Safe Cities and Gender Budgeting by Prof. Vibhuti Patel

Professor Vibhuti Patel

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/professor_vibhutipatel/86/
United Church of Canada

“Divest from fossil fuels”

The United Church of Canada, a member church of the World Council of Churches, has taken the decision to sell its 5.7 million Canadian dollar holdings in fossil fuels and invest instead in renewable energy.

Delegates to the church’s highest decision-making body, the General Council, passed a proposal to encourage the United Church of Canada “to take active steps” to sell its holdings in the 200 largest fossil fuel companies.

According to the background material on the motion, the United Church of Canada Foundation holds 2.8 million Canadian dollar in fossil fuel investments or 5 percent of the portfolio. The Treasury has 5.9 million Canadian dollar in fossil fuel stocks or 4.7 percent of that portfolio.

“We need to take bold actions on climate change,” says Ann Russell of the Climate Justice Group of a United Church parish in Toronto, the country’s largest city. “The burning of fossil fuels is the biggest contributor to climate change and is threatening the most vulnerable populations in the world including Indigenous Peoples and people living in poverty.”

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Black Day Protest in Delhi

National Council of Churches in India

Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India

Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society

in Collaboration with

YMCA, YWCA, NCCI, HMI, Dharma Jyoti,

Delhi Forum and PSA

National Consultation on

Resisting the Empire: Re-imagining Multitudes

“The burning of fossil fuels is the biggest contributor to climate change,” says Ann Russell of the Climate Justice Group of a United Church parish in Toronto, the country’s largest city. “The burning of fossil fuels is the biggest contributor to climate change and is threatening the most vulnerable populations in the world including Indigenous Peoples and people living in poverty.”

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Yuan Devalued

The surprise declaration by the People’s Bank of China, devaluing the external value of its currency Yuan, also called Renminbi, by 1.9 % on 11 August and again by 1.6% on the next day jolted the financial nerve centres across the world. Whereas the external values of the other currencies are decided by the market every day, the value of the Chinese currency is fixed by her Central Bank. It is after a gap of two decades, the change was effected. In fact, it was overdue for China to make the change, and for many years, financial experts were wondering why China was delaying a decision on that.

The announcement of the decision by China set off a shock-wave across the globe, tumbling the currencies of many nations and causing a dip in the price of stocks. Indian Rupee breached the 65 level to close at a two-year low. This is bound to have adverse impacts on the growth of Indian economy. Whereas, the devaluation, both market - led and government-decided, of the currencies of less developed countries makes no significant global impacts, that by big financial powers like China is certain to aggravate deflationary pressures and difficulties for many countries, including the developed ones.

There are two reasons for China’s decision. First, it is a move towards a more market –friendly currency rate and more liberalization of the economy. And secondly, it is a strategy to raise exports. Floating exchange rate policy is a condition to qualify a reserve currency for the IMF’s Special Drawing Rights (SDR’s). At present, the basket of currencies in the SDR consists of the US dollar, euro, pound and yen. It is quite possible that China seeks to elevate Yuan as a world reserve currency by liberalizing her exchange rate regime. The devaluation of Yuan can be the first step to achieve this. But, this is a bad omen for the US, European Union and Japan.

In recent years, China has been facing the problem of fall in her exports. The devaluation is, definitely, aimed at pushing up her exports. Many people would remember that the devaluation of Indian Rupee by the Government (Central Bank) in 1980 and 1991, as per the advice of the IMF, with the claim that it would boost the country’s exports did not produce the desired result. It may not be the result in the case of China. Increase in the export of big economic powers like China will have major adverse impacts on other countries, especially those in Asia. India’s deficit in the trade with China in 2014-15 is $48,500 million. Under this scenario, further increase in the export of China is bound to aggravate India’s trade deficits with China. Many other countries in Asia are also bound to face this grave issue. Further, China’s move towards a market-friendly approach will hit not only the less developed countries but the developed countries including the US too. The talks about raising the interest rate by the US, as a mark of improvement of her financial health, are quite alive these days. But, the devaluation of Yuan may compel the US to put off this decision. The use of China’s muscle power to liberalise the financial sector further, will not be good for the less developed countries and the poor people throughout the world.

Thought for the Fortnight

Fortune is a great deceiver. She sells very dear the things she seems to give us.

— Vincent Voiture
The 22nd Lecture in memory of the founder of the Ecumenical Christian Centre Rev. Dr. M. A. Thomas, was delivered at the ECC on 8 August 2015, by Dr. Satish Deshpande, Professor of Sociology/University. The topic was "What should we mean by 'Communalism'"

Among those present were Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Chairman of the ECC, Metropolitan Dr. Abraham Mar Seraphim of the Bangalore Diocese of the Orthodox Church, Very Rev. Dr. Cherian Thomas, Director, ECC, several heads of institutions, scholars and students.

Throwing light on the etymology of the term 'communalism', Dr. Satish Deshpande warned that 'normalisation' of communalism was leading us to the danger of taking things for granted. He said, "We must struggle hard to resist this invitation and renew our commitment to the values that compel us to oppose communalism in all its forms.'

The word "communalism" has two main meanings, one of which was invented in colonial India and is, therefore, specific to South Asia. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the original meaning of the adjective ‘communal’ in the English speaking West referred to something 'shared by the whole community', or 'owned in common.' So the noun 'communalism' in its original western meaning indicated radical forms of sharing, of which 'communism' would have been one form, and this usage gained in currency after the Paris Commune of 1871. The South Asian meaning derives from the very different context of colonial governance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the British believed religious ‘communities’ to be the main units of Indian society. Our sense of communal, therefore, heads in the opposite direction from the prior English meaning in that it emphasizes that which is not shared. Communal and communalism in our context are therefore forms of chauvinistic hostility directed at communities other than one’s own. The contrast between these two meanings of the same word has acquired much greater relevance today when aggressive forms of identity politics seem to be built on shared hatreds rather than shared values. To put it differently, communalism is the condition where the decisive test of our commitment to our own faith is not what we are prepared to do for it or within it, but rather what we are prepared to do against others of different faiths.


Concluding his lecture Dr. Deshpande said, 'As an instructive example of the ongoing and open-ended nature of social exclusion and oppression, we have the emergent case of what are being referred to as sexual minorities. Being gay, lesbian or transgender is another ascriptive identity whose oppression was and is legitimized along the entire spectrum ranging from codified law to public behaviour. The persecution of religious minorities appears as a self-evidently illegitimate act, whereas sexual minorities are still seen today by many people as deserving exclusion. It is only when we recognise the close affinity of these forms of prejudice, exclusion and oppression with the phenomenon that we confidently name as communalism that we will be able to resist both.'

"We have no way of telling what the future will bring in this respect, so it is all the more necessary to constantly re-examine the foundations of our beliefs about rights and wrongs."

"Let us not be too quick, then, to distance ourselves from that which we regard as communal, for the same or similar values may well be dwelling in our midst with our own encouragement and nurture."

Jeevan Adhikar Satyagraha, Badwani, Madhya Pradesh

The Government’s claim that all the SSP-affected villages on the banks of Narmada have already been acquired and rehabilitated is incorrect and is nothing but a blatant lie.

Narmada Bachao Andolan, after a six-day yatra (August 6th – 12th, 2015) across 25 villages in Madhya Pradesh continues to question the false declarations, irrational policies and unlawful decisions of the government authorities, in particular, the decision to raise the height of the dam by 17 mts which is in violation of the Award of the Narmada Tribunal and the Supreme Court judgement on this matter in 2000 and 2005. The people began the yatra in 2000 and 2005. The Supreme Court judgement on violation of the Award of the Tribunal has established the sovereignty, socialist, democratic, land.

The Government’s decision to raise the height of the dam up to 138.68 mts will lead to the submergence of 244 villages and the huge township of Dharunpur. The majority of this population comprises of tribals, landless, fishing and other socio-economically marginalized population. These villages would cover a population of nearly 2,50,000 people who will be submerged along with approximately 13,300 ha of pristine forest rich with flora and fauna. In fact, the total number of displaced families by the SSP in three states will be much higher, since more than 90,000 kms of total canal network in Gujarat will require over 1 lakh hectares of land.

It has been alleged in the last few years that there have been serious and continuous discrepancies in the process of rehabilitation and resettlement of the Sardar Sarovar Project and much of which is exposed and established by Govt’s own records. The people’s intervention on this account has led to the appointment of a Judicial Commission headed by Justice (Retd.) S.S Jha in August 2008 and the issue lies in these discrepancies and widespread fraudulent practices. The report of the commission is awaited.

It is not only a question of mass displacement, submergence, rehabilitation, and resettlement, but points to larger questions of rule of law, justice and accountability.

The country has celebrated its 69th year of Independence. Still, we continue to assert our rights and through democratic struggle we fight for a true sovereign, socialist, democratic, secular republic.

We urge everyone to participate in the Satyagraha in solidarity with the struggling people.

ATTACK has in it TACKLING as well

We urge everyone to participate in the Satyagraha in solidarity with the struggling people.

NBA News
Issues demanding urgent attention

Vibhuti Patel

Gender budgeting demands special programmes targeting women based on enumeration of differential impact of expenditures across all sectors and services - gender disaggregated impact on literacy, school drop outs, mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, illnesses, safety & security.

Some unresolved issues:
- Decision-makers in the urban LSBGs need to address the following issues demanding urgent attention:
  - How to bridge the gap between notional allocation and actual allocation?
  - Accounting, auditing and record keeping of gender disaggregated data & allocation
  - How to achieve physical & performance/ achievement targets?
  - Implementation of maternity benefits, Tribu Sub Plan, Scheduled Caste Plan for the urban poor
  - Major departments claiming indivisibilities of allocation of resources
  - Notional allocation projected as real allocation
  - Absence of uniform guidelines & procedures

Gender budgeting in Urban LSB Bodies
- Process of gender budgeting demands special programmes targeting women based on enumeration of differential impact of expenditures across all sectors and services - gender disaggregated impact on literacy, school drop outs, mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, illnesses, safety & security.
- Hence, they need to ensure the review of equity opportunity policies and opportunities in the public sector-jobs, school education, wages, health care, skills, technical training, and computer education.

Allocation and expenses of resources for women in Panchayat Budgets:
- NIPPF has recommended the following classification of financial allocation on schemes and programmes for gender audit as well as gender budgeting.
- Women specific schemes where 100% of the allocation is required to be spent on women.
- Pro-women schemes where at least 30% of allocation and benefits flow to women. E.g. all anti-poverty programmes.
- Gender Neutral Schemes meant for community as a whole
- Residual schemes for Protective Services for disaster management
- All India Institute of Local Self Government (AISLG) gives details of all schemes under these 4 categories through its publications, workshops and training programmes. Moreover, it also teaches the elected representatives about the efficient ways of programme implementation through budgeting from below:

Enhanced budgetary allocation for Protective Services, Gender and Welfare Services
- These are the schemes directly benefiting women for crisis management of situations arising out of economic and socio-cultural subordination and dehumanisation of women such as shelter homes, short stay homes and rehabilitation schemes. Hence, such schemes must be recast to empower municipal bodies.
- Panchayats need to get untied funds to formulate plans according to
  - Need of the Hour
  - Women’s groups are moving beyond grievance
  - Women's groups are moving beyond grievance
  - Women's groups are moving beyond grievance
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  - Women's groups are moving beyond grievance

Objective of the Legal literacy Programme
- To open up a thought process to systematically and critically scan the context from socio-political and religious perspectives.
- To impart knowledge enhancement on the Indian Constitution and Rights of the (Christian) Minorities.
- To equip the participants with basic legal knowledge to handle the crises at the grass-roots context.
- To introduce the modern technologies to build networks and
- To sensitize the participants with a code of conduct for the grass-roots mission workers in a multi-faith context.

The NCCI Commission on Unity, Mission and Evangelism
- The Rt. Rev. Paul Dupare, CNI Bishop in Nagpur, inaugurated the training. The Bishop observed that such legal literacy was essential for every minority community in our country, every Christian, church and mission leaders and partners.

Reported by
Christopher Rajkumar
Executive Secretary, Commission on Unity, Mission and Evangelism

The NCCI Commission on Unity, Mission and Evangelism on the request from Indian Missions Association (IMA) organized a 3-day “Legal Literacy and Training Programme” for the Mission Leaders and Mission Workers. There were 35 Mission Leaders and Mission Staff including 3 women from 18 Mission Organizations from all over India:

The General Council of the United Church of Canada, meeting at Corner Brook in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador, voted unanimously on 13 August to adopt a proposal for “Full Communion” with the United Church of Christ in the United States. This is the first time such a proposal has been adopted by the Canadian church.

The announcement of the result of the vote was greeted with a standing ovation.

The term “Full Communion” is used for formal agreements between churches that acknowledge they share a common vision of Christian mission and agree to engage in joint ministry and to call one another’s ministers as

A historic vote in Canada has set the stage for close cooperation between two North American churches.

The agreement between the United Church of Christ and the United Church of Canada will take effect in October 2015 at a celebration in the city of Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada on the border with the United States. A joint worship service and a time of fellowship will mark the event.

Both churches are members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCC-Rev).

The historic vote was greeted with a standing ovation and a burst of applause.

The vote was then certified by the lawyers for both churches, who confirmed that the proposal had been adopted by both churches.

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A catalyst for meaningful engagement
in the public sphere

Introducing the programmes, the Rev. Dr. Vincent Rajkumar, Director, CISRS, said, “In its six decades of journey, analyzing socio-political and economic issues and empowering communities at the margins, the CISRS has always been committed to the tenets of Christian faith, affirming the gospel of Jesus and the rule of God. This unapologetic allegiance to Christian faith enabled the Institute to be a catalyst for meaningful engagement in the public sphere.

The churches, the People’s movements, faith communities and the ecumenical organizations have to witness the God of life at this time of the Empire.

We are organizing a day’s consultation on Resisting Empire and Reimagining Multitudes today.

“By this engagement, we look forward to fruitful dialogues and cooperative actions of the churches and people’s movements. Some of these movements at least at the time of their formation are inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus. But a vast majority of such groups are outside the church connections. Whether they are inspired by religious faiths or secular ideologies, they are committed to the liberation of the oppressed. It is understandable that the institutionalized church has some constraints in moving easily into all the areas and works as the people’s movements, for the struggle for justice, but it is imperative for the churches to engage with such movements which directly struggle for the oppressed. We recognize that today, the Indian church is equipped to widen its self-understanding and to engage meaningfully in public witnessing, thanks to their openness, and to the work of the CISRS and other similar institutions in this regard.”

Excerpts from the presentations

Reconstituting a Theology of Multitude in India
Y. T. Vinayaraj

Addressing the imperative to envisage a ‘life in common’ in the contemporary context of ‘governing order’—Empire, Antonio Negri, the Italian philosopher (with Michael Hardt) offers a project of alternative global living—Multitude. Multitude is a global form of democracy over against the sovereign global order—Empire.

The project of Multitude demands an open and inclusive democratic global society that internally nullifies the project of Empire. Empire today is not just like the medieval/ modern imperialism; rather it is a ‘network power’ that includes the dominant nation-states, trans-national institutions, capitalist corporations and other powers. Not all powers are equal in this power network. It is a system of inequality and hierarchies. However, all partners in this system maintain the order intact to keep up their position within. Empire exists by creating the state of war—state of conflict—within and without. War in Empire is not a military action; rather it is the biopolitical act of “producing and reproducing” of the subjects. Negri and Hardt claim therefore that when ‘life itself is put on center stage, then war becomes properly ontological. It is this ontological war situation that sanctions the suspension of the democracy.

According to Negri, multitude is the living alternative that grows within Empire - living in common and acting together while remaining different. For Negri, multitude is an open net-work—life in common. Common is not homogeneity but alterity and difference. Unlike the concept of people which is unitary and identitarian, multitude is many. Multitude is composed of many ‘irreducible singularities’ of cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations. Multitude is many-colored.

The context of resisting the Empire and re-imaging multitude in India demands a radical shift in the formulation of political theology in India. It was M.M. Thomas who proposed a political theology of the crucified God—a God who denies his own sovereign ontology to nullify the rule of the Roman Empire—in the postcolonial Indian context.

According to Thomas, the mission of the church today is to embody this mark of crucifixion and thereby reconstitute its own ontology by baptizing it in the cry of the political victims in India today. Signifying M. M. Thomas, there is an imperative for the churches in India to reconstitute a political theology of multitude in India in order to witness its God crucified in India today.

– Rev. Dr. Y. T. Vinayaraj is a member of the Faculty of Dharma Jyoti Vedya Peeth at Faridabad

Multitude is a new concept of a new tomorrow
D. Rathnakara Sadananda

There is a difference between ‘Ochlos’ or multitude and “Laos” or people in the New Testament. Ochlos is used to denote a crowd without an identifiable or particular identity, people who are denied of their identity, whose identity is crushed and negated, or people with a wounded and hurt identity. The multitude are “no people”, whereas Laos means a people who aspire and hope for a new identity. Jesus looks at the multitude with compassion (Ex 14) to people to have a new identity. It is a movement to make Janata or multitude or no people, Prah or a people. The multitude is looked on in compassion as a crowd, as sheep without a shepherd. Jesus engages with the multitude and helps them to realize their potential and innate abilities.

Jesus helps them to reclaim, reinvigorate and rejuvenate their identities. His journey from Galilee to Jerusalem with the ‘called out’ ones or ‘Ekleiste’ portrays the hopes and aspirations of a community in struggle, connecting with and helping the margins to become the expression of a movement that challenges the empire.

Multitude in the book of Revelation is a new concept of a new tomorrow, it is the multitude which exhibits the marks of the slain lamb; who simultaneously express suffering, hurt and pain and celebrates the liberation through the passion. It is the multitude, a new community, which does not have boundaries and barriers, an ecumenical community that proclaims the language of life and hope and manifests the reign of God.

– The Rev. Dr. D Rathnakara Sadananda is the General Secretary of the Church of South India

The Challenge for the Church to be a Vibrant Member of the Multitudes
Roger Gaikwad

The Empire has continued to spread and deepen its influence on our lives. The Empire has penetrated not only society but also individual lives. It is controlling the ways we live (eat, sleep, dress, work, and relate). The church is living within this empire. And so the church too is impacted by the Empire.

In locating itself with the multitudes which resist the Empire, the church in India is faced with its own challenges: Casteism, Corruption, Communalism, Confessionalism, Corporate Culture

NCCI’s Vision
NCCI envisions just and inclusive communities which enable the full realization of the human potential individually and collectively, and live together in harmony, justice and peace.

The Mission of NCCI
The mission of NCCI is to participate in efforts towards realizing just and inclusive communities through collaborative programmes with the churches at local, national and international levels, people’s movements, grassroots communities, community-based organizations, faith communities, and governments.

The last book of the Bible spells out a beautiful picture of the multitudes:

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever! Amen!”

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Indeed these are the multitudes who have resisted the Roman-like empires!

– The Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad is the General Secretary of the NCCI

Release of the Book on Church and Homophobia, Published by the CISRS

L to R: Rev. Dr. D. Rathnakara Sadananda, Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, Most Rev. G. Dyvasirmadem, Mr. Rajendra K. Sail and Rev. Dr. Vincent Rajkumar.

National Consultation On Resisting the Empire: Re-imagining Multitudes

People’s Reporter

Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Collaboration with YMCA, YWCA, NCCI, HMI, Dharma Jyoti, Delhi Forum and PSA

AUGUST 25 - SEPTEMBER 10, 2015

Peoples Reporter
“We need a political spirituality that keeps us always in opposition”

Excerpts from the presentations

Listening to the Multitudes: Understanding and analysing the new resistances

M. J. Vijayan

“We need a political spirituality that keeps us always in opposition…” was the call given by Dr. Thomas. MMT was clearly referring to the situations that keep rising in the battles of communities and people at large in their efforts at countering the empire! However, as someone who had to go against the Church and its institutions, for they were siding with the state during Emergency (the worst challenge so far faced by the Indian democracy and constitution), MM Thomas also knew very well the institutional characteristics of organised Christianity and its ability to part with the ‘multitudes’ and side with the ‘empire’.

This is indeed an important position that needs re-imagining and re-affirmation. It was precisely this re-imagining of the multitudes that was attempted at the National Consultation held in Delhi on 11 August as part of the Dr. P. D. Devanandan and Dr. M. M. Thomas Memorial Lecture.

The political expression and the intent was clear with the consultation having titled itself, ‘Resisting the Empire: Re-imagining Multitudes’. The sharp political sarcasm was clear as the P. Devanandan and M. M. Thomas memorial lecture was titled, ‘Yoga, Mann Ki Baat and the Emergency of our Times’. It brought together not just the organising collective, but also a host of intellectuals, academia, theologians, clergy, activists and professionals from different walks of life.

Often, while analysing the empire vis-à-vis the resistance, one tends to move closer to analysing the empire in detail and homogenising the people in resistance! The presentations at the consultation by theologians including Dr. Y. V. Vinaiyar, Dr. Roger Gaekwad, Dr. George Zachariah and activists like Priya Pillai, Rajendra Sail, Mugahid Nafees and Usmanhagi Shersayda showed that the diversity in the new resistance movements as well as the need to own up organised and unorganised / individual forms of resistance were the central theme. The memorial lecture became an occasion to analyse, ridicule and statistically counter the new regime in India and its nationalistic, patriarchal ways. The Memorial Lecture was jointly delivered by AK Ramakrishnan, Nivedita Menon, Mary E. John and Usha Ramanathan.

At a time when the new empires are hell-bent on destroying voices of dissent, sanity and reason, it is important to be undivided, analyse together and put up a varied resistance. We hope the mistakes of the past by the organised religion will not be repeated in future, since they can jeopardise and risk the new awakening of the people!

—Mr. M. J. Vijayan is the National General Secretary of the Programme for Social Action (PSA)

Re-affirming the People’s Movement as the Church

Rajendra K. Sail

M. M. Thomas has had a formative influence in my life, like many other ecumenical stalwarts of that time. In April, 1972 I joined the CISRS, and spent a few months in the Devanandan House living with MM for an orientation. MM tortured me to study Theology. He told me then: “Your Law and Politics are meaningless, unless you combine it with Theology”. So, I was forced to study Theology (informally), and I realize now with thankful heart that MM was indeed right in saying so.

Thus, my sharing here is more of a tribute to MM Thomas, who taught me many things, more so, the Spirituality for Combat, that has sustained me to continue to be an old fashioned, die-hard Christian Social Activist (in that order, of course!

The Church exists at three levels:

a) Establishment;

b) Congregations;

c) Small groups practising Faith in Action.

The Church is still an Establishment, in its nature and content, a replica of the Corporate Sector, even practising its values and depicting its culture – in living and working both. The Congregations, almost all of them could be easily identified and classified as poor, oppressed, exploited, daft, adivas, women, etc. In India, the true identity of the Church is that it is The Dalit Church, the Adivasi Church, the Women’s Church, etc. These churches exist at another level of the Church, totally separated from the Church as an Establishment. There is hardly any interaction, leave aside dialogue in words and deeds, between these two levels of the Church.

There is an inherent contradiction between the ‘Church for the Poor’ and ‘Church of the Poor’. In thoughts and actions, it is almost like: Church for the Poor Vs. Church of the Poor. Thus, the identity crisis in the Churches in India!

People’s Movement is the Church! Today, I believe that people’s movement is the Church! It has not only been my experience but that of many who took their faith seriously in the action-reflection process of participating in the struggles of the people for justice, peace, freedom, equality and dignity, etc.

The End as a New Beginning: Journeys Ahead with the People in Faith & Action!

A relevant theology presupposes a relevant political identity. To achieve this, we need to move from a Political Theology for the Church today. Somehow, the Church feels shy and falls short of evolving a relevant political theology, because, as of today, it has an irrelevant political ideology. Thus, the Church stands more in identification with the Capitalist/Corporate, Consumer Establishment (The Empire) that symbolizes the negation of fuller and richer humanity being offered in the Crucified and resurrected Christ!

—Mr. Rajendra K. Sail, well-known social activist, is the Director of RCDRC, Raipur

Christian Public Witness - Theological Reflections

George Zachariah

Public witness is the Christian praxis of engaging in the public affairs of our times offering critiques, convictions, insights, and alternatives to transform our social relations based on the vision of the reign of God.

We can identify two major trajectories of public witness in the history of Christianity. The first trajectory engages in public affairs to provide theological legitimacy to the state and the powers be. The second trajectory, on the other hand, is a political testimony of Christian faith exposing the inherent sinfulness of our social fabric and body politic. History of Christianity is the tension between these two trajectories. Emergency is the best example in the history of Christianity in India to understand the tension between these two trajectories. While almost all the mainline churches, ecumenical movements, theological colleges, and even the progressive theologians supported the emergency, providing theological legitimation to the fascist regime, there was a ‘remnant within the remnant’ in India, who showed the nerve to live out their faith, exposing Ms. Gandhi and her Empire.

The last three decades have witnessed the emergence of vibrant civil society initiatives and subaltern social movements all over India, witnessing the advent of a different world and politics alternative to the values and politics of the Empire. In our times, the spiritual quest for selfhood and moral agency is situated in the materiality of the subaltern struggles for survival and self-representation. Subaltern social movements as sites of reclaiming moral agency and challenging imperial claims of lordship over the selfhood of the people are hence, engaged in a spiritual praxis.

The politics and spirituality emerging form the social movements of the multitudes in India provide us new possibilities to live out our faith in the context of our unfolding democracy. When the Church in India and the ecumenical movements pitch our tent in the ground zeros of state terrorism where we experience God as Immmanuel and become part of the struggles of protest and hope, we can experiment in our times. This is the only way we can confess our faith in Jesus, the Christ in contemporary India.

[Dr. George Zachariah teaches at United Theological College, Bangalore]
The first reason for branding Jesus, ‘mad’

Master’s words and deeds, teachings and actions, from beginning of his public ministry, led them to a firm decision.

Yes, our Master is mad!

In a rhetorical way, we can put the bold decision of the twelve. They declared, “Yes, our Master is mad! But we will not leave him. We will continue to follow him!” Because, the history testifies that none of the twelve left Jesus, on that occasion. All of them continued ‘to be with him’. Mk. 3: 14, even after that incident.

But, most significantly, the twelve, found some justification in the branding of their Master as ‘mad’ by his detractors and people.

Why? Why?

Why did the disciples who critically and deeply examined the words and deeds of their Master during those days, arrive at that conclusion? As the twelve deliberated on the message and ministry of Jesus during those days, the words and deeds of their Master unravelled before them one by one.

Leprosy in those days!

One of the first deeds of Jesus, his public ministry, is described by Mark in the first chapter of ‘the Gospel according to Mark’. ‘And a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.”’ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I will, be clean’ Mk. 1: 40-42. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched! Whom?

A leper! Will we, who live after two thousand years, stretch out our hands and touch a leper? Will we? If those days, there was no disease more horrid than leprosy. It is written, “No other disease reduces a human being for so many years to so hideous a wreck.” Leprosy branded the sufferer ‘unclean’. ‘He (a leper) was banished from the fellowship of men; he must dwell alone outside the camp; he must go with rent clothes, bared head, covering upon his upper lip, and as he went he must give warning of his polluted presence with the cry “Unclean, unclean!”’

We see the same thing in the Middle Ages, which merely applied the Mosaic law. The priest, wearing his stole and carrying a crucifix, led the leper into the church, and read the burial service over him. The leper was already a dead man, though still alive.”


The leper, according to the society’s stipulations of those days, should not have gone near Jesus. Even if the leper had gone near Jesus, he should not have ‘stretched out his hand and touched the leper and made himself unclean. It was a blatant violation of the laws of the society. It was, unquestionably, a challenge to the laws, stipulations, practices and taboos maintained by the society. Most importantly, it was the outright rejection of the way of thinking, the logic of the society. So the question before the disciples was whether they should confine themselves to the way of thinking, the logic of the world, or they should reject the way of thinking, reasoning, the logic of the world and be disciples of ‘mad’ Jesus. They decided they would reject the prevailing logic of the world and would be disciples of the Master Jesus.

Are you willing to be called ‘mad’?

Jesus rejected the dominant logic of the world. And he was called mad by the people. Now too, to be disciples of Jesus, we have to reject the dominant, logic of the world and be willing to be called ‘mad’. Embracing the reigning logic of the world we cannot be disciples of Jesus. We have to reject the enslaving logic of the world to be disciples of Jesus. Then the world will call us ‘mad’. Are we willing to be called ‘mad’?

To be continued

Safe Cities and Gender Budgeting

Prepare ‘bottom-up’ budgets

People's Reporter

To be disciples of Jesus – 3

A crucial decision for the disciples

The twelve were compelled to examine carefully the words and deeds of their Master from the day he started his public ministry. Those words and deeds must have been the reason that provoked his detractors and the ‘people’ to brand him, ‘mad’. Certainly, it must not have been a casual, easy affair for the disciples. Because all of them knew well that the response they would have to that question, the decision that they would take on that same occasion for them to take a decision whether they should continue to follow him. It was the very first day of their discipleship! So the best time to take a decision on whether they should follow Jesus, branded mad by his detractors, and indirectly approved by members of his family.

They took a decision

Finally, the deep, critical, collective examination of their
The re-opening of the Church of Panagia Galaktrophousas in Cyprus

The re-opening of the Church of Panagia (Virgin Mary) Galaktrophousas in Palekythro, Cyprus, after 41 years was hailed by the WCC as an important sign of peace and reconciliation. The church opened its doors to worshippers on 16 August.

The Church of Panagia, built in 1890, has been closed for worship since 1974 following a coup d'état on the island that led to a Turkish military invasion and eventually a ceasefire and United Nations-patrolled buffer zone dividing the island into two ethnically separated parts. The Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders are currently engaged in active negotiations under UN auspices for a comprehensive settlement.

In his address, Bishop Porfyrios reiterated the appreciation of Archbishop Chrysostomos II of the Church of Cyprus to the WCC for its support and encouragement. He also thanked the WCC for its contribution to the island's peaceful coexistence.

Dr. Sivakami, Fr. Jayaseelan and Mr. Lluis, are daily engaged in improving the life condition of people, helping them build their own future with hope and optimism. They champion the cause of women, children, Dalits and Tribals; organize income generating activities; and build institutions and provide healthcare and education. The once marginalized and dispossessed people now comprehend their condition and are telling their stories through art and print media.

Ms. Sivakami delivered the Convocation address highlighting the plight of women, Dalits, landless and poor people as they seek education, empowerment and dignity. She spoke for all volunteers working among the poor and the marginalized that their involvement was not out of some habit but of facing the cruel condition of people living in poverty, oppression and tears. She brought to focus the current reality in the country - instead of living in a vibrant society of peace, cooperation and decent livelihood. "We are now a nation of people increasingly intolerant and selfish. The situation of Dalits, Tribals and women are particularly appalling. Besides continuing poverty, Dalits are now facing several new forms of untouchability, discrimination and violence due to issues emerging from inter-caste marriages and so-called 'caste honour'," she said.

"The oppressed, in their innocence, have unconditional faith in the goodness of democracy and the Constitution. However, the Governments have steadfastly denied or undermined the benefits due to them. A culture of mere poverty alleviation and 'freebies' keep the poor enslaved. Dalits need to rethink their strategies. They must wake up to the pernicious effects of sub-caste politics into which they have been cleverly co-opted. United they must reclaim their honour, political space, educational and economic uplift and entitlement to land," said Dr. Sivakami.

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We, very earnestly, appeal to you to introduce the People’s Reporter to as many friends, relatives and concerned persons, as possible. If you will write to them, marking copies to us, either by email or post, we will, then, follow them up directly with them. We would be very happy to send sample copies to prospective subscribers.

The Academy
Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration

The 26th Convocation of the Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration was held at the Madras YMCA Youth Center, Chennai on 8 Aug 2015.

In recognition of their contributions to Church/Society the title of ‘Doctor of Divinity (Honoris Causa)’ was conferred on Ms. Sivakami Palanimuthu (former IAS officer, renowned author, poet, political and social activist), Rev. Fr. Jayaseelan Amanathan (Priest, writer, educationist, social activist), and Mr. Lluis Compte-Puerto (Volunteer social worker, Laa Foundation).

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