) happens in the world and known to us in the life and work of Jesus, crucified and killed by men, but raised and exalted by God to be Lord and Christ (Mt. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:22, 4:14; Ac. 2:32,36).

2. Mission involves repentance (Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:14-15), turning around from self towards God and towards others (neighbours), and believing the Gospel (good news) of God's Kingdom (rule), begun by Jesus. The Kingdom of God is at hand, within, amidst, upon us (Mt.12:28; Lk. 11:20, 17:21) and is also coming (Lk.22:16; Rev.21:1-4) to establish God's love, justice, righteousness and peace. Mission is participating in God's rule on earth, as in heaven (Mt. 6:10).

3. Mission is being anointed and sent into the world for proclaiming the Kingdom of God, even as God sent Jesus Christ into the world and as Jesus sent his own disciples into the world (Lk. 4:18,44; Mt. 10:1-5; Jn. 17:18, 20:21).

And, mission is receiving and responding too, not only sending or giving (Ac.10:34-11:18). Jesus approved of genuine faith whether shown by the rulers or ordinary people – suffering men and women.

4. Mission in its fuller sense is being sent to people who are bewildered and longing for God (Mt. 9:35-37), who are lost to the fold (Mt. 10:6-8) and those who are not of the fold (Ac. 26:17-18) – for healing them both physically and spiritually, for leading them from darkness into the light of God, for delivering them from Satan, giving them forgiveness of sins and sanctifying them in Christ.

5. Mission is done by us, having received the Holy Spirit, sent by the crucified and risen Christ, as his personal witnesses to what we have ourselves heard and seen\experienced (Jn. 20:22; Ac. 1:8; 26:16).

6. Mission is both preached and lived by example, in prayer and action, in the way of Jesus (Mt. 14:23, 26:36; Mk.1:35; Lk. 5:16, 9:10-17, 28,37, 42, 22: 39-42). Christ

himself is both the messenger and the message, the evangel and the evangelist of God's Mission (Lk. 4:18-21). There can neither be preaching nor action without pointing to or looking at Christ (Mt. 11:2-6; Lk. 7:18-21) who himself points to God (Jn. 14:10, 24; 17:7,8).

7. Preaching the good news (gospel of God's Kingdom) to the poor and oppressed and bringing justice and liberation to them is integral to Mission. The Kingdom of God involves transformation of both individual and corporate lives, spiritual and social structures, and liberation from all forces of evil which oppress and enslave human beings (Mt. 12:18-21; Lk. 4:18, 19:8).

8. Doing Mission with the 'least' of our brothers and sisters is doing Mission with Christ. Jesus is known in the acts of compassion done with the poorest and most oppressed (Mt.25:40). The Bible, amazingly so, shows a bias in favour of the younger, the smaller, the least righteous (repentant), the rural, the poor, the sinners and the outcastes, the prodigal, the foolish, the discriminated, the marginalised, the oppressed and the downtrodden.

9. Mission is for total healing of the sick of every kind – in body, mind and soul, and raising the dead (Mt. 4:23; Lk. 7:20-23), irrespective of race (caste), class and gender (Mt. 8:5-13; Mk. 3:1-6, 15:22-24, 25-34; Mt. 15:21-28; Lk. 7:24-30, 8:2, 11-17; Jn. 4: 5-29). Mission restores lost humanity, re-establishes human relationships and brings new life in community.

10. Mission is to be done with the home, the church and outside in the world (Lk.4:16,31,44; Mt. 9:35; Mk. 1:39). It has to begin wherever we are, in the home-town, in the province and nation and carried to the ends of the earth (Mt. 28:18, Ac. 1:8). Mission in and through the Church builds up the Christ-centred Fellowship (*Koinonia*), which spreads love, righteousness and justice, equality and common good (Ac. 2:41-47, 4:32-35).

11. Mission is to be done in struggle (warfare) with the 'Devil and Satan'¹, who is the prince of the world yet is the

deceiver of the world, who is the Evil One with the power of death and who sets himself up against the will and purpose of God. But Christ has already conquered the Devil (Rev. 12:9) and will destroy him forever (Rev. 20:10). Through partaking human nature and his own death, Christ has destroyed the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb. 2:14). People are to be empowered to withstand the viles of the devil, prevented from falling into his snares or coming under his condemnation (Eph. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Tim. 3:6). The spiritual powers of wickedness are to be fought with the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:13f), knowing that Christ has delivered us from evil.

12. Mission is (witnessing in word and deed) to our faith in Jesus Christ as liberator, redeemer and saviour who sets us free from sin, and reconciles broken relationships and restores community (Mt. 1:21, 20:28; Lk. 2:11, 21:28; Jn. 3:17, 4:42, 12:32-34; Lk. 7:45-50; Mk. 2:9).

At the missiological level, there has been the happy augury of converging trends in doing Mission (despite differences in doctrinal or practical emphases) by the 'ecumenical' and the 'evangelicals', as evidenced by the Ecumenical Consultation on World Mission and Evangelism at San Antonio, USA in May '89 and the Evangelical Congress on World Evangelisation at Manila, Philippines in July '89.

In both the international meetings there have been similar content in the call given to all Christians and emphases.

On the unity (integrity) in Mission — of word and deed, of witness and service, for the integration of evangelism and justice, particularly at the grass-roots/base communities;

On the Wholeness of the Gospel integrating the spiritual and social for the whole human being and all of humankind;

On involving the Whole Church — of men, women and children and all divisions of the Church: Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic, ecumenical and evangelical;

Respect for, and dialogue and common action with, people of other faiths and of diverse cultures;

Recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples, ending discrimination based on race/caste, class and gender, and cooperation in evangelism and social action.

The mission of spreading the Good News (of God) consists in both verbal preaching and working for justice. The acknowledgement of Sin, both personal and social, spiritual and material, personal and structural, and the prophetic denunciation of all injustices and oppression without putting aside the need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, both of individuals and of all life — were areas of explicit/implicit agreement in these consultations.

The mission of Jesus Christ, while including both the oppressed and the oppressors, was particularly directed to the poor and oppressed, marginalised and excluded sections of people of his day, to restore the image of God and the fullness of life in them. Jesus Christ lives today and continues his mission through his body, the Church, of which we are all members.

BIBLICAL MEANING OF 'DALIT'

The Sanskrit root of *dalit* (broken, oppressed) is related to the Hebrew root word, *dal* which essentially means weak, frail.

'Dalit' in Sanskrit² and many other Indian languages means: (1) broken, torn, rent, burst, split; (2) opened, expanded; (3) bisected; (4) driven asunder, dispelled, scattered; (5) trodden down, crushed — all of which have social reference. A sixth group of meanings has theological reference — manifested, displayed.

The Old Testament Hebrew word *dal* has been translated into English as 'poor' which, however, is a generic term including the helpless, needy, destitute, hungry, oppressed and humiliated. In the Old Testament³ *dal* depicts, (1) physical frailty eg., the thin cows of Pharaoh's dream are *dal* (Ge.41:19); (2) military frailty eg., Gideon's clan is *dal* (Jud.

6:15) and (3) social frailty of the *dal* (Pr. 19:4). Being frail or *dal* requires charity for their survival/existence (Job.32:16-20). *Dal* does not merely depict a condition but more, it describes a process of being made weak or frail, being impoverished, being emptied or made unequal. At one end of the scale, there is the impact of power and at the other end, the powerlessness of the *dal* or frail poor to defend or lift up themselves. Because of their social and economic frailty, the *dal* are easily crushed (Job 20:19) and do not have the means to recover.

The Hindi New Testament uses the word 'dalit' for the poor and oppressed in Luke 4:18.

Dal has been used with other Hebrew root-words, *ebyon* (needy poor) and *ani* (brought low, afflicted, subdued, violated, forced, ravished). *Dal* and *ebyon* have been used, according to scholars, over forty times together with *ani* and they describe a whole range of domination including physical and social oppression, sexual violation, economic exploitation and political manipulation. However, the Hebrew root *dal* also signifies the need to rise up and shake off oppression!

The poorest of the land (*dallah*) were left behind by King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:14; Jer. 39:10, 52:15-16) to work in the fields and vineyards in Israel, while he took away the princes, elders, soldiers and artisans into exile at Babylon.

The prophets Amos and Isaiah used all these root-words, *dal*, *ebyon* and *ani* together, as a formula for denouncing the exercise of oppressive power and exploitative greed (Isa. 3:14-15; Amos 2:6,7; 4:1).

The devalued and dehumanized people of biblical times and Jesus' own time, *am-ha-aretz*, the rabble without religious merit, will all qualify as dalits today, who share the many oppressions recorded in the Old Testament and the gospels. Such oppression include,

(1) extortion from their meagre earnings – charging exorbitant interest on loans (by land lords and money

lenders) and withholding the pledges made by the (*ani*) poor (Ex.22:25; Eze. 18:12-13), even taking the infants and young children in pledges (Job 24:9);

(2) exploitation of labour, withholding their wages and not paying them at the end of the day (Dt. 24:14; Lev. 19:13; Jer. 22:13);

(3) dispossession of the weak (*dal*), adding field upon field by the rich (Isa. 5:8);

(4) despoliation of the oppressed poor (*ani*) and crushing them ruthlessly (Isa. 3:14-15) and

(5) corruption and injustice in the courts of law (Ex. 23:3; Dt. 16:18; Isa. 10:1, 2).

In the Bible, frailty (*dal*) and need (*ebyon*) are often used together in the appeals to God, and in the affirmations of his pity for the weak and dependent (Ps. 72:13). God is their 'stronghold', a shelter from the storm and shade from the heat (Isa. 25:4). God is on the side of frailty and need rather than on the side of dominating power. God is on the side of the oppressed, afflicted, needy and poor and acts towards the transformation of the power structures for bringing about human and human community (Ps. 9:12,18;10:2, 9; 12:5; 22:24, 26; 37:11,14). It is this character of God that gives the oppressed and broken their rights and empowers them to struggle for justice and to achieve their liberation.

God's response to oppression and injustice is to show himself as God creating a history of justice, which begins as his redemptive act at the Exodus and continues until the end, when justice and righteousness are achieved in all the earth. God's redemptive act is in saving the downtrodden from the unjust and the oppressor. God's judgements proceed around the facts of oppression and the issues of justice (Ps. 82: 1-2). God demands the rulers of his people to

Give justice to the weak (*dal*) and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted (*ani*) and the destitute (*rush*). Rescue the weak (*dal*) and the needy (*ebyon*) deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Ps.82: 3-4).

Righteousness and Justice are the foundations of God's throne. The glory of God becomes known through his giving justice and maintaining the right of the oppressed and the deprived (Ps. 97:2,6).

Israel's faith and trust in God, as their redeemer from oppression and persecution, as creator of a new covenant community (to live in mutual relationship with their God and neighbours) and the sustainer of community by his justice and righteousness, was based on their historical experience of deliverance from intolerable slavery in Egypt. Their exodus experience showed that God intervenes in history on behalf of the broken victims in society, and that their faithfulness in taking care of the oppressed sections – the downtrodden and impoverished, the widows, orphans and strangers among them – and changing their ways of governance to establish just and right relationships between people become the test of true community. (Dt. 15:15; Lev. 19:36). The prophets of the Old Testament constantly appealed to the collective conscience of the Israelite people, calling their rulers, elders and priests to repentance and renewal of the covenant (Jer. 5:1, 5; 8:10, 11; 31:31-34). God himself entered into controversy with his people, on their failure to keep his commandments, and called them to return and live by the covenant (Mic. 6:2, 8; Hos. 4:1-3; also Isa. 3:17; Jer. 25:31).

Being made dalit has been a historical process. The dalits' injustices and inequalities have been inherited and accumulated through the ages, fed by the religio-cultural and social sanctions for placing and keeping them at the very bottom of the social ladder, destroying their self-image and denying them opportunities for education and employment.

The Bible, perhaps, is the only scripture speaking vividly about the oppressed and poor – the dalits. The questions of their oppression and struggles for liberation have not been really resolved since ancient times. The search continues still and calls for a contemporary and concrete commitment by Christians within our own Indian context and culture.

If mission is to preach the good news of God's rule to establish justice, righteousness and peace and to work with the oppressed and broken victims for setting them free from structures of injustice and inequality, what does it all mean for dalit liberation?

THE DALIT ISSUE

In the Indian context, we may not simply speak of the poor and oppressed people or of poverty and oppression in objective/neutral terms, as they embrace specific communities, with subjective and concrete histories, experiences, aspirations and struggles. The core of the poor and oppressed in our country/society is constituted by the dalits and adivasis, who form 'enduring' groups of castes and tribes (which have not shown upward mobility in their social positions or significant change in their material conditions through the ages) who have collectively remained at the bottom of the hierarchical, stratified Indian society, through 3000 or more years, as socio-culturally ordained fixed groups within Indian society. Dalits and adivasis are ancient tribal communities of indigenous people, who were either conquered or coopted, excluded or isolated from the main framework of society, built on a religio-cultural and social ideology of the caste system, which together with the economic and political factors, forms a 'caste-class' nexus.

The Hindu Brahmanical *varnashrama-dharma* or caste ideology with its ideas of pollution and purity has become the instrument for legitimising power and privilege in a hierarchical and unjust social order.⁴ The pollution-purity principle determines the ritual status of the caste communities: the Brahmins having the highest and purest varna status (associated with their scholarly and priestly functions), the Kshatriyas are next in the hierarchy (with their soldierly and ruling functions). The Vaisyas are next in the hierarchy (with their trading and financial activities), and the Shudras come last in the social ritual order (with their cultivation and artisan services). Intellectual activity has been accorded a superior status over manual tasks, which

are determined to be more polluting among the social functions/jati-occupations. There is a marked correlation between the downgraded social status and economic deprivation of the lower strata in our society, which has never been convincingly explained. Conversely, power and privilege have always been associated and still remain with the higher strata. Modernisation processes and developmental growth have not been able to change the (traditional) hierarchical values and institutions of Indian society!

The dalits and tribals do not belong to the *chaturvarna* hierarchy. Their divergent social development have resulted in the tribal adivasis becoming isolated and largely secluded and the dalits becoming subjugated and coopted by the Hindu society to virtually become a fifth caste or *panchamas* and placed outside the *varna-vyavestha*, making them out-castes (exterior castes or excluded castes). Further, the *panchamas* were assigned 'menial' tasks and ritually stigmatised as "untouchables" or *asprisyas* (the lowest and most polluted castes) and prohibited from owning property or having other possessions or indulging in literary pursuits. The Hindu religious-theological-cultural values and social practices are intertwined with economic and political interests of those who are at the top of the hierarchy. In short, pollution, poverty, powerlessness, is the Dalit issue.

The caste-class framework (tentatively proposed by the CISRS and WCSRC) endeavours to understand the socio-cultural and economic factors responsible for the unique system of oppression in the country.⁵ The social-cultural religious factors on the one hand and the economic structures on the other, are inter-dependent and interacting forces of domination within the Indian social reality. Dalit struggles have to develop into anti-casteist and counter-theological movements for the liberation of dalits.

In Maharashtra, the old servile or reformist usage of 'Dalit', (since the 1930's), acquired revolutionary content within emerging cultural and literary protest movements of the untouchables, inspired by Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy,

in the late 60s and 70s. 'Dalit' has become understood today as embodying the sense of being oppressed and therefore, the need to revolt against oppression. Being 'Dalit' implied a double oppression: social and economic of the low-caste, ritually impure dalits. 'Dalit' thus became a symbol of assertive pride and resistance to rejection of the linked oppression of caste and class.⁶ The concept and word were popularised by the Dalit Panthers in the early seventies inspired originally by the American Black Panthers. For the 'Dalit Panthers', 'Dalit' meant change and revolution, not caste. The political usage of the term on the Dalit Panthers was inclusive of all who are "broken and oppressed" viz., SCs and STs, neo-Buddhists, workers, peasants, landless labourers, women and religious minorities who are oppressed by caste and exploited economically.

It is to be noted, however, that 'dalit' has really come to mean the castes/communities which suffer caste degradation socially, and consequent economic deprivation. Only the Scheduled Castes (former Depressed Classes) who continue to suffer under the stigma and social practices of untouchability and cast-segregation, lay claim to be real dalits. It is also noteworthy that 'Dalit' is the name that the former untouchables have given to themselves, contrary to all the other names mentioned earlier, given to them by others: Hindu legalists, social reformers, Government administrators and the like. Dalit is the mark of self-identity, self respect and self assertion of the ex-untouchable communities and their fighting slogan against the dehumanising caste oppression.

The term 'Harijan' (children of god), originally coined by a Gujarathi novelist, Narsinh Mehta and popularised by Gandhi to refer to the untouchables, though still used in popular parlance, was resented by Dr. Ambedkar and the later militant dalit activists. In recent times dalit movements have rejected the term altogether, because of its implications of social patronage and condescension and also because of the oblique but pejorative reference to 'children of god' born to devadasis.

Atrocities on Dalits

Contemporary times have been witnessing increasing protests and self-assertion of the dalits against their discrimination and degradation by caste, in society and in the religious institutions. Their rather slow but steady progress – whether under the influence of egalitarian religions or the governmental efforts for their uplift through protective discrimination policies of the impact of education or the varied employment opportunities and the geographical mobility offered by a modernizing transport system – has become a threat to non-dalit ‘upper-caste/class’ social domination and their monopoly of public administration and services. Dalits have begun to aggressively defend themselves or even attack their oppressors. Increasing brutality and ruthless suppression of dalit protests and peaceful struggles for their rights and social justice, by the dominant non-dalit sections of the society and by the state have become the order of the day. The atrocities are perpetrated for socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political reasons, all of which are undergirded by caste values reflecting untouchability practices. Socio-cultural reasons are based on untouchability and caste-discrimination and resentment against educational progress or urbanised culture among dalits; socio-economic reasons include wage and land-struggles and unionisation/mobilisation of dalits; socio-political reasons include independent ideology, actions or alliances and voting by dalits. The very recent atrocities at Pimpri-Deshmukh village in Maharashtra (on 16-8-91), Sargur village in Karnataka (on 16-11-91), and Tsundur village in Andhra Pradesh (on 6-8-91) illustrate the points made. Caste (and communal) carnages are resorted to by the forward castes against dalits in the name of discouraging and preventing ‘casteism’ alleged to be promoted by the Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes! The refusal of the President of the Indian Union to meet with the 106 SC and ST M.Ps (during Sept ’91) for a discussion on the ways and means to put an end to atrocities against dalits, is a sad tale of an undemocratic action by the Head of State, that seriously undermines the confidence of the subjugated people in the Constitutional processes.

The anti-SC caste riots in Marathwada in Maharashtra (1978) and in Gujarat (1980,81) which spread even into interior villages are grave indicators of non-dalit resistance to dalit-uplift and progress. (The anti-Mandal riots and civil uprisings against Reservations for BCs in 1990, clearly indicate the extent to which the upper strata and the ruling sections of our society will go, irrespective of the laws for social welfare!).

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATIONS IN RESERVATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM DALITS

It is common knowledge that converts from scheduled caste communities have entered many egalitarian religions or sects, like Buddhism, Bhakti cults, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity, through successive periods of history. Scheduled Castes have been traditionally treated as Hindus (despite their lacking a status in the caste-system and despite recent protestations by awakened dalits that they were never really Hindus). Buddhism and Sikhism have been considered as part of the Bharatiya culture, while Islam and Christianity are said to be ‘foreign’ (alien), non-Indian religions. Apart from the religious and cultural implications of such a view, a socio-political consequence has been that only those members of scheduled caste communities professing Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism are made eligible for Reservations (protective discrimination) by the President’s Constitution (Scheduled Caste) order of 1950, amended in 1956 and again in 1990, leaving out and denying the benefits of Reservations (for elections to Parliament and State Legislatures for Public employment and professional education) to Christian and Muslim of Scheduled Caste origin. As far as the Christian dalits are concerned, particularly in the rural areas and in smaller towns, and excepting completely urbanised individuals/families, they continue their membership in and social practices of their natal SC communities, who accept them as fellow-dalits. As long as their commensal and connubial relationships are exercised within their original SC communities, what other criteria will establish their SC status?⁷

If they are Christians (or Muslims) it is a matter of individual or group conviction and choice. How can they be denied then benefits on par with other SCs? It is now accepted even within the highest levels of government that there has not been any substantial change in the material conditions of the Christians of Scheduled Castes origin. The two Backward Class Commission Reports of the centre (1955 and 1980) and the (unpublished) Minority Commission Report (1983) as well as several State Government Commissions and Committees have testified to this fact. Political representation, legal rights and economic aids to them are citizenship rights. The mass upsurge of Christian dalits all across the country is indicative of their mood that the government should review their question and include them in the President's Constitution (SC) order, for parity with other SCs and for social justice.

Christian Dalits

Their general poverty and marginalisation both in the society and church impels Christian dalits to covertly or overtly declare themselves and get enumerated as SCs to avail of government reservation and welfare benefits. Economic and social adversity seems to override theological ambiguity of this situation.

Also, in the context of untouchability offences and atrocities involving them, they cannot register complaints or seek redress under the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 (amended 1976) and the SCs and the STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 because of being excluded from the SC lists, nor can they defend their Human Rights as communities (for the justiciable fundamental rights in the Constitution primarily apply to individuals) and, in any case, they are too poor to go to courts. This is the main reason why they declare themselves and struggle as dalits within dalit movements. While the dalit movements will support Christians in dalit struggles it is an open question whether SC list.

The Christian dalits have been described as "twice alienated", i.e., both in society and in the church. There is

undoubtedly much caste-discriminations within some mainline churches, particularly in South India. Calling them by caste names and being spoken to discourteously, separate seating and separate communion in church worship, separate cemeteries or lack of them, even separate seminaries and serious punishment for crossing limits are well known facts and well-documented too. While churches support the Christian dalit struggles for reservation at a secular level, they have never openly supported their civil rights struggles (e.g. against caste atrocities) or sought for a comprehensive human rights legislation, in the context of social justice. Nor will church hierarchies or Christian institutions tolerate any organised dalit protests or demands for justice within church communities! Examples may be given of the CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese (since 1980) the Roman Catholic Diocese of Palayamcottai (April 1991) and Hyderabad Diocese (Aug. 1991) etc.

There have been dramatic exits from the churches, by Christian dalits, alleging ill-treatment and unequal relations, lack of pastoral care etc., the best known example being Meenakshipuram of Tamilnadu (1981). Such reconversions may be sporadic or discontinuous, but it is a threatening trend that needs to be faced by the churches and, in any case, reconversions for economic reasons are going on all the time at the individual/family levels.⁸

Statistical data for continuing backwardness of SCs

After 44 years of our national Independence the situations of the dalits have changed only marginally, despite protective discrimination policies and social welfare schemes of governments at the centre and states. The visibility and mobility of SCs and STs have been more apparent than real! Contrary to claims of the government and the political parties their improvement and progress have been much too slow, even sluggish and disparate regionally\zonally, due to the 'apathy and antipathy of caste-Hindu officials and village functionaries implementing the statutory and non-statutory provisions and programmes for SC uplift.

Education

(i) Literacy rates (1981)	SC: M 21.38% F 10.93%	
	Gen. Pop. M 56.37% F 29.75% (1991 - M 63.86% F 39.42%)	
(ii) Enrolment (1985 - 86)	Primary School	16.10%
	Middle School	12.87%
	High School	12.02%
	Higher Secondary	11.84%
	Under-Graduate	6.53%
	Post-Graduate	6.30%
(iii) Drop-out rates (1981-82)	Primary School	59.21%
	Middle School	74.76%
	High School	85.72%

Employment

(i) Central Govt. (1977-87)	Grade	A	8.23%	(under-represented)
		B	10.40%	(under-represented)
		C	14.46%	(normal)
		D	20.09%	(over-represented)
(ii) Public Sector (1987)	Grade	A	4.86%	(under-represented)
		B	6.17%	(under-represented)
		C	18.54%	(over-represented)
		D	30.82%	(excessive)
(iii) Nationalised Banks (1.1.1987)	Officers		7.29%	(under-represented)
		Clerical	13.77%	(marginally represented)
		Subordinate	22.30%	(over-represented)
(iv) Universities (1.1.86)	Teaching:	Professors	0.61%	
		Assoc. Prof.	1.04%	
		Lecturers	3.16%	
		Research asst.	10.53%	
	Non-teaching:	Grade A	3.35%	(under-represented)
		B	4.57%	(under-represented)
		C	8.51%	(under-represented)
		D	14.93%	(near normal)

(v) Public Service Commission (1985-87)	
a) Union	1 out of 11 SC members (no chair-person)
b) States	12 out of 131 SC and ST members (no chair-person)

These statistics quoted from the 28th report of the SC-ST Commissioner for 1986-87 speak for themselves. In the (recent) 29th Report of the SC-ST Commissioner for 1987-89 no statistics were given and the Commission has recommended a public-litigation suit against the Government's failures to implement the provisions of the Constitution for the speedy uplift and socio-economic welfare of the SCs (and STs)! In fact, the Commissioner goes on record to say that "so long as the State is unable to discharge the Constitutional obligations, the peoples' resolve for the recreation of the system on the basic values should be honoured and their peaceful struggles should be supported. Any use of force, direct or indirect against peoples' struggles for establishing their right to life should be prohibited." He even stated that he would want to associate with such struggles, particularly of the SCs and STs, within a "framework of affection and obligation."

DALIT WOMEN

Dalit women are said to be "thrice-alienated" by caste, class and gender (social, economic and sexual oppression). They do the hardest, unrequited toil in their homes as well as in the fields and factories, cook, bear and rear children and care for their husbands (patriarchal oppression). They keep up the caste traditions, and among Christians, church practices too in their families. They show more religious fervour and faithfulness. In calamities, natural or man-made they show real courage and endurance. They are raped and molested and their children murdered during caste-atrocities to establish caste-supremacy as well as male-supremacy of the forward caste-class men, to teach a lesson to the dalit men and to the entire dalit community. Their leadership in dalit struggles is brutally punished (for

being out of line) by the upper caste/class leaders. With all that, they are paid relatively less wages than their men and are given limited variety or opportunity in agricultural and non-agricultural employment. Seasonal unemployment is a burden for them. They may be sexually exploited by the forward caste employers as chattel or cheap sex-objects. Some of them, from a particular caste, are dedicated as *devadasis* (religious prostitutes). Their female children look after their younger siblings or look after the cattle and goats of the land-owning employers. In spite of the laws to the contrary, child-marriages are common. The dowry evil (till now confined to non-dalits) also vitiates their lives. Malnutrition, excessive childbearing and lack of medical or health-care sap their energies, breed diseases and increase their mortality rate. Separated, divorced or widowed women are common among them. Female foeticide or infanticide in overt or covert ways are not unknown. The decreasing sex ratio, 929 F: 1000 M in 1991, would relate to SC communities too! Literacy is of a very low-level among them. Often dalit women betray themselves, acting as pimps or procurers for their employers! Dalit women are indeed critical subjects for mission!

BONDED AND CHILD-LABOUR AMONG SCs/INDEBTEDNESS AND IMPACT OF FOREIGN DEBT

India continues to have the dubious distinction of having the largest working-children force in the world. Estimates for 1981 vary from a cautious 17 million through 44 million to 100 million by government and private sources respectively. 87% of them work in agricultural operations; the other 13% work in hazardous employment and in the urban unorganized sectors. Depending on the nature of employment, child labour may result in stunted physical and/or mental growth, emotional imbalance due to being separated from families, exploitative labour may affect them psychologically, children may become brutalised by monotonous labour and drudgery of long hours of work — all these would eventually make unhealthy anti-social adult citizens!

Of the 32.12% of cultivators and 41.75% of agricultural labourers among SCs in 1981 a very large proportion became indebted in various degrees for domestic or social or economic reasons. Of the bonded labour, over 86% come from SCs and STs including 61.25% of SCs. A national survey report published in 1981 estimated over 2.6 million bonded labourers in 10 major states. Bondage may be of many types including inter-generational bondage and widow bondage etc.

External debt by the country has its heaviest toll on the dalits (and tribals). The stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes as part of the loan conditions result in sharp devaluation, financial austerity and credit squeeze leading to inflation and economic recession, as well as increase in unemployment (due to reduction of investment and production), escalation in mass transport costs and cut-backs on expenditure on education, health, food and other social welfare programmes. Woe into the poor and oppressed, who are being truly crushed! (Amos 2:6; 8:6)

ISSUES FOR MISSION

In its message, the San Antonio World Mission Conference has called Christians everywhere to join in

- proclaiming the good news of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ;
- acting in solidarity with those who suffer and struggle for justice and human dignity;
- sharing justly the earth's resources . . .

In its Manifesto, the Manila International Congress for World Evangelisation called on all Christians

- to demonstrate God's love visibly by caring for those who are deprived of justice, dignity, food and shelter (# 8);
- to engage in prophetic witness of denouncing all injustice and oppression, both personal and structural (# 9);

- to preach the word in the power of the Spirit and pray for entering into Christ's victory over the principalities and powers of evil (# 11);

- to transcend, as members of the Body of Christ, all barriers of race, gender and class (# 13);

- to turn their congregations outward towards the local communities in evangelistic witness and compassionate service (# 16);

- to call churches, mission agencies and other Christian organisations to cooperate in evangelism and social action, avoiding competition and duplication (# 17).

The New Delhi Rally of the All India Christian Convention for the rights of the "Christians of Scheduled Castes Origin" (1990) called upon and brought together all Christians, churches and voluntary agencies in India, transcending their denominational, doctrinal, organisational and caste\class differences.

- to cry justice and bring victory, in the power of Christ's Spirit (Mt.12:18-21), to Christian dalits,

This writer has called for the emergence of Dalit Theology through re-interpreting God's liberating presence in a society that has been consistently denying the dalits their humanity by socially ostracising them, culturally subjugating them, economically exploiting them and politically marginalising them.⁹ Dalit theology and Dalit Ideology would become instruments for the total liberation of dalits.

Christ, the Servant-Lord in his compassion is suffering and struggling with the dalits and, is calling to the 'dis-jointed' members of his Body, the Church, to hear (afresh) voices of the dalits crying out in anguish and pain, for their liberation! Let us hear again, the

- voices of dalits, who have been enslaved in their own country under caste-oppression;

- voices of dalits who are struggling to establish their self-identity and their right for self-determination as sections of indigenous people of our land;

- voices of dalits who are denied the image of God in them and persecuted as sub-humans;

- voices of dalits raised up in angry protests against the blatant violation of their human and civil rights;

- voices of dalits who are being pauperised by mechanisation and commercialisation of agriculture and export oriented production of superior food-grains and cash-crops;

- voices of dalits who are the tillers and producers but do not own land and do not share its produce;

- voices of dalits suffering the 'backlash of development' and suffocating under the burden of the country's external debt;

- voices of dalit women who suffer multiple exploitation – social, economic, sexual and of patriarchy;

- voices of dalit children who work as child-labourers and who are denied their rights to a carefree, joyful, healthy, protected and enlightened life;

- voices of dalit youth who challenge the double standards of Christian leaders and the wide gap between Christian professions and practices;

- voices of dalits longing for social justice and liberation;

- voices of dalits seeking for solidarity and offering their active participation in the quest for a new human community;

- voices of dalits who cry out for spiritual freedom to seek for and work out God's salvation in their oppressed lives.

The crisis and opportunity of the Indian Church lies in the fact that its membership is predominantly (65 to 90 percent) made up of 'converts' (or their descendants) from the dalit communities. The Christians, as a covenanted community, share the Judaeo-Christian understanding and obligation to live responsibly before God and with each other, responding to the needs of the dalits for charity and justice. That is the true test of their fellowship\community. As people of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31), they are to be a

light and covenant to the Indian nation (Isa. 42:6, 7) to open the eyes of people blinded and imprisoned by the inequalities of the oppressive caste-system, so that God's salvation may reach every corner of the country (Isa. 49:6).

Doing mission with the dalits would involve understanding afresh their spatial location/geographical dispersion and the caste-equations in their populations. All over India, the dalit communities live in hamlets (*wadas, cheris, palems, pallis, mohallas, thatties* etc.) attached to the main villages. Dalits are usually known by the names of their principal caste-communities e.g., Chhuras, Bhangies, Lalbegis and Chamars in the north; Mahars and Mangs in Maharashtra; Malas and Madigas in Andhra Pradesh; Pallas and Parayas in Tamilnadu; Holayas and Madigas in Karnataka; Pulayas and Parayas/Sambavas in Kerala etc. Historically and sociologically these are co-equal, autonomous communities or originally indigenous tribes. Unfortunately, these principal communities along with their sub-castes have been encouraged to contend and compete with each other and to stay divided, in early times through religious myth and folk-lore, social intrigue and division and in contemporary history by political manipulation. They inhabit separate hamlets too in the peripheries of villages. They may form separate settlements even in the towns. Different dominant-caste land owning communities patronise the labourers of one or the other dalit community. Also, the major political parties coopt different dalit communities and use them in their campaigning or as fighting cadres in the conflicts between parties or factions within the same party. Any uppity or independent behaviour by the dalits is brutally repressed.

The Christian dalits too live in the segregated hamlets, with their fellow-dalits of other faiths. Often, the denominations and even sects are predominantly composed of one principal dalit caste and their sub-castes, and separate church buildings in the separate hamlets or in the same area are used for worship or the same church building may be used by the different dalit communities at different times.

In the villages and in district towns, the Christians are very much under the influence of Hindu culture and participate in the Hindu (and local Muslim) festivals, worship of family gods (*Ishta devtas*), village goddesses, local heroes and also visit pilgrimage centres. Popular religiosity takes them to worship/pay vows at Catholic shrines and dargahs of Muslim saints and so on. In South India, it is common for rural Christians to bear a dual identity, with two names; a Hindu and a Christian name. The Christian youth in rural areas may be active in their local churches, but nevertheless indifferent to the Christian message/leadership.

The educated dalit youth have come to adopt leftist ideologies and currently Ambedkarism. There are determined attempts being made by Hindu communal bodies (e.g. RSS, VHP etc.) to woo the dalits (a comparatively recent phenomenon) in the name of Indian culture and social reform and promises of promoting equality and security for dalits.

The questions that remain relate to the methodologies and strategies for doing mission, evangelism and justice within a decidedly multi-religious (even communal), pluralistic (culturally and ideologically) and segmented (socially and theologically) contexts of our society. The reflections here are of a Christian activist, which may be conveniently grouped under four heads: theological, ecclesial, socio-cultural and politico-economic.

Theological

(i) It has been said that specifically, the dalit situations and sufferings are the result of caste-ideology based on certain Hindu-Brahmanic theological-philosophical concepts that underlie the hierarchical relations and socio-cultural-economic discriminations in Indian society. Dalit struggles basically manifest the spiritual quest of dalits for human identity and dignity, equality and autonomy. The elements of dalit spirituality are rooted in their autochthonous (indigenous) cult-forms, folk-traditions, myths, oral history, songs and proverbs, which reflect a

continuing (if unfamiliar to the middle-class) counter culture with reference to the dominant Brahmanic culture. In the context of dalit liberation, this counter-culture¹⁰ has to be constructed into an active, popular dalit theology (to undergird a social ideology) to counteract the doctrinal-theological basis of inequality and marginalisation, promoted by the dominant Hindu culture, paradoxically equated with Indian culture. Dalit Theology will thus be a counter-theology. Christian dalit theology together with being a faith-affirmation of liberation-salvation experience (under God, in Christ), also becomes a 'confessional' theology laying bare the roots, identity and consciousness of dalit communities (Dt. 26:5-12).¹¹ It is the whole community (men, women and children) doing theology! More than the ethnic relationship the sense of community, in their context, consists in belonging, intimacy, cordiality, inter-personal contacts, mutual aid and communication, and warm social relationships. The community leader is understood as being 'first among equals' and democratic.¹² Also, Christian dalit theology will be shaped by the common experience of the sufferings (pathos), struggles, aspirations and hopes of *all* dalits. The theology of Indian Christians, so far, has neither divested itself of western-moorings and interpretations, nor has Indian Christian theology (or what is claimed as such) become an indigenous interpretation of the 'composite' culture of India, including the religio-cultural traditions of the Brahmanical system as well as those of the dalits, who form the majority in the Indian Church. Indian Christian theology has been also, so long, the preference of the middle class and the preserve of professional theologians in the Christian community. Looking at theology from the grass-roots would necessarily change the western-conceived interpretations of Christology and soteriology, hermeneutics and pastoralia, and would open the way for pluralism of Christian views (without syncretism).

(ii) In the dalit context, there has been a proliferation, in the last couple of decades or more, of largely local, fundamentalist-charismatic groups which stress the significance of the Holy Spirit (in the Trinity), and the 'gifts' of the Spirit,

particularly for speaking in tongues, healing and casting out demons. These popular fellowships are characterised by the participation of large numbers of 'lower' caste-class, disprivileged and dominated people of the churches and local communities, i.e., dalits, in their various meetings and worship services. This phenomenon has been partly explained as a form of popular protest against the religious emphases of the dominant middle and upper segments in the church and society. Another reason is that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are believed to be within the grasp of everyone, and the persons (often dalits) who were not socially expected to be fit or able or authorised to exercise the miraculous powers, to their own surprise, find themselves possessing these unexpected talents and accepted, heard and supported in a charismatic ministry. Women assume leading and independent roles and are respected fully. But more importantly, these charismatic groups accept and deal seriously with the aetiology (origin) of suffering/affliction and particularly the evil effects of disease, sorcery and demon-possession.

Church hierarchies and lay-leaders, earlier condescending or contemptuous towards belief in demons and spirits and their propensity for causing evil or disease, are now more accommodating to the popular beliefs in divine healing of diseases, exorcism of evil spirits and devils, and hold special services in their churches.¹³ However, this is one area of mission that needs to be explored and examined at depth for proper theological understanding and for engaging in useful ministry, which has a great potential for evangelism. It is a pity that the initial or original formations of these charismatic groups, which were not related to caste or class have also become affected with these distinctions. The charismatic ministries, should be guarded from becoming self-afflicting exercises for emotionalism and easy avenues of escapism. The healing of souls and bodies, should be combined with the concern for the healing of the whole society. Charismatic preaching should denounce corporate sin resulting in injustice and oppression and the personal

sins of non-involvement in and indifference about social regeneration.¹⁴

(iii) At the inter-faith level, dialogues and interactions between the expositors of dalit spirituality from the Bhakti traditions of the Nanakpanth, Kabirpanth, Valmiki, Ravidas, Satnamis, Basava Samithi, Vira Brahmam, Saiva Sidhanta and so on and of the mainline religions Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and neo-Buddhist, will have to be actively engaged in, with mutual respect, as an unexplored area for theological exchange and expression in indigenous thought patterns. Also, a theological analysis of dalit myths, stories, songs, proverbs and the like and mainline/formal dalit sahitya and oral traditions should be seriously undertaken by Indian Christian theologians, to create an alternative body of 'sub-altern' theology.

Ecclesials

(i) The Christian dalit situations of rural and slum areas and their struggles and sufferings in common with dalits of other faiths (and ideologies) indicate the need for creation of grass-root Christian core-groups (for doing evangelism and justice) similar to the Basic Christian Ecclesial Communities (of the Asian and Latin American type)¹⁵, with the leadership of local lay-people (women and men) and clergy. This is not to copy or import models and this may not be palatable to conservative or fundamentalist Christian friends, but it has to be done as an imperative and judiciously promoted by the churches (involving both ecumenical and evangelical activist-thinkers), considering the increasing opposition to dalit activism and Christian endeavours for justice. The action-reflection process may be based on concrete life-experiences (from family life, daily work, injustice, atrocities or persecution, folk-performances etc.) and related to/evaluated by relevant biblical passages/instruction, not in the academic but in the form of popular and social discourses, oriented towards justice and equality, through change of power structures and power-relationships. The evangelistic spirit and prophetic spirituality should not be lost sight of. Education of the local congrega-

tions, training of local leaders for community actions and support actions to people's struggles and movements, become basic objectives of the grass-root core group building programmes. Pastoral formation, in theological colleges and among the lay leadership in local contexts, and continuing education of pastors in parishes etc., have to be undertaken as priority programmes. Mission through the dalits, rather than Mission to the dalits, with the belief that God in Christ begins his rule with showing justice to the oppressed and poor, who are passed over by the centres of power in our society, and brings those at the periphery to the centre, to fulfil mission, becomes a new basic insight.

(ii) The solidarity between the dalits of the principal antagonistic communities and their united struggle against oppression becomes crucial for dalit liberation in general and Christian dalits in particular. The Indian Church truly missed a revolutionary opportunity to effect social change, at least within the Christian community, in the context of the large scale accessions into the church by the dalit communities during the mass conversions. There is the obligation for recognition of the paramouncy of dalit struggles, for justice and equality, both within the church and in society, by the middle and upper strata of the church and extending their solidarity and action with dalits in achieving their liberation, consistent with the nature of Christian fellowship. The dalits too need to seek for alliances with and solidarity of the non-dalits, in friendliness and on an equal basis, maintaining their own leadership and initiatives.

(iii) The preoccupations of the organised churches with institutionalism, formalism of faith and ritualism of worship, should give place to the strengthening of preaching, teaching and healing ministries to become oriented to people and their needs for spiritual and social formations. Pastoral care of the people, especially involving emotional support in their adversities should become diversified and enlarged to make it into team work by skilled and trained colleagues including clergy and laity.

(iv) Church growth and church planting among ethnic communities are legitimate concerns of mission and evangelism. This may be best done in cooperation with other churches in the area, recognising and respecting other ministries, and in relation with people, accompanied by sharing the life and struggles of the 'churchified' people, improving the quality of their Christian life and their commitment to justice. The euphoria produced by quantitative growth accompanied by exaggerated individualistic, spiritualistic concepts of mission should be guarded against.

(v) The ministry of women, with women particularly, and at every level of the church, commending and respecting their ministries as being co-equal to the ministry by men, is strictly in accordance with the Bible (Lk. 8:2; Ro. 16:1; Phil. 4:2). The rigid stances about women's ordination and comprehensive ministries within organised churches but, the ready acceptance of their charisma and spiritual leadership within charismatic fellowships by many of the loyal members of organised churches, is a contradiction in terms.

vi) The discussion on the ecclesial dimensions cannot be complete without the mention of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's views on Indian Christianity.¹⁶

Bharat Ratna Dr. Ambedkar, generally misunderstood in Christian circles for having rejected the Church, was in truth a good friend of Christians, even taking offence at Gandhi's strange dislike of Christian missions. He was well-read in the Bible and had profound knowledge of biblical history and religion, Gospels and Epistles. He liked to compare himself with Moses, the university-educated liberator of his own slave people, who had given the Code of laws to the new nation of Israel. Moses was the model for Ambedkar's own leading of the dalits and making laws for their protection and welfare. He burnt the Code of Manu, on the Christmas eve of 1927, and is reported to have said that his act symbolised the passage of his people from a life under the Law to a life under Grace! His deep interest in Indian Christianity was because its ranks were drawn from the 'untouchables'.

His sincere advice to the Indian Christians was that they should fight for their civil rights and work for their economic uplift. He exhorted the Indian Christians not to depend for every need on the missions but to organise and demand their rights from Government.

His friendly criticism of Indian Christianity was that

(a) It became an instrument of desocialisation,¹⁷ as he knew it in Western India. The Christian 'untouchables', who studied in mission schools and became advanced did not care a pin for the backward members of their former caste-members.

(b) The Indian Christians were disjointed and lacked a community feeling, "consciousness of a kind". Their common faith in the one Lord did not become a unifying force to transcend caste, creed, language and region. The term Indian Christians remained a statistical phrase!

(c) Conversion to Christianity would make the depressed classes denationalised: the multiplication of their numbers would strengthen the British hold of India. This was the worst of his criticism, based on his uncritical acceptance of Savarkar's concept of Hindu nationalism.

Nevertheless, he appreciated the Christian Missions for trying to provide a sound body (*Corpus Sanum*), to the people of India and to create a sound mind (*Mens Sana*), among Christians. But, he also was greatly disappointed that Christianity did not improve the social status of untouchables, and did not remove caste-distinctions and discriminations in the Church.

He exhorted the Christians to create community, to withstand the onslaught of militant Hinduism masquerading as Indian Nationalism, and their tendency to indulge in antagonistic acts against Christians like burning Mission buildings and so on.

The implications for Mission are clear. The unity of all Christians transcending caste, credal, regional and linguistic divisions and the solidarity of the Christian elite with

the backward masses in Christianity in their struggle for their civil rights and economic uplift, were fundamental aids to Mission.

Socio-cultural

The priority area for Mission, evangelism and justice, is to promote the study and review of Indian history, to focus on the history, culture, social and religious movements of sub-altern, indigenous people (dalits and tribals) in the total context of the development of Indian society, with its multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural formations.

Politico-economics

The inclusion of Christian dalits in the SC lists by the Government of India, for reservations giving them full political, economic, religio-cultural, social and civil rights is crucial for Mission, as this step will remove the socio-theological ambiguities in Christian identity and promote church-growth and deepen the quality of Christian life in community. As visualised by the Medak Diocesan Conference in 1959, this will contribute to the "spiritual vitality and economic stability of (Christian dalits), so that they may become spontaneously expanding churches.¹⁸



END NOTES

1. The power of the 'devil' or the evil one can never be depersonalised, minimised or secularised. The spiritual roots of evil or the oppression by the devil cannot be left out. Satan is to be most feared and resolutely resisted against his effort to question the will of God and to undermine the natural response of human being to obey God (Ge. 3:1; Job 1:9). It is this rebellion of the Evil One (Satan) that results in the brokenness (dalitness) of humanity which the sovereign God will overcome because he is holy and righteous.

2. For 'dal' and 'dalit' see Vaman Shivram Apte, *Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Delhi, 1989, quoted by James Massey, *Dharma*, vol.16 no.1, January-March, 1991, p. 44.

3. The discussion on the biblical roots of 'dalit' has been adapted from Harvey Perkins, *Roots of Vision*, WCC-CCPD/CCA, Singapore, 1986.

4. S.K. Chatterji in M.E. Prabhakar (ed.), *Towards a Dalit Theology*, CISRS-CDLM/ISPCK, Delhi, 1988, pp. 17-19.

5. It is a sad fact that there has been neither a serious critique of the *varnashrama dharma* by Indian Christians nor a tradition of dissent against the caste system or adoption of an alternate lifestyle by the Christian community whose preaching on equality and fraternity is louder than its practice. The notions and ideology of caste have sunk so deeply into the psyche of Christians – both dalits and non-dalits – that it appears almost futile to expect them to change their social attitudes and practices. De-hinduisation has for them meant only a change of community in the physical and social sense and not a change of old caste attitudes and values. The dalit question in the church cannot be solved without the unquestioned acceptance by every Christian that caste is incompatible with christianity at any level – spiritual, theological, ideological or socio-political.

6. Gail Omvedt, "Dalit Literature in Maharashtra: Social Protest and Revolt in Western India" in *South Asia Bulletin*, vol.7, 1987.

7. The administrative term "Scheduled Caste" was first used by the British in 1935 replacing the earlier category of 'Depressed Classes'. Both categories primarily included the untouchable castes for state protection against caste disabilities suffered by them. The Government of India Act 1935 stipulated that no "Indian Christian shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste", presumably because they had separate political reservations as minorities. However, the Constituent assembly (1947-49) abolished the category of minorities providing for a policy of special protective discrimination of Scheduled Castes coopting them into Hinduism. The traditional classification of Untouchables as Hindus became the official category of Scheduled Castes professing Hinduism by the President's Constitutional Order of 1950.

The reluctance of the Government to consider Christian Dalits as Scheduled Castes stems from the above. The further argument is that caste is a Hindu phenomenon which is not professed by Christianity. Though caste disabilities are suffered by Christian dalits too the Government despite professing secularism manifests a Hindu religious bias and will not change the status of Christian dalits without the acceptance of the majority Hindu community who really fear the desertion by Scheduled Castes if allowed to embrace non-Hindu religions.

The reluctance of the dalit movements to support the Christian dalits' rights for constitutional status rests on their (i) fear of having to share their economic cake with a larger number and (ii) suspicion that Christian dalits depend on foreign money and religious culture.

The reluctance of the church to support Christian dalit struggle at the secular level (within the wider dalit movements) is the fear of direct political involvement which is believed to be outside its mission. The Indian Church as a whole has not spoken publicly on human rights issues.

8. Mass conversions into Christianity of former untouchable castes occurred during the latter half of the 19th and earlier part of the 20th

centuries (1860-1930). Bishop Pickett, in his book *Christian Mass Movements* has recorded that the primary reason for mass converts was their desire to come out of the cruel bondage of caste and to find their sense of value within the Christian Fellowship (which preached equality, fraternity and liberty). Also, that this same realisation of their self-identity and respect raised in them the desire for self-improvement and children's upliftment (pp. 128 & 157).

'Missionary' approaches and methodologies of the mass-movements era have not changed much in the present day and we in the church are yet to find genuinely Indian ways of evangelisation generally acceptable to all sections of the church. A major factor missing today from the theology of missions of that era is the earlier missionary commitment to the religious, social and educational uplift of the new converts. The writer's use of the phrase 'churchification' has not been used pejoratively but as a matter-of-fact considering that most evangelistic efforts are preoccupied with the numerical increase of 'converts' and that there is little pastoral, socio-cultural and community-oriented ministries with the new congregations and believers. While the identity and self-respect are the hall-marks of all Christian dalits these characteristics have not found fertile grounds to fully express or fulfill themselves within church structures and in the rural milieu. As a faithful churchman this writer believes in the power of the church (Gospel, institutions and material means) to transform, not to just reform. The progress/emancipation of the dalits within the churches has been too slow and tardy, making any one impatient (for the Lord's sake).

At independence, the Indian Christian leaders rightly understood the gospel of Jesus Christ as a "process of reconciliation of relationships, of righteousness, of right relations with God and one another resulting in a new quality of fellowship (koinonia)." It was hoped that this insight would influence and change the existing attitudes to caste in the church. But even till today caste is either seen as unrelated to religious life and spiritual experience of individuals or as an unmitigated evil to be destroyed or as an unavoidable evil to be tolerated while the caste-spirit is being transformed by the Spirit of Christ within the church. We need really work with Christ in rooting out the cast evils in the church which is part of our warfare with Satan.

9. M.E. Prabhakar, *Towards a Dalit Theology*, p. 44.

10. A.M. Ayrookuzhiel in *Towards a Dalit Theology*, p. 84.

11. A.P. Nirmal, *Towards a Dalit Theology*, pp. 76-78. Covenant-theology was adopted by a nation of confederated tribes of equal status and similar culture, with a common experience of bondage in a foreign land. The Indian Church, sociologically, is a convention of inherently unequal and estranged segments being forged into a religious community. The theology of mission, perforce, in the particular historical context, took precedence over the development of an Indian covenant theology.

Theology, in a basic sense, is the application of our faith in God to the realities of daily life and the struggles for fuller humanity. Dalit theology in

this sense becomes a counter-theology to the dominant *varnashrama* theology, which contradicts God's gifts of free will and equality for all human beings. Dalit ideology would support the dalit struggles for revival of their original culture affirming their freedom, self-hood and respect. The dalits who have been de-historicised should be re-historicised. Demythologization of their beliefs, customs and traditions is a necessary step in this process.

De-hinduisation or de-sanscritisation are both components of dalit counter-culture rejecting the brahmanic ideology and culture of hierarchy, purity and pollution and cycle of births.

Counter-culture as known in the post-vedic times involved the Vedas, the preaching of universal values, denial of dominant social values and religious beliefs focussing on caste affiliations – all of which led to the adoption of an alternative life style. Therefore, Aryans who destroyed the original dalit cultures cannot be accepted as counter-culture people.

12. Gottfried Deelan, "The Church on its Way to the People: Basic Christian Communities", in *Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin*, April, 1980, p. 386.

13. Lionel Caplan, *Class and Culture in Urban India: Fundamentalism in a Christian Community*, Oxford University Press, 1987.

14. Philip Berryman, "Latin America: Iglesia que nace del pueblo", in *Christianity & Crisis*, vol. 41, 1981, p. 238.

15. M.M. Thomas quoted by Caplan, *Op. cit.*, pp. 191 & 211.

16. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol.5, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1990.

17. J.W. Pickett, *Christ's Way into India's Heart*, 1938, pp. 22-25.

18. P.Y. Luke and J.B. Carman, *Village Christians and Hindu Culture*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1968, p. 224.