Obituary Pravinaben Patel

Professor Vibhuti Patel
All India Council of Christian Women

XI Quadrennial Assembly

Call for a new paradigm of relationships, structures and ministries

Ms. Moumita Biswas, Executive Secretary, AICCW, introduced the theme and programmes of the Assembly and welcomed the delegates.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Kusumam Joseph, the State Co-ordinator of National Alliance of People’s Movements. Ms C. K. Janu was honoured in the Assembly for her leadership role in the historic struggles for the land-rights of Adivasis.

The Rev Dr Gaikwad, General Secretary, NCCI, Ms Pearly Jos, Vice President, NCCI, Ms Alpana Kumar, President, AICCW, Ms Sosamma Mathew, Vice-President, AICCW, Mr Kasta Dip, Director, India Peace Centre, and others spoke at the Assembly.

So far the AICCW is engaged in empowering women, women’s ecumenical formation and leadership development. But now along with women’s empowerment, the AICCW will also engage in empowering men-church leaders regarding gender justice through ecumenical formation trainings. This is essential as violence on women has increased frighteningly in India. Empowerment of women alone cannot solve this problem.

– Reported by AICCW

Please see page: 5
New turns in India’s foreign policy

Although many a time India has yielded to the pulls and pressures of powerful nations to change her trade relations with countries, all these years after independence, the country has been upholding two basic tenets in her foreign policy. One, commitment to non-alignment; and two, refusal to be a party to any military block. But, on the eve of the 66th Republic Day celebrations, our government seems to have abandoned this sacred tradition. The joint statement signed by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi made it known that India would, no longer, be unchangeably committed to non-alignment. Also that, it would be a close ally of the evolving new military block in the Asia-Pacific. Almost at the same time, some quarters close to the government put forward the proposal for a discussion on dropping the words ‘secular’ and ‘socialist’ from the Preamble.

For those who cherish India as a sovereign, secular, socialist and democratic republic and a non-aligned nation, these are matters of grave, deeply disturbing concern. There was, of course, strong objection to the invitation extended to President Obama to be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations. Even before the US has toasted many democratic governments and put autocratic rulers in their places and also that it still provides economic and military support to many authoritarian regimes across the world. In fact, this was the reason that dissuaded all the previous governments from inviting a president of the US to be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations. Despite this, Mr. Narendra Modi welcomed President Obama with all fanfare.

We always forget the fact that Britain exploited India during the colonial days, and thereafter, the US has been exploiting India. The US today, at the receiving end of the military support to many authoritarian regimes across the world, is in search of India’s large markets, for her own recovery. What the US needs most is a large, favorable defense and consumer market in India. As against this, Mr. Narendra Modi welcomed President Obama with all fanfare.

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In fact, President Obama could appropriate many benefits of his visit to India. He got the assurance that India would open the economy more, to suit his desires and would stop the purchase of arms from the US. He could relieve the US. S. suppliers of nuclear plants, from the burden of paying compensation for nuclear disasters in India. In fact, the biggest score made by Mr. Obama is the agreement on the strategic defense framework that raises the military tie up with the two countries to a new level of closeness and the promise of India to be part of the strategic plan for the Asia-Pacific region. This discloses clearly the intention of building up a new military block with the partnership of the US, Japan and Australia with the purpose of countering the growth of China. While the US has been pressurising India to join this bloc, China has been wooing India away from this group. When this military block becomes a reality, Indian Ocean will turn out to be a zone of perpetual conflict. Our failure to take serious and critical view of the project is bound to have disastrous repercussions in the future.

Thought for the Forthnight

No cause is helpless if it is just.

No matter how popular, carry the seeds of their own destruction.

— John W. Scoville

People's Reporter

People's Reporter

 Collective Priesthood

Israel Selvanayagam

[The Rev Dr Israel Selvanayagam is former Principal of United Theological College, Bangalore. Currently he is Professor of Religions at Gurukul Theological College and Research Institute, Chennal.]

Collective priesthood is one of the greatest and most distinctive but partially realized visions of the Judeo-Christian tradition. At a solemn moment of making the significant covenant the Yahweh God told his people whom he had just liberated; ‘Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Ex. 19: 6). But the original vision was lost in the subsequent developments.

It is significant to note that ‘priest’ was not a category of Christian workers recognized in the early church. In fact, the original vision of collective priesthood was applied to the Christian community, but which was not immune to further distortion (1 Pet. 2: 9).

We read of the alien priest- king of Salem Melchizedek who blessed Abraham and received from him a tenth of everything (Gen. 14: 18-20). As far as Abraham himself and his descendents were concerned the head (father) of the household played the role of the domestic priest when they built an altar wherever they pitched their tent and performed sacrifice (e.g. Gen. 13: 4, 18). In due course, mainly because of the influence from the neighbouring cults, a complex priesthood developed among the Israelites. The priesthood was thus meditators between God and people, performing sacrifice and intercession, teaching and consulting for decision making.

Moses combined himself a leader, priest, judge and law-giver. But perhaps he was influenced by his upbringing in the palace of Pharaoh; consequently he tended to be autocratic and authoritarian with no tolerance for criticism. Though stressed out, he was unwilling to delegate responsibilities to those seventy elders chosen long back. God had to remind him in a chiding tone. An interesting event happened: Moses gathered at the seventy to the Tent of Meeting but two remained at their own home-tents. When the Spirit filled them the two absentees were not exempted. When Joshua objected, Moses, as if enlightened in a flash, declared, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them’ (Nu. 11: 29).

But the old Moses appeared ostensibly. Once his brother Aaron and sister Miriam questioned him saying, ‘Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn’t he also spoken through us? But the ‘humble’ Moses took them for a task. He invoked God’s anger in his favour and the poor woman Miriam was punished with leprosy (Nu. 12).

More horribly, Korah and his companions rebelled against Moses and Aaron reminding them, ‘You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?’ (Nu. 16: 3). Again Moses asked God to save him and all the rebels went alive to a mass grave. No doubt, such stories have helped enormously the priests who consciously resisted the challenging vision of a collective priesthood.

Priests in all religions have tried to retain their supremacy over their religious community while carefully checking any counter movement. They can tactfully tamper documents of challenge and interpolate with words that would safeguard their vested interest. Let us refer to one example. In the popular psalm 51 the psalmist prays: ‘You do not delight in sacrifice, or burnt offerings; you do not delight in burnt offerings.我国 God’s anger in his favour and the poor woman Miriam was punished with leprosy (Nu. 12).

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Church in the Context of the Nation

Jetti A. Oliver

Church is the sign of the Kingdom of God. A sign to the people beyond the borders of ethnicity, gender, geography, faith, economy, social status, political affiliation and so on. A sign to lead people from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from wretchedness to repentance, from repentance to forgiveness. Therefore, the church has the onerous responsibility to be a shining example to the world communities radiating the love of Jesus, with the spiritual richness of possessing the gifts of the Spirit.

‘Why we speak out together?’

There are historical churches otherwise called inherited churches. The emerging churches may not be with much history, yet, are manifesting great revival of the spirit of God rekindling enthusiasm among the faithful and attracting new believers.

The historical churches over the years have focussed on organizational set-up, infrastructural mechanisms, human resources development, working capital accruals and so on. A new generation is looking at the church like any other corporate organization resulting in some very good management - advancing instruments while others remained as maintenance-oriented outlets. The Church as the community of God’s people, has the greatest potential for accomplishing the people in their struggles for justice, peace and life of abundance. Most of the churches as registered organizations, have set objectives and functions like other social or corporate organizations, endeavouring to live and serve their constituency. Albeit, this is the image, the members of the church understand. It raises the hope and aspirations for opportunities of success in life, in secular settings. As William Temple described “Church is a peculiar organization in the lives of its non-members”. How close we live to the mission thrust, a self study ourselves.

The Nation of India in the recent times has changed a great deal. India became a self reliant to the Father of our nation and its team of fighters, the church being an organization that lives for its non-members. The church is a peculiar organization in the lives of its non-members. The gates remain wide open for the church from its very inception, in the context of Swaraj. The church from its very inception, in the context of Swaraj. The church from its very inception, in the context of Swaraj.

The Protestant and the Carolin Churches in Germany

Why we speak out together?

Anchor ecological sustainability in our styles of life and economy

The 1970s Kyoto Protocol mentioned that the members of the community of nations had ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’. This reflects the ethical problem that those who have caused climate change are not necessarily those who suffer from the consequences. These countries are particularly called upon to act, as they were not only responsible for a major portion of emissions in the past, but continue to be, today.

Climate change has been at the center of this, which is endangering the basis of existence for the current generation and generations to come, as well as the creation as a whole. This affects the poorest countries and people particularly strongly. Climatic shifts and their consequences therefore need to be taken into account in developmental cooperation as well as in national policy, now more than ever before.

Climatic researchers generally agree that if the warming of the earth were to continue unabated, it would lead to a tipping point in the climatic system, after which negative developments would mutually reinforce each other and irrevocably so. This would entail global catastrophic consequences. Climatic protection and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and carbon emissions in particular, are therefore key political and societal tasks of our time.

The United Nations climate conferences have, however, shown how hard it is to find a consensus on this issue. Poor countries and the major emerging economies, and a number of old industrialized countries have often seen a conflict between climatic protection and economic growth. Economically weak countries are depending on growth as a means of freeing themselves from poverty and therefore reject a new and legally binding climatic protection treaty due to their understandable fear of negative economic consequences.

There needs to be a global and fundamental transformation of the market economy in order to make it possible for coming generations to enjoy a high standard of living. This demanding process of change can only succeed if the new goal of ecological responsibility is tied to conventional principles of market freedom and social balancing. This reflects the necessary yet tension-ridged plurality of aims in the ecological-social market economy.

Economic growth will continue to be important in the future whether as the prerequisite for the financing of needed investment or of increasing social and health costs. Still, developmental pathways need to be found that detach economic growth from further pressure on the use of resources and the environment, and which serve to contain the dangers of climatic change. A market economy geared toward sustainability would build more to take negative increases in prosperity. Environmental protection, on the one hand, and the reduction of poverty and increase in social justice, on the other, serve together as guideposts for a leading role in the creation of an ecological-social market economy at the national, European, and global levels.

Germany has already embraced this responsibility with its decision to shift its energy policy. If Germany now remains a competitive economy and the German social model of shared prosperity can be sustained in the long term, the ecological-social market economy can serve as an example and become a model for other countries to follow.

The financing of the state pension fund will become increasingly difficult especially as the disadvantageous combination of an increasing number of pensioners and decreasing number of contributors. This has led to various reforms introduced to fear that demographic developments more strongly into account and to use stable contribution rates to prove the progress and prosperity of the country also came on to the radar of the church movement. The ecumenical movements created facilities and platforms for the fragmented churches, denominationally divided churches, for accompanying peoples groups in their struggles for a just life. In many a case, this is a story of the past. The present scenario makes one wonder whether the sheen was lost, because of internal bickering or external pulls and pressures or the very fact of diminishing commitment. We feel so inadequate to rise up to the occasion. In many instances, are found to be wanting and out of context.

Having become professional organizations, with delegated role-plays, the compassion element of the local church or...

People’s Reporter

FEBRUARY 10 - 25, 2015

“Church is a peculiar organization that lives for its non-members”
Strive to preserve secularism

Ashik Bonofer

In the last few decades the Indian democracy has been challenged heavily by these afore said issues. Unless liberal ideas and approaches are propagated and followed sincerely, India’s priding itself as the world’s largest democracy could become short-lived.

3. The pillars of socialism and secularism of the Indian State are crumbling fast. Although these are vitally important and protective for the minorities, the role of Christians in counteracting these is conspicuously minimal. This may be because of the anti-socialist and anti-secular teachings of the Church. What is your comment in this regard?

India is a land of contradictions. On the one hand we pride saying India is shining and we also have the world’s most expensive private house “Antilia” in the heart of the commercial hub of India. On the other hand, right next to Antilia, is the home of the country’s largest slum. Based on this context one needs to analyse the relevance of secularism in India today. The framers of the Indian constitution in their wisdom opined that India would have to remain a secular country or its unity could be threatened. Since the 90s one finds that the earlier said threats are slowly becoming true. Religious minorities have come under attack from parties that support fundamentalism. In most occasions, the government, which is supposed to protect the minorities remain a silent spectator. President Obama’s recent visit to India is a timely observation and a warning to the Indian leadership on the importance of saving Indian secularism.

Christians like other minorities have been targeted in India. Especially, in the rural areas, by the fundamental groups. It is hard to pinpoint at one reason for the attack, but one mass conversion has been shown as a major reason. Known for its liberal theology, Christianity addresses the concern of all the people cutting across all regions, small and individual Churches in order to gain maximum publicity and mileage have been involved in open conversion. They also do not subscribe to the liberal theology. Such promotional activities by smaller groups have also endangered the larger Christian community, who are also involved in social development. Meanwhile, Christians address these aberrations, the fundamentalists would always find reasons to attack the church.

- Dr. Ashik Bonofer is currently working as Assistant Professor at Madras Christian College, Chennai. His areas of research include International Relations, Ethnic Conflict and South Asian Affairs.

In the context of the Sixty Sixth Republic Day Celebrations of the Nation, the People’s Reporter is approaching a few young people to know what they think of their motherland. In this column we are publishing their responses to our queries.

Indian Republic Completes 65 Years

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To what extent do you believe India has come a long way in sharing and so on. The technology; networking; global advancement of science and education; the church exists for its mission. A church that stands up for the cause of people and not itself and to conscientise the faithful at large, is to contextual. Aping of the world’s culture is conspicuously minimal. This may be because of the anti-socialist and anti-secular teachings of the Church. What is your comment in this regard?

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All India Council of Christian Women

XI QUADRENNIAL ASSEMBLY
30 Jan. - 1 Feb., Kochi, Kerala

An edifying example of ecumenism

Roger Gaikwad

Set before us an exemplary model of Christian Discipleship

Rise up above our differences

Saramma Varghese

Beloved members of the AICCW,
I greet you all in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and saviour.
Let us all come together to love each other and to serve each other. Let us rise up above our differences and strive together to help the needy and the suffering.
Let us become one through our prayers and share our joys and sorrows.
May we be like lamps emitting light to brighten up our homes, our churches, our society and our country. May God’s guidance and blessings be with us all in our future work.

Moumita Biswas

Introducing the theme of the Assembly, Ms. Moumita Biswas, Executive Secretary of the AICCW, said, “Let us celebrate life together and share testimonies of how God gives women hope in the midst of frustrations to engage in prophetic ministry. Also share our stories of breaking the silence and puncturing status quo to strive for justice and peace. Let us Wail together and make our voices heard to protest against gender based violence.”

Ms. Moumita added, “Indian Christian women and Churches in India cannot remain silent when violence on women and children are increasing in leaps and bounds in India. Religion plays a very crucial role in building the conscience of the people.”

She said that the AICCW promotes spirituality of justice and builds the conscience of people to end the culture of violence on women and children, and equips them with thorough training and advocacy.

Stand on the ramparts for our people

Lillemor Persson

The theme of this conference, ‘Frustration of life and Fullness of life’ is based on the Book of Habakkuk and John 10:10.

Frustration of life! I think that we have quite a lot of frustrations in our daily life. But we can also be frustrated over situations in our neighbourhood, at work, in our congregations.
Habakkuk is also crying out for his people. In the beginning of verse 1 he says, “How long must I call for help….” At the same time Habakkuk says in chapter 2 “I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts:….”

We who are gathered here can do the same as Habakkuk. We can stand on the ramparts for our people. We can rely and trust that Jesus is with us in all situations of life. We are not alone. We have His promise that says, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt. 28: 20.

We who have had the grace to receive salvation in Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, are called to spread the light into this world. “You are the light of the world”, said Jesus. His light is seen through His people. May you be encouraged day by day to shine His light to those you meet. Isa. 60:1-6

– Mrs Lillemor Persson represented the Swedish Evangelical Mission at the AICCW Assembly.
entitlements, as they are deducted from the basic provisions for old age. In order to prevent pension levels from falling too low, moreover, it was necessary to increase the length of people’s working lives and to raise the retirement age to 67. Much needs to be done, however, to ensure that all earners are able to reach this age cut-off, as the reform would otherwise only mean a decrease in pension for many retirees due to individual reductions. This can be particularly critical for lower income groups as they more rarely have other reserves and are more frequently pursues employment that is particularly hazardous to their health.

The increasing need to be flexible in one’s work (both mentally and geographically) requires that work be geared more strongly toward individual lives. This includes, for instance, the ability for more flexible regard to working times during certain phases of life, including taking into account considerations of family situation and age. The need for further training or complete retraining several times in the course of one’s working life is to be accommodated more. Lifelong learning needs to be viewed as a task for the social state and public support. People who have yet to achieve adequate professional qualification also need to be taken more strongly into account, as the fight against poor education is also an important instrument when it comes to overcoming poverty in general.

One might have had the impression in the past that many social problems have been managed but not actually solved. The goal of continually equipping people to take as much responsibility as possible for their own lives, however, has sometimes been lost from sight. We now know that the efficacy of social state high priests. He identifies him with Melchizedek with a stress on his non-ancestry. For him Jesus was sinless and compassionate having solidarity with all people, particularly sinners. Above all, he sealed the tradition of priesthood by the perfect sacrifice he offered.

In the New Testament there is no place for priest in the ministry of the church. To avoid any tendency of its creeping into it, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews has given a comprehensive reflection on Jesus as the high priest. He identifies him with Melchizedek with a stress on his non-ancestry. For him Jesus was sinless and therefore the only one qualified to enter into the sanctuary and perform sacrifice. As the one who was both the priest and victim of the sacrifice, he was compassionate having solidarity with all people, particularly sinners. Above all, he sealed the tradition of priesthood by the perfect sacrifice he offered.

One of the ideas on which Martin Luther initiated his reformation was that the collective priesthood of the early Christian church was to be a living reality. Luther interpreted his reformation was thus a great opportunity to re-identify spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet. 2: 5). But later development of several denominations did not clarify the practical expression of the collective priesthood. Catholics, Orthodox, and Anglicans have continued to use the word ‘priest’ for those ordained. The Protestant Churches use the term pastor, presbyter and minister though in some churches they are treated as priests coming in the line of the Hebrew/Jewish priests. To make the situation worse, in some areas they use the term of the Hindu priests (yayati). Actually, the profound meaning of ‘ordination’ is centered around the idea of confirmation or addition and they are supposed to coordinate worship services and mission by involving all members of the congregations. But there is so much confusion in understanding the status (change of nature or functional emergence) of and his/her responsibilities.

Along with the proper title for the minister, the true biblical meaning of discipline and servant, clerical uniform needs reconsideration. Aspiring for extravagant vestments reveals the unredeemed psyche. It seems the white cassock/gown, imported from Europe has come to stay. It is important to ask, in what way the long robes of our pastors/presbyters/ministers are different from those worn by religious leaders that Jesus criticized. Is it possible to devise an Indian uniform which will be un-alienating the ordinary people and symbolizing servanthood? One may argue that the idea of ‘collective priesthood’ should be reclaimed and changes made accordingly for the sake of clearly communicating the unique gospel in a pluralistic world. Simultaneously, members of congregations should be educated about the meaning of living as sacrifices and belonging to the kingdom of priests (Ro. 12: 1; Rev. 1: 6; 5: 10).

We have some best models around the ecumenical world where the ministers are not the central players in a worship service, but coordinators involving the congregation not only for reading the scriptures and leading the main prayers but preaching as well. Of course, identifying gifts and graces, training and caring for people is perhaps harder than the minister himself doing everything!...
Unshaken by the threats and unnerved by the things to happen in Jerusalem, he walked ‘ahead of them’. The disciples and the other followers were amazed at his courage, conviction, determination and haste to confront the reigning religious and political powers and their ‘kingdom’, in his effort to usher in ‘the kingdom of God’. But those who followed were afraid.’

Mark 10: 32.

In preparation
To prepare and equip them further, the Master Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.’”

“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking……….”” Mark 10: 32 – 45.

This year, the Lent begins on 18 February. This period of forty days is especially a time for self-critical reflection, repentance and renewal. A deep reflection on the verses from 32 to 45 (Mark Chapter 10) will reveal to us some essential elements of human nature. Also, it will inspire us to have an incisive inward look, and to have genuine repentance and renewal.

These verses (Mark 10: 32-45) record one of the most painful incidents occurred during the public ministry of Jesus.

Ahead of them
Jesus and his followers were on the road to Jerusalem.

Inclusion and participation

Why we speak out together?

Inclusion and participation should play central role in social policy

Obituary:
Pravinaben Natubhai Patel (1935-2015)

She always stood by young couples ostracized by the community for their inter-caste and inter-religious ‘love marriage’ and came forward providing moral and material support exhibiting great personal courage. She would always confront anyone who made sexual innuendoes in the street, bus, train and in public places. She would loudly respond, “What is wrong with your hands? Why are they moving in a wrong direction?”

Pravinaben will live in the hearts of all those who knew her as an example who did not belong to the community, even in her death by donating her body and eyes. As per her wish, no rituals were observed. – V.P.

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Pravinaben will live in the hearts of all those who knew her as an example who did not belong to the community, even in her death by donating her body and eyes. As per her wish, no rituals were observed. – V.P.
WCC calls for protection of church leaders in Colombia

Serious death threats to human rights defenders, many of whom are church leaders, have been made by a paramilitary group in Colombia. The World Council of Churches (WCC), among other international organizations, has called on Colombian government to protect their lives.

On 14 January, the WCC’s Commission on International Affairs office received a message from the church leaders in Colombia regarding death threats hurled at them by a paramilitary group. The message stated that on 11 January, 39 human rights activists, renowned for their long time commitment and work on rights, land restitution and promotion of the peace process, UN individually named in a list issued by the AguasNegras, a paramilitary organization, and was posted online, later reported by the Columbian newspaper El Heraldo. The paramilitary group explicitly stated their intention to eliminate them.

Among the human rights activists mentioned, are also a number of prominent Colombian church leaders, such as Agustín Jiménez from the Mennonite Church; Fr. Fernando Sanchez from the Anglican Church; Jairo Barriga, German Zarate, Rev. Milton Mejia of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia and Fr. Fernando Gary Martinez of the Catholic Church.

The Church representatives appearing in this list are highly respected members of the international ecumenical movement with whom WCC member churches have worked over the years,” said WCC’s acting general secretary Georges Lemopoulos, in a statement. “We stand with the churches and church leaders in Colombia and WCC member churches have worked over the years,” said WCC’s acting general secretary Georges Lemopoulos, in a statement. “We stand with the churches and church leaders in Colombia and WCC member churches have worked over the years,” said WCC’s acting general secretary Georges Lemopoulos, in a statement. “We stand with the churches and church leaders in Colombia and WCC member churches have worked over the years.”

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