

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K. C. Abraham

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Chapter 10: Globalisation and Liberative Solidarity

Globalisation is the magic word today. Economic development in the Third World countries, we are told, is possible only if they link up with the global economy through the global market. Globalisation is also a cultural as well as political reality for many. Ecological crisis, information technology and other aspects of modern life know no boundaries. They are global issues. Therefore it is not surprising that theological thinking and mission praxis in recent years is influenced by globalisation. The euphoria with which it was greeted by many theological colleges in USA indicated its importance for theological education. This paper is an attempt to analyze the phenomenon of globalisation and to raise some issues that are pertinent in facing its challenges. It suggests a model of Christian response, liberative solidarity, that is rooted in the experience and spirituality of the poor and the message of the cross.

1. Globalisation: An Analysis of the Phenomenon

Modern communication has converted the world into a “global village”. TV brings into your living room events in far off lands, drawing you closer to the gruesome war in Bosnia or the tribal massacre in Rwanda. Air travel is fast. You have your breakfast in one continent and lunch in another. And there is hardly a major city in the world which cannot provide you with a Chinese restaurant, a hamburger or a Japanese motor car.

Political and economic changes that take place in one corner of the world affect the life of people far away. Seldom do we realise that a drop of a few cents in the stock market in New York has drastic effects on the economy of major cities in the Third World. A decision of the USA not to purchase raw rubber can unsettle the economy of Malaysia, for, example.

We may briefly mention three aspects of this process as they are pertinent for our discussion:

(a) The process is an inevitable consequence of certain historical as well as structural factors at work in the last 300-400 years. Travel across the sea provided opportunity for closer relations between countries. Travel was not for pleasure or adventure alone, but also for trade. Spices, minerals and other commodities of Asia and Africa created new trade routes from the West to the East. Soon they needed to be protected from competition from rival powers. Slowly colonial powers began to exert military and

political control over most of the countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This colonial rule, as is well known, provided the cheap raw material for the industrial expansion in the countries of Europe and a ready market for their furnished goods.

b) The process of globalisation from the beginning was fraught with competition, conflict, domination and exploitation. Certainly there has been exchange of ideas and customs between peoples of different countries. And this has been mutually beneficial. But the ambiguous character of the process of globalisation is quite obvious.

Colonialism is perhaps the most blatant form of exploitation during this period of globalisation. Several consequences of colonial rule are now well-known. It is now evident that the industrial development of the West would not have been possible without the cheap raw materials and labour from the colonies. Cotton, iron, gold and minerals of all kinds were taken out of the country, sometimes arbitrarily with the use of force or at other times with the enthusiastic support of the local elites. Not only that the colonies provided cheap materials but they became ready markets for products manufactured in the West. The textile industry is a case in point. Built into this practice is a process of double exploitation. And the historical roots of poverty in the Third World can be traced to this colonial exploitation.

- Colonialism has inflicted more serious damage on the colonized people. Frantz Fanon in his famous analysis of colonialism has brought out the condition of colonised minds. “Those who internalise the colonial mentality”, wrote Fanon, “suffer a systematic negation of personhood. Colonialism forces the people it dominated to ask themselves the question constantly, ‘in reality who am I?’ The defensive attitudes created by this violent bringing together of the colonized man, and the colonial system form themselves into a structure which then reveals the colonized personality.”² Perhaps many erstwhile colonies have not recovered from this.

Science and technology have accelerated the process of globalisation. For one thing, it has created “rising expectations” about development, faster economic growth. While it has promised opportunities for expansion of human potential, it has also used new forces of destruction. Ecological crisis is the most serious crisis brought about by modern technology.

c) Today there is a sense of urgency when we talk about global realities. Nuclear threat raised the possibility of a total annihilation of the global. This threat has drawn us together. Ecological crisis has brought to our awareness the need for preserving this fragile earth which is our common home. Life is endangered and we need all resources to preserve it.³

Any consideration of globalisation therefore should keep in mind these three aspects: inevitable, ambiguous and urgent.

II Globalisation and Third World

The global village has provided new opportunities for the enhancement of life of our people. No doubt we need to affirm the positive side of this development. But many in the Third World look at this process with apprehension. They look at the global village as an order or mechanism for greater exploitation and political oppression. In this discussion we enter into the modern period of globalisation.

When the Third World nations become independent of colonialism after long periods of freedom struggle, they embarked on massive efforts to develop their reserves and to eliminate poverty. Development by economic growth based on rapid industrialization was the magic word. Three ingredients of this programme were, local elite (rulers), external resources (aid from the developed world, multinationals) and trade. The goal was not only to eliminate poverty, but also catch up with the First World in modernization. But the net results of the past few decades of development have been well summarized in the cliché -- the poor becoming poorer -- the rich becoming richer.

On global level the gap between the rich nations and the poor nations has increased. The average per capita income of the developed world is \$2,400 and that of the developing countries \$180. The gap is widening. The U.N. tried to change this trend, but failed. In 1970 the U.N. suggested that 7% of 1% of the total GNP of rich nations should be made available for the development assistance. But actual help declined from 52% of 1% in 1975 to 32% of 1% in 1976. This downward trend continues and what is more distressing is that the First world countries confirm that they have increased their military expenditure. The existing trade patterns are inimical to the well-being of developing nations. The aid that supposedly helps the growth of the Third World is always with “strings” attached- and used as a tool for continuing the First World dominance over the economic growth of the Third World.

C.T Kurien points out that the countries of the Third World regard the 1980s as a “lost decade in terms of their development opportunities.” He writes,

The prices of many of the goods they export came down, the richer countries kept them out of their markets and the terms of trade turned against them. As is well known, many of them have come to be caught in the ‘debt trap’. Less well known is that the decade came to be one of net resource transfers from the South to the North. And the gap between the rich and the poor countries measured by percapita income) widened.

Kurien further notes

The integration of the global economy has brought to the fore a new set of actors who have played an increasingly Important role in it: the transnational or multinational corporations (TNCs or MNCs). These first attracted comment in the 1960s, grew rapidly in the 1970s and emerged as powers to be reckoned with in the 1980s. Some even argue that by the dawn of the next century they, rather than national economies, will be the principal actors in the emerging global economy and that we are already well into the ‘transnational stage’ in the development of capitalism.⁴

The TNCs role in the Third World has now been subjected to serious analysis by economists. These large corporations know no national boundaries and their products find a way to the remotest corner of the world. Between 300-500 TNCs control of the enormous portion of world’s production, distribution and marketing process.

The sales of an individual corporation is bigger than the GNP of many developing countries. According to the figures supplied by the UN in 1981, EXXON has sales of 63,896 million dollars and General Motors, 63,211 million. Whereas the GNP of Nigeria is 48,000 million, Chile 15,770 or Kenya 15,307.

The power of the global corporations is derived from its unique capacity to use finance, technology, and advanced marketing skills to integrate production on a global scale in order to form the world into one economic unit and a “global shopping centre.”

They do not bring large capital to the host countries, but they take out huge profits. They do not generate more employment, as their technology is not labor intensive. Profit maximization is their goal and not development. They decide where people should live, what they eat, drink or wear and what kind of society their children should inherit.

Their primary goal is to safeguard the interests of developed countries and not the developing countries. In the recent discussion on conserving the world's biological diversity⁵ the behavior of MNCs has again been criticized by the Third World leaders. The Malaysian delegate to the UN General Assembly, 1990, made the following pertinent observation:

There are various instances where transnational corporations have exploited the rich genetic diversity of developing countries as a free resource for research and development. The products of such research are then patented and sold back to the developing countries at excessively high prices. This must cease. We must formulate mechanisms for effective cooperation with reciprocal benefits between biotechnologically rich developing countries and the gene-rich developing countries.⁶

The local elites are also agents of globalisation their role in the development should be recognized. When the countries became independent the leadership was naturally transferred to the local elites. They have developed interlocking interests with the western industrial elite. The development model which the newly independent countries accepted has helped them and they exert considerable pressure on the policy decisions of the Third World countries on globalisation.

The priorities are determined by the demand of the market-often the greed and no need becomes the controlling factor.

TV was considered a great symbol of modern development. But in an informal survey conducted by a sociologist it was revealed that the people who benefit most by TV are our industrialists. They have increased the sales of their products such as Maggie's Instant Noodles and many kinds of junk food which are not essential to the life of ordinary people.

The growing inequality between the rich nations and poor and between the rich and the poor in each nation is a fundamental threat to global harmony. Globalisation and marginalisation go together. This contradiction needs special attention. This can be illustrated with the economic situation in India.

III Globalisation and the Indian Economy

In 1991 the Government of India introduced drastic reforms in its economic policies which have far reaching implications for the life of the country. The involvement of World Bank and IMF was acknowledged as crucial in the structural adjustment. It was

a deliberate move to take the country right into the process of globalisation. MNCs are allowed to come into the country in a big way by liberalization of the earlier stringent regulations with regard to the type of industry and the profits that they are allowed to take out of the country. It is perhaps early to evaluate the full impact of these policy changes. These reforms have helped to revive the sluggish economy and to discard some of the unproductive bureaucratic controls. But some of the inevitable consequences of these reforms are quite alarming. The indebtedness of the country (internal and external) has now reached a staggering figure of 90.6 billion dollars. C.T Kurien who has made a careful analysis of the trends in the present economy, has concluded has observed thus:

If the economic reform measures in India have therefore been sponsored by a tiny, though exceptionally powerful and influential minority which is pursuing them to safeguard and promote its own narrow interests, they are unlikely to be of benefit to the bulk of the people, in spite of claims that they are not only necessary and inevitable, but also in the national interest. The impact of the reforms on the lives of sections of the peoples beyond this narrow minority, has already begun to be seen. On the basis of an examination of the relevant figures, one estimate shows that in the first year of reforms, “nearly 6 to 7 million people went below the ‘poverty line’ in contrast to an annual improvement of nearly 10 to 15 million moving above the poverty line over the last decade.” Therefore, in overall terms “it makes a difference in terms of a setback in poverty alleviation pace by nearly 20 millions.”⁷

Kurien and other economists are not saying that Indian economy is not in need of reforms, but they point out that the “thrust of any alternative reform measures must be towards the welfare of the largest segments our society.”⁸ At present these segments are excluded from the process of decision that affect their lives and their condition is deteriorating. These sectors are marginalised working class-unorganized labourers, and landless. They are the dalits and tribals.

Increasing marginalisation of dalits, women and other sectors continues to be a problem. Our hope that their lot would improve is now shattered. No doubt the movement of the marginalized for justice and participation will be stronger. But resistance to them will be on the increase.

As we have seen, marginalisation is linked with globalisation. The advanced sectors have achieved considerably more expansion and led to the improvement of the traditional sector. As one report correctly observes, “much of rural development has simply been extension of urban development.” There is an urgent need for an alternate form of development that meets the basic needs of the rural people.

Among the marginalized groups struggling for justice, women is the largest. They are fighting many issues. Cultural prejudices, structures of patriarchy, economic exploitation and unjust laws and traditions are some of them. Organized movements of women are beginning to make some impact but they need to be strengthened. The church is also of male dominated structure. Rich resources and contribution that women can make to the life and ministry of the church are seldom made use of. Unfortunately prejudice against women are nurtured in our families. We tend to foster double standards in sexual morals. Female feticide, dowry deaths and other glaring

incidents are symptoms of deep-seated prejudices and discriminatory practices and customs.

IV Globalisation has Become the Vehicle of Cultural Invasion

The idea of progress is decisively shaped by western life-style and its structures. Air travel, color TV, super computers and space technology all are the symbols of progress. When a nation opts for TV it is not just the technology but all the cultural and social life that nurture it come with it.

Technology is power, and the power is never neutral. It becomes the carrier of those systems and ideologies (values and cultures) within which it has been nurtured. The tendency is to create a mono-culture. Prof. Koyama in his inimitable style provides a sharp critique to this in all his writings. By mono-culture we mean the undermining of economic, cultural and ecological diversity, the nearly universal acceptance of technological culture as developed in the West and its values. The indigenous culture and its potential for human development is vastly ignored. The tendency is to accept the efficiency with productivity without any concern for compassion or justice. Ruthless exploitation of nature without any reverence for nature which is an integral value of the traditional culture.

M.M. Thomas in his recent writings has reflected on the impacts of modernization on the traditional culture. He writes,

The modernizing forces of technology, human rights and secularism are today directed by a too mechanical view of nature and humanity which ignores the natural organic and the transcendental spiritual dimensions of reality. No doubt, traditional societies emphasize the organic and the religious aspects of life in a manner that enslaves human beings to natural forces and human individuality to the group dicta. But modernization based on a mechanical world-view atomizes society to permit the emergence of the individual who soon becomes rootless and a law unto itself and since rootlessness is unbearable for long, the pendulum swings to a collectivism which is a mechanical bundling together of atomised individuals into an equally rootless mass under mechanical State control.⁹

There are groups that strive towards a critical approach to Western values and technology. They want to retain humane values of tradition. They see the need for a holistic kind of development. They are for pluralism and diversity in cultures. They are for science and technology, but not for a neutral kind of scientism that willingly allows itself to be used by the elite. They are for industry, but not industry that destroys ecological balance and causes pollution. In short, they are asking for an alternate form of development that takes the interest of the poor as central and allows room for their culture and religion.

V Globalisation and Ecological Crisis

The pattern of development that is capital intensive and the life style propagated by the media together create a situation where ecological balance and sustaining power of the earth for nurturing life is being destroyed. The problem is further aggravated by the process of globalisation. In fact, ecological crisis is not merely a Third World problem. The whole planet is affected and perhaps this issue brings together concerned people

of the South and North.¹⁰ Perspectives on this question differ.

The Third World perspective on ecological crisis raises the question of justice as an overriding concern. The life of the poor and the marginalised is further impoverished by the crisis. Shortage of fuel and water add peculiar burdens to the life of women. It is said that tribals are made environmental prisoners in their own land. Details, whose life has been subjected to social and cultural oppression for generations are facing new threats to them by the wanton destruction of the natural environment.

On a global level this concern about the gap in the control over and use of natural resources should be raised to gain a correct perspective on globalisation. The modern European person is the most expensive human species in this world. American people who represent about 6% of the earth's population melt, burn or eat over 50% of the world's consumable resources each year. Every 24 hours citizens of U.S.A. consume 2,250 heads of cattle in the form of MacDonald hamburgers. Extend this style to the entire world, what will be its consequences. It is these hard questions about the nature of development, the life-style and justice that have to be raised. In order to pursue this kind of life-style we need to have easy access to the mineral resources and energy. Many a political conflict arises out of this need: We try to put an ideological garb over such conflicts. East/West conflict is now replaced by North/South conflict. What is at stake is the sphere of political dominance linked with control of resources. Global peace is possible only if we can diffuse this by establishment of a world order.

VI A New Look at the Global Village

What is the paradigm of the miracle of Global village we have in mind? People who write and talk about global village are people who have never lived in a village. It is therefore not surprising that their image of the global village is born out of their references of a technological, industrial culture. One of the prevailing tendencies in such a culture is to put everything in manageable, organized system. There is very little room for diversity. The clearly defined centre exercising control over the periphery -- that is why "melting pot" becomes a favourite image in the U.S.A. But what we see in the village is not so neatly organized, uniform structure. A village is a small, separate unit connected to other units. It is of different shape and diverse character. It is a mosaic and not a neat uniform system. The global is very much present in the local. Diversity and not uniformity is its hallmark.

We simply assume that to gain an experience of the global we used to travel to foreign countries. This is not true. We may travel and see things but still miss the essential values that keep our life human. But the consciousness that our local life is bound up with realities and relationships that go beyond the given time and space is what makes as truly global. It is the basic openness to the other - it is affirming the other who is different but integral to our life. It is necessary to affirm the local as unique, but exists in the wider network of relationships. In other words, plurality is an essential aspect of the global. It provides the space for different identities to grow in dialogue. When that space is denied the marginal suffers most. The struggle of the marginal for identity is to be seen as a necessary process to realize the global.

Within each nation there are measures, laws that regulate the economic activity and distribution through taxation, minimum wages, and so on. But in international relations there is no regulative mechanism. The UN is powerless. They have indeed

talked about a new economic order. Demands include reduction of trade barriers, more stable commodity prices for raw materials, easier access to foreign technologies, better terms of aid and rapid expansion of industrialization. Some of these demands are legitimate, although there is very little hope anything will be changed. These demands however, do not challenge the existing international system and its assumptions; they want a greater share in the global economic pie. This is usually the demand of the bureaucrats and elites. What the poor people are asking/telling us is, unless we rethink the basic questions of life-style, the use of natural resources and the reaction between environment and development, we cannot address the question of a new economic order.

Globalisation, is not a neutral process. An alliance forged by the forces of domination for profit becomes the driving force of much of globalisation. The poor and the marginal do not find protection and security under it. But this process is inevitable, therefore a blind rejection of it seems to be realistic. How do we orient the forces of globalisation for the furtherance of justice? Can we seek a new global solidarity of the victims of present system to build a just global order?

VII The Search for Alternatives

The Third World perspectives on the global unity are made dear. The present global order controlled by the MNCs, neo-colonial forces and elites of the countries does not ensure the values of justice and plurality. The ecological crisis has further accentuated the problem of global injustice. The search is for a global order where life affirming values are preserved and strengthened. This would mean an economic system that is free of oppression. Kurien in the above study points out that today the powerful and all pervasive market has become “a tool of oppression”. “What they (people) need, therefore, is not greater market friendliness but ‘people friendly markets’. A people friendly market, he further states, is a social institution used, deliberately under human direction and control, the dictum ‘leave it to the market has no place here’.¹¹

Speaking in cultural terms, M.M. Thomas argues that a “post-modern humanism which recognizes the integration of mechanical, organic and spiritual dimensions, can develop creative reinterpretation of traditions battling against fundamentalist traditionalism and actualize the potential modernity to create a dynamic fraternity of responsible persons and people”.¹²

An alternative developmental paradigm should be supported by an alternative vision of human bond to one another and to the earth. It is important that this new vision emerges from the experiences of the poor and the marginalised. “It is our conviction that a new paradigm for just development must emerge from the experiences of the poor and the marginalised.”¹³

It is not our intention to give a blue print for alternative development. That can be evolved only by economist, political leaders and scientist who are committed to values that are necessary for human development. In this task we should learn from the experiences of the poor, for they are close to the earth and their techniques of preserving the ecosystem should be taken seriously. Those who live close to the land and the sea have developed a way of using earthly resources without destroying them. By polluting our water and destroying our forests we cannot develop. More important is the conviction that a set of values that are integral to human survival can be learned

from the life-style and the world view of the marginal groups. They have lived in solidarity with one another and with the earth. Their communitarian value system is necessary for evolving a just and sustainable form of development. This is the global solidarity that we propose for the future, giving a new direction to the process of globalisation. 'People friendly markets', 'enabling social changes' and 'post modern humanism' - are all attempts to give this orientation to globalisation.

VIII Towards Building a Just Global Order: Theological Considerations

Can theology be pressed into service towards building a just global order? Does theology deepen our commitment to a new global solidarity based on justice and peace? The vision for theologising should emerge from the experiences and traditions of faith of the people. Sometimes theologians turn such visions into rigid systems and absolute ideals. But the emphasis on contextual theology is an effort to ground theology in the immediate experiences of oppression and suffering of people.¹⁴

The faith articulation of women and indigenous groups struggling for their dignity and freedom has helped us in our search for a relevant theology. They are important for our task of building a global solidarity. A holistic view of reality and non-hierarchical form of community are integral to their vision of life. This vision has to be recaptured in our theology. Some of our feminist writers and theologians who are committed to develop ecological theology are beginning to articulate this new vision of doing theology.

Holistic View of Reality

Our perception of the structure of reality changes as we become aware of new areas of human experience and knowledge. The dualistic model of classical understanding -- spirit/matter, mind/body -- is not adequate to interpret our contemporary experience. Moreover, our feminist thinkers rightly point out that such a dualist view of reality is largely responsible for maintaining a patriarchal and hierarchical model of society. A holistic model is closer to our life experiences, including our relation with nature. In fact, theologians who write about ecological concerns are united in their opinion that a holistic view of reality is basic to a responsible relation between humans and nature. An organic model of reality should replace a mechanistic model in our times. An organic model can interpret "the relation between God and world in ways commensurate with an ecological context". Sally McFague, taking into consideration the insights from contemporary cosmologists, has described the organic model in the following words:

The organic model we are suggesting pictures reality as composed of multitudes of embodied beings who presently inhabit a planet that has evolved over billions of years through a process of dynamic change marked by law and novelty into an intricate, diverse, complex, multi-leveled reality, all radically interrelated and interdependent. This organic whole that began from an initial high bang and eventuated into the present universe is distinguished by a form of unity and diversity radical beyond all imagining: infinite differences, and diversity that is marked not by isolation but by shared atoms over millennia as well as minute-by-minute exchanges of oxygen and carbon dioxide between plants and animals. All of us, living and non-living, are one phenomenon, a phenomenon stretching

over billions of years and containing untold numbers of strange, diverse, and forms of matter -- including our own. The universe is a body, to use a poor analogy from our own experience, but it is not a human body; rather, it is matter bodied forth seemingly infinitely, diversely, endlessly, yet internally as one.¹⁵

Radical inter-relatedness and interdependence of all creation is of paramount significance as we perceive reality “By reality,” Writes Samuel Rayan, “is meant every thing; the earth and all that it contains, with all the surprises it holds for the future; people and their creations; the conditions in which they live, their experience of life as gift, their celebration of it, no less than their experience of oppression and death, and their struggles and hopes and wounds and songs”.¹⁶

Leonardo Boff goes further and affirms that “Ecology constitutes a complex set of relationships. It includes everything, neglects nothing, values everything, is linked together. Based on this we can recover Christianity’s most early perception; its conception of God.”¹⁷ For him “world is a mirror of Trinity.”

This provides a new perspective on Christology. Our tendency in modern theology to subsume all the new questions of theology under a framework that may be described as ‘Christocentric Universalism’ is perhaps not the most helpful paradigm. Too much weight is put on this. Christ-in-relation seems to be a better way of affirming the trinitarian concern of the process of transformation and renewal. A spirit-filled theology that responds to the pathos of people and their liberative stirrings should be evolved. The characteristic posture of the spirit is openness and an ability to transcend limits. The affirmation of the solidarity of the poor is the spirit’s creative activity. To discern the spirit’s working, we need ‘Christic’ sensitivity, but it can never be wholly interpreted by Christological formulations.

If radical interrelatedness is the characteristic of the reality and therefore of the divine, then openness to the other is the essential mode of response to God. The openness becomes the seed for creating new relationships and a new order.

The struggle today is for open communities. Again the awareness of the need for the communities is not new. But today we face a situation where the identity struggle of different groups is projecting the shape of communities as classed, each group defines its boundaries over against the other. The question is how can we build a global solidarity of open communities. A community of communities that accepts a plurality of identities in a non-threatening, but mutually affirming way is the core of our vision.¹⁸ In fact, the Church is meant to be this solidarity. Leonardo Boof writes:

The ecclesial community must consider itself part of the human community which in turn must consider itself part of the cosmic community. And all together part of the Trinitarian Community of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

We have a long way to go if we take this vision seriously. The churches are so introvert that they are incapable of becoming a sacrament of this community of open communities in this world.

Mission has to take seriously this task of recreating communities: It means a critical awareness of the process and structures that are inimical to an open community.

Forces that threaten life, practices that seldom promote justice and love, and above all an attitude of apathy towards change.

Liberative Solidarity: A Form of Global Mission

A holistic vision of reality is the basis for non-hierarchical open communities. But this vision of wholeness should have a concrete direction. In the prophetic vision of a community, compassion is the concrete dimension of it (Micah 6:5). It is solidarity that is liberative and life-affirming.²⁰ Justice and loving mercy are the words used by the prophet. Together they may be translated into liberative solidarity. The logic of justice as developed in the West emphasizes rights and rules and respect for the other. It is a balancing of duties and rights. But in the prophets justice includes caring. Justice expressing compassion is the biblical emphasis. Prophets were not talking about balancing interests and rights, but about caring, the defending of the poor by the righteous God. This emphasis comes with poignancy when we consider our responsibility to the earth. It is a defenseless and weak partner of humans in creation. Caring love comes from compassion by standing at the place where the poor are and being in solidarity with them. It is this solidarity that makes us raise questions to the dominant models of globalisation.

It also points to a new direction for global community that celebrated sharing and hope. Jesus rejected the imperial model of unity, which in his time was represented by the Roman empire and the power wielders of Jerusalem temple. He turned to Galilee, to the poor and the outcasts, women and the marginalised. He identified with them. His own uncompromising commitment to the values of the kingdom and his solidarity with the victims of society made himself an enemy of the powers-that-be conflict was very much part of his ministry. It resulted in death. On the cross, he cried aloud, “My God, my God, why have you forgotten me?” It is a cry of desperation, a cry of loneliness. But it is a moment of solidarity -- a moment when he identified with the cries of all humanity.

In solidarity with the suffering, Jesus gave expression to his hope in the liberating God who has his preference in defending the poor and the dispossessed. It is in this combination of total identification with the depth of suffering and the hope that surpassed all experiences that we see the clue to Jesus’ presence in our midst and future he offers us. New wine, a new logic of community that comes from a solidarity culture was projected against the old wine, the old culture.

The promise of God’s future in such a solidarity culture is an invitation to struggle, advocacy for the victims, and compassion. People who are drawn to the side of the poor come into contact with the foundation of all life. The Bible declares that God encounters them in the poor. With this step from unconsciousness to consciousness, from apathetic hopelessness regarding one’s fate to faith in the liberating God of the poor, the quality of poverty also changes because one’s relationship to it changes.²¹

The solidarity culture is sustained by spirituality, not the spirituality that is elitist and other-worldly, but that which is dynamic and open.

In our struggle for a new global order we need to mobilize the superior resources of all religious traditions, not only the classical religions, but the primal religious traditions

as well. In fact, the classical religions tend to project a type of spirituality that is devoid of a commitment to social justice. There are, however, notable exceptions. We begin to see a new search for the liberational form of spirituality in these religions. See for example the writings of Swami Agnivesh and Asgar Ali Engineer.²² Tagore's words express this kind of spirituality:

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, lowliest, and the lost.

When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, the lowest and the lost. (*Gitanjali*).

But a distinct challenge comes from the Indian spirituality tradition. Its focus upon inferiority is to be considered important when we talk about a commitment for action. Amolarpavadosh in all his writings emphasized this. Freedom also means liberation from pursuit, acquisition, accumulation and hoarding of wealth (*arta*), unbridled enjoyment of pleasures comfort (*kama*), without being regulated and governed by righteousness and justice (*dharma*), without orientation to the ultimate goal (*moksha*).²³

Mention has already been made about the spirituality of indigenous groups. Their holistic vision and communitarian value systems are essential for the emergence of a new global order. They are signs of freedom we long for. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (Paul). Our longing for a free and open order is a spiritual longing. Only when communities live with mutual respect, when they together eliminate all caste, atrocities, when they together remove and hunger, when all their religions sing the song of harmony, when they together celebrate God-given unity, then the Spirit is free. Towards that global solidarity let us commit ourselves.

This reflection on liberative solidarity can be conclude by mentioning two concrete expressions of it.

One, the emergence of dalit theology in India. Dalits are the oppressed groups, marginalised for centuries by the social and cultural systems. Today dalit consciousness based on a new found identity has provided the impetus for a dalit theology, Prof. A.P. Nirmal describes the methodology as follows:

Dalit theology wants to assert that at the heart of the dalit peoples experience is pathos or suffering. This pathos or suffering or pain is prior to their involvement in any activist struggle for liberation. Even before a praxis of theory and practice happens, even before a praxis of thought and action happens, they (the dalits) know God in and through their suffering. For a Dalit theology "Pain or Pathos is the beginning of knowledge." For the sufferer more certain than any principle, more certain than any action is his/her pain-pathos. Even before he/she thinks about pathos; even before he/she acts to remove or redress or overcome this pathos, pain-pathos is simply there. It is in and through this pain-pathos that the sufferer knows God. This is because the sufferer in and through his/her pain-pathos knows that God participates in human pain. This participation of God in human pain is characterized by the New Testament as the passion of Jesus symbolized in his crucifixion.²⁴

Two, a few months ago I visited a Buddhist monk in the southern provinces of Sri Lanka. I had heard about his intense involvement in the struggles of people for freedom and justice. Three of us, theologians, sat at his feet listening in rapt attention to the stories of his involvement how at the risk of his own life he had to defend young activists. He was constantly in clash with the powers that be. At the end, one of the group asked him, “Sir, how do you explain the motivating power that sustains you in all these?” He thought for a moment and then said, “I do not know, perhaps I am inspired by the compassionate love of Buddha.” And then looking intently on us he asked, don’t you think Jesus also teaches us about compassion.” I ventured to say, “Yes, but there is a big difference between the response of some of us Christians to our Christ, and your response to your Buddha.” I do not see the same intensity of commitment to the passion of Jesus in our churches. That is the crux of the problem. Can compassion, another name for liberative solidarity, unite us?

Notes:

1. Mahatma Gandhi’s famous strategy for creating an awareness of the evil of the colonial rule was the call to boycott foreign made clothes and to wear clothes made from home spun materials.
2. The Wretched of the Earth (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books), 1988, p. 250.]
3. Numerous writings are available from scientists and ecologists. But is important to note that the churches have taken this up as an area of concern. World Council of Churches materials are made available to the churches for study and reflections. See Eco Theology (Ed. David Hullmann), (Geneva:WCC, 1994).
4. C.T. Kurien, Global Capitalism and the Indian Economy, Tracts for the Times/6 (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1994), pp 57-58.
5. It is recognized that the tropics hold a rich reserve of the planets biological diversity. Variety of species that exist here are being eliminated by destruction of tropical forests. The UN has expressed concern over this and efforts are underway to preserve them, through the World Wild Life Fund, the World Bank and other agencies. But many Third World leaders argue how these efforts are neglecting the point of view of the South. Bio-diversity, it is pointed out; is destroyed by the pattern of development adopted by MNCs and others in the North. They further observe that the farmers’ wisdom and techniques of preserving the diversity should be recognized and taken seriously. See. Vandana Shiva and others, Bio-diversity - Social Perspectives, World Rainforest Movement, Penang, Malaysia, 1991.
6. Ibid., p. 11
7. C.T. Kurian. op. cit., p. 120.
8. Ibid., p. 123.
9. M.M. Thomas, The Nagas Towards AD. 200 and other Selected Addresses and Writings, (Madras: Centre for Research on New International Economic Order, 1992) p. 27.

10. See the recent publication of WG.C. Eco Theology (Ed. David Hullmannn, 1994).

11. C.T. Kurien, op.cit., p. 123.

Also see, Amartya Sen, Beyond Liberalisation: Social Opportunity and Human Capability (New Delhi: Institute Of Social Science, 1994). This eminent economist compares India's policy for liberalisation with that of China and observes that the force of China's market economy rests on solid foundations of social changes that have occurred earlier, and India cannot simply jump on to that bandwagon without paying attention to the enabling social changes in education, health care and land reforms - that made the market function in the way it has in China (pp. 26-27).

12. M.M. Thomas, op. cit., p. 27

13. K.C. Abraham (Ed.) Spirituality of the Third World, NewYork: Orbis Books, 1994, p.1.

14. Speaking to a group of German pastors the other day I remarked that all theologies were contextual theologies and Karl Barth was a contextual theologian. Predictably my comment was that Barth had rejected a kind of contextual theology found in the liberal tradition. But they had to agree that Barth was concerned about the word in the European situation obtaining after the World War and the crisis of liberalism. Further it was pointed out that his own experience in his parish made a big difference in the manner in which he theologised. Kosuke Koyamas contribution in developing contextual theology in Asia should be acknowledged.

15. Sally McFague, The Body of God, (Fortress Press, 1993) Special mention has to be made about Sally McFague's another Models of God (Fortress, 1987). Also refer Jurgen Moltmann, God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God; (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985). Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins, (New York: Cross Roads) Felix Wilfred, From The Dusty Soil. (University of Madras: Department of Christian Studies, 1995) p.258 f.

16. J.R. Chandran (Ed.) Third World Theologies in Dialogue, Bangalore: EATWOT-INDIA, 1991, p. 47

17. Voices from the Third World, Vol. XVI, No. I p.115.

18. S.J. Samartha has expressed this concern in his discussion on pluralism.

“The new global context the Church has to define its identity and role in history in relation to, rather than over against other communities. What; for example, is the relationship between the Buddhist *sangha*, the Christian *ecclesia* and the Muslim *ummah* in the global community? When every religion has within it a dimension of universality it is to be understood as the extension one's universality overcoming other particularities? In what sense can the community we seek become 'a community or communities' that can hold together unity and diversity in creative tension rather than in debilitating conflict?” (Samartha, *One Christ -Many Religions*; Indian edition SATHRI Bangalore, 1993, p. 13).

19. *Voice from the Third World*, Vol. XVI No. 1, p. 115.

20. Preferential option for the poor is the characteristic mode of response in the liberation theology. In some situations it may be misconstrued as patronizing attitude. Liberative solidarity has the advantage of the entering into a different relation with the poor. Their experience and their spirituality hold the key for a future order. To acknowledge our indebtedness to the poor is to seek a new future.

21. Dorothee Solle, On Earth as in Heaven, USA: Westminster, p. 16.

22. See especially Asghar Ali Engineer, Islam and Liberation Theology: Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1990).

Here the influence of liberation theology cannot be ignored. All the religions are challenged to take seriously the emphasis on liberation.

One may quote the stirring words of Deane William Fern at the close of his essay "Third World Liberation Theology: Challenge to World Religions in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, World Religions and Human Liberation, (New York:Orbis, 1992), p. 19. "Liberation theology issues a call not only to Christianity but to the other religions of the world as well. Are these religions willing to show 'a preferential option for the poor'? Can the communities of the poor which are irrupting throughout the Third World be the basis for a new "peoples theology" which seek to liberate humanity from all forms of oppression : poverty, servitude, racism, sexism, and the like? Can justice and spirituality become partners in a world embracing enterprise? Can the struggle for justice and belief in God come to mean one and the same thing? Herein lies the stirring challenge of third World Christian liberation theology."

23. Theology of Development, (Bangalore NBCLC, 1979), p. 15.

24. KP.Nirmal (Ed.)A Reader in Dalit Theology, U.E.L.C.I., Madras, 1990.

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