

Baptist News

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Editorial



In this issue we have based our theme on “**Together towards Justice and Peace**” with a reflection from Genesis 2:15. Today, as we look at the scenario of the fast growing world with modern technologies, new inventions, rapid industrialization, we realise how we are doing over exploitation on our mother earth and natural resources due to our greed. Uncontrolled deforestation, illegal exploitation of natural resources, illegal wildlife trades, land grabbing, contaminations of water bodies are all rampant in our present days. Often we fail to understand that the destruction of environment is a crime against mother earth and adversely affect humanity.

God had created the Garden, the most perfect and bountiful paradise imaginable; it was up to man to diligently keep the Garden perfect and beautiful as made by God. We are given a special responsibility to take care of the creation that includes the nature and every living and non-living beings. The Bible is wonderfully ambiguous at this point. Was the garden made because human needed a place to live? Or was it created because the garden needed someone to

care for it? Today, we have a responsibility to take care of what God has given us (material things). We know that all these things we own may be one day burnt up. We are to nurture, sustain, and care for all the created things just like the way God nurtures, sustains and cares for us. It is our duty to seek protection and justice for all the creatures God has made and to witness to God's love for them, acknowledging that they together with us will share in God's beautiful creation. However, with our efforts alone we cannot save the earth and do justice to all. Only God, who is the giver, sustainer of all lives and redeemer of all creation, can deliver peace with justice and will help us in keeping all His creation safe. And as a Christian, we are all expected to participate in God's good work of creating new heaven and new earth.

In our homes, in our work place, in our community, our church, we can begin to model that kind of love and care for the earth that God has for us and for all the creation. Let us re-commit ourselves that we will participate in caring for God's creation along with others in this world.



Rev Dr Solomon Rongpi
General Secretary, CBCNEI

Let us redeem God's Creation

Rev Dr Wati Longchar, Professor of Theology & Culture, Yushan Theological College & Seminary, Hualien, Taiwan

The Mother Earth, the 'Home' of humans and all forms of life, is being shaken by greenhouse gas emissions, global warming, rising sea levels, the alarming pollution of air, water and other essentials. Why are God's creation groaning? Who is responsible? Why do we have to talk about the redemption of God's creation? What went wrong to God's creation which sustains all lives? What are the humans' responsibilities in redeeming God's creation? These are some of the issues we need to address today. Redemption and preservation of God's creation is a justice issue. It is the foundation of all lives, and so also theology. The redemption of creation has to do with how human beings relate to Mother Earth. In this sense, eco-justice and social justice are so intertwined that one cannot be sought without the other.

Groaning of God's Creation

God's creation is groaning. The ideology that has contributed to groaning of God's creation has four major streams of praxis. The confluence of these four streams has created forceful current in the dominant Christian traditions that set aside the truth of the communion of human beings with God's creation. It is important to see how they have influenced the attitude of humans and contributed to the exploitation and abuse of Mother Earth.

a) Mechanical view and secularization of creation

This stream of thought is rooted in the Western Enlightenment tradition which makes sharp contrast between nature and history. The advancement of the knowledge of science and secularization of nature

is interconnected. With the advancement of knowledge in the field of science and technology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought industrial capitalism, market economy, mass production, democracy and rationalism. The whole created order began to be viewed objectively. Using the tools of mathematical calculations and experimental data, human began to claim that one could understand the specific nature of the physical matter constituting the Earth, and the changes within it. Thus, the nature is seen purely from the utilitarian perspective and took away the mystery and sacredness of nature from the western worldview. People began to perceive that there is nothing amazing and sacred about the world; it is merely a sum-total of many material components and energies. Humans are capable of understanding, predicting, and controlling everything that relate to physical world; we are separated from, and masters of, the earth. Natural resources are given only in so far as they are useful for the development of science and technology. Hence, human's materialistic attitude today is greatly shaped by such ideologies. Many people visualize human civilization in term of a highly mechanized and industrialized society. The booming of economic progress, high-tech mechanized life-style is perceived as attainment of higher quality of life. 'Growth' is seen as the only principle for liberation. The growth-driven and consumerist economic system and the one-sided development pursuits have led to colonization of others and laid ideological justification for the subjugation and exploitation of non-renewable earth's resources in a massive scale. The concepts of 'care for one another', 'just economy' and '(sabbath) rest for creation' are considered as non-productivity and the root of all human problems stem from poverty to sickness to political instability. Any attempt to slow down economic growth is labeled as immoral. Right to have dominion over God's creation is a biblical mandate and exploitation is seen as exercising human's creativity bestowed on them in the "Image of God" (Gen 1:27,28). This Enlightenment paradigm of euro-centric modernity rooted in the conquest of nature is the major root cause of today's world crisis. Christian theologies have played its role in justifying exploitation of mother earth.

b) Hierarchical structure of creation

In the Hebrew thought, man is the helm of the hierarchy, ruling over the family, the women, the slaves, etc. Several Christian theologians have explained God's creation within this hierarchical structure. According to Thomas Aquinas, God, the Creator, in the beginning, simultaneously created a hierarchy of creatures, ordered according to their degree of perfection. In this hierarchical order, angels are at the highest peak. Angels are created, but purely spiritual beings and they are above human beings. Humans are the highest among the created material beings having ultimate right over the other creatures. This hierarchical order is divine design because "the imperfect beings are for the use of perfect."¹ Imperfect beings are created to serve the need of more noble beings, for instance, the plants draw their nutrients from the earth, animals feed on plants and these in turn serve human's use. Therefore, those lifeless beings exist for the sake of living beings, plants for animals and animals for humans. Having affirmed that, Aquinas went one step further and said that material creatures were created that they "might be assimilated to the divine goodness"² For him, those creatures lower than the rational human creature in hierarchy simply assimilate to the divine goodness by fulfilling the needs of human creatures. The whole material nature exists for humans' needs because humanity alone possesses rationality. Human beings are above all creatures. In other words, the other non-human creatures are protected, preserved, and sustained by God to serve rational human's needs. This theology gives justification for manipulation and exploitation of other segments of God's creation.

c) Anthropocentric view of creation

Hierarchical and anthropocentric views of life are interrelated and they assume similar theological position in regard to creation. It views that humanity is the reference point of everything. Creation has meaning and values by serving the interests of humankind. In this view of life, Robert Borrong, an Indonesian theologian, underlines nine assumptions:

- (1) Humans are separated from nature;
- (2) Prioritizing the rights of human beings over nature, but not

- emphasizing the responsibility of human beings;
- (3) Prioritizing the feelings of humans as centre of their apprehensiveness;
 - (4) Policy and management of natural resources in the interests of human beings;
 - (5) Solution to the ecological crisis through population control, especially in the poor countries;
 - (6) Adherence to the philosophy of economic growth;
 - (7) The main norm is profit-lost;
 - (8) Prioritizing short-term planning; and
 - (9) Adjusting oneself to the prevailing political and economic system.³

This view has become the basis for greedy exploitation and depletion of nature's resources in today's world.

Protestant theologies also gave theological justification to this view of life. Luther saw the whole creation of God as something which exists for the benefit of humans. He recognized nature simply as an existential springboard for grace. The ultimate purpose of creation is perceived as non-living, valueless; they are merely created so that human beings experience God's grace. Karl Barth also advocated similar theology. For him, God is the "wholly other", the transcendent Lord, who can be known only when He chooses to reveal himself, as He did preeminently in Jesus Christ. Barth said that the Word is not the foremost principle of creation which gives life to all created things; rather the Word is the first and foremost God's address to humanity in Jesus Christ. God is not known through His creation, but only through Christ. Barth is very explicit that salvation history begins from the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but not from the creation. Barth further argued that this great history of salvation cannot be actualized if there is no place or space for it to occur. It needs a "showplace" or a "theatre" outside of God and humans.⁴ This is the reason why God brought the created world into existence. It is very clear that Barth conceives creation simply as a showplace/theatre for

the saving works of God. Everything is created solely for the sake of the realization of God's covenant with humanity in Jesus Christ. However, nature is sustained, protected and upheld for the sake of election. Thus, creation is merely a stage. It has no history, not redeemed, but merely used. Bultmann also held the similar position. God is not to be perceived in the phenomena of nature but He is known and experienced in the 'cave of the heart', in the inner personal experience.⁵ Such theology places creation in the secondary position.

d) Dualistic view of creation

This stream of thought is of Greek origin with its dualism of body and soul. The soul is the highest among all created order. The soul finds its true destiny by escaping from nature, creation and the world. Marcion taught that the visible world is the creation of the God of Israel, and a created out of matter; it is an evil work destined for destruction. The world is evil because it is created by a lesser god. This view stressed that God is absolutely different and distinct from His created nature. A holy God cannot be related to material world. Gnostic held the view that the world is creation of demonic power from the chaos of the darkness. The created world is purely material and fleshly, a full expression of evil. Origen, the Early Father, held that God created the world because of a spiritual rebellion in heaven. Thus, the creation of the world was related to the Fall of man. The world is created for the fallen spirits and thereby it becomes a place of purification where fallen humankind could be educated through suffering to regain the pure state of spiritual realm.⁶ Origen valued soul over the material world. The influence of dualism is evident among the Reformers. Nature and other material objects do not take part in the salvation and redemption of Christ. According to Luther, nature is not a witness to the glory of God. Nature is only a supplementary item for salvation drama of human beings. This dualistic view of life influenced humans to believe that humankind is called upon to control nature and so the function of religion is simply to aid human beings in the execution of their task. This view contradicts biblical testimony. God's creation is redeemed when human beings respect the rhythm of nature and it's dynamic.

Most of the nineteenth century Evangelicals⁷ took this dualistic position. The Evangelicals recognized God's revelation only in Jesus Christ, but not in the total creation of God. One can know God only through Jesus Christ but not through creation. The teaching of heaven and hell further reinforced negligence and undermining of God's creation. The world is coming to an end, all materials will be destroyed, but only the souls will be saved and live eternally in heaven; other materials will be perished. This doctrine made people to think that "This world is not our home. We are just a passenger." If this world is not our home, why should we take care of it?

The aim of this discussion is not to argue that theologians in the mainline Christian traditions have a negative attitude to creation. What we are trying to say is that because of their great interest in the uniqueness of God's action in history for human redemption, they were indifferent to other God's creation. It is understandable that serious attention was not given to creation theology as they did not face ecological crisis like today. Moreover, one should not assume that Christianity does not have a theology of creation. Paul Santmire in his book, *The Travail of Nature*⁸, has shown convincingly that it is not fair to blame Christianity and its traditions like Lynn White,⁹ to be 'ecologically bankrupt.' Santmire's book shows a long historical study in which he has demonstrated ecological promises in Christian theology. He has shown immense ecological insights in the theology of Irenaeus, Augustine and especially of Francis of Assisi. But the fact is that these voices have never become part of the dominant Christian traditions. Their voices are still unheard and have not integrated as part of Christian praxis and ethos. It is fact that the dominant Christian theologies have been too anthropocentric, hierarchical, mechanistic and dualistic in its approach and content. We need to acknowledge that the Judeo-Christian tradition bears to a certain degree responsibility for today's ecological destruction. ... But there is can be no doubt that Christians have for too long neglected the theme of Creation in their theological reflection and teaching and have accepted values and perspectives which are foreign to the Biblical tradition. They have uncritically supported modern domination of nature.¹⁰

The dominant Judeo-Christian perceptions of life continue to promote greedy exploitation and depletion of nature's resources. Today we realize that such theologies of creation are destructive to life. The mindless destruction of earth's resources, and marginalization and subjugation of the indigenous people through war, cultural genocide, alienation, denial and suppression are deeply rooted in such view of life. It has contributed in reducing the indigenous people and nature as mere commodity. Such theologies are not adequate to respond to the present ecological crisis. We need a theology that promotes respect and caring attitude towards all God's creation.

Re-vision God's creation

The biblical faith unfold the fact that that creation is God's first act of revelation: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." Life begins from water. God cannot be perceived without water, wind, trees, vegetations, sky, light, darkness, animals, human creatures. In this first God's act of revelation, God revealed himself/herself as *co-creator* with the earth. The most striking aspect in this first act of God's revelation is that "God is present in creation." The presence of God makes this earth sacred. That is why God entered into a covenant relationship with all creatures. There are many stories, myths, parables, and even fairy tales of how the Sacred Power and the land sustain life together. This makes "the whole earth (is) full of God's glory" (Isa. 6:1-3). To perceive God as detached from creation/earth or mere transcendental being, who controls life from above is not the biblical faith. We believe in God because God as the Creator is present and continues to work with the land, river and sea to give life and hope. Everything emerged from God and was sanctified by His grace and love, and thus sacred. Human beings are no longer separate from nature, but form an integral part of it. This affirmation is the foundation of life.

The human body shares the power of nature in its composition of water, air and other elements of the Earth. Redemption of God's creation happens when human maintain just communion and solidarity with all living and inanimate nature; it contributes to the maintenance of the whole

Earth in its eco-systems, and all its equilibrium and balance.

Indigenous cosmology also gives inspiration to go beyond mere stewardship¹¹ to affirms a spirituality of *kinship with the Earth*.¹² It is signified by their totemic and taboo relationship with nature. Kinship expresses the reality of inter-dependence of the humans and nature. Kinship relationship promotes thus a nurturing and a caring attitude and praxis towards all creatures.

The idea of sustainable development emerged from the realization that there has to be “limits to growth.” This concept is also very much tied to anthropocentric vision of reality. The dominant concern here seems to be the survival of humanity which is not possible when the environment is damaged, or the resources of nature are overexploited. Sustainable development does not focus on the present situation of poverty in a world where 20% of the population consumes 80% resources of nature.¹³ It seems to be concerned more about *intergenerational equity* by which is meant that the use of natural resources be such that we leave behind for future generations resources and means necessary to fulfill their needs. Hence the restraint on profit oriented massive scale development becomes imperative for human security. Such an orientation does not ensure justice to creation. It still looks at nature as an instrument/ resources for the present and future human well-being and progress, but not having value in itself. The Mother Earth is endowed with meaning and value in themselves and not in terms of their utility for human beings. This vision of life needs to be percolated in all relationships of human beings to nature, including economic activity, and this would ultimately enhance the quality of human life.¹⁴ All forms of life, including humans are depended on the Earth, its products, the biosphere and the eco-systems. Therefore, we are called to redefine the followings:

i) Our understanding of church and mission. Mission of God is not limited to conversion and planting of the church. Mission is inclusive. It involves calling persons to commitment to the kingdom of God, justice and peace, and ecological health of the land.

ii) Our understanding of Creation is not just things to be exploited. Every

living creature possesses an intrinsic value and right. Therefore, preserving the integrity of the whole inhabited earth and promoting an ecologically responsible development are a matter of survival for the whole world.

iii) Our understanding of justice is not an abstract reality to be realized within human community alone, but it is how we live in the web of life in reciprocity with people, other creatures and the earth, recognizing that they are part of us and we are part of them.

iv) Our search for a new ethical principle. Human communities must bear a responsibility towards the earth and its wholeness. The earth, with its diverse life forms is functioning as one coherent whole. The whole earth is God's creation and we need to respect its inherent value and rights. A lifestyle of high material consumption is unethical. Learning to live in a new way not based on exploitation and injustice would allow all to flourish in health and wholeness.

(Footnotes)

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, ed. by the English Dominican Fathers (Burns, Pates, Wshbourne, Ltd., 1922), Part I, QQ LXXV-CII, p. 237.

² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³ Robert Palannang Borrong, *Environmental Ethics and Ecological Theology: Ethics as Integral Part of Ecosphere from an Indonesian Perspective*(Geboren te Sandana, Indonesia, 2005), pp. 73-74.

⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1961), 3.1. p. 97.

⁵ W.S. Ariarajah, "World Religions and the Wholeness of Creation" in *Ecumenical Movement Tomorrow: Suggestion for Approached and Alternatives*. Eds. Mare Reuver, Friendhelm Silms, Gerrit Huzer (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), p. 163.

⁶ Robert P. Borrong, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

⁷ Most of the Asian churches are product of Evangelical movements in the West and we have inherited a very strong dualistic theology.

⁸ *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

⁹ White accuses western Christianity as the most anthropocentric religion and arrogant towards nature that Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for the ecological crisis. Critics of White argued that his thesis does not account for reckless attitudes towards nature evident in various non-Christian cultures, and that he ignored the ways in which the forces of industrialization, urbanization, and the capitalistic drive to increase wealth have caused a large measure of the world's ecological crisis. They see the problem as political and economic, rather than religious. White's response is that the 'roots' of the crisis can be traced to Western Christendom's blessing of the methods and tools that have unlocked the modern world's conquest of nature. See Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, ed. Ian Barbour (reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1973), pp. 55-65.¹⁰ *Listening to Creation Groaning*, John Knox Series 16 (Geneva: Centre International Reform John Knox), 2004, p. 11.

¹¹ Christian theology of 'stewardship' is conceived very much within the framework of an anthropocentric vision.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 10

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.



TOWARDS FULLNESS OF LIFE IN THE SOCIETY

Rev Boipu Serto, Youth & Education Secretary, Manipur Baptist Convention

"I came that they might have life and that they might have it abundantly" – John 10:10

Pastor Bill Hybels, founder and senior Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, Chicago made a statement, "The Local Church is the Hope of the World." Church is not the building. Church is not a denomination. Church is not an organization. The people/members are the true Church. The Church is to be the salt and light to the world. Though not exhaustive, I like to put forward three simple aspects of how we can contribute towards fullness of life in the society.

(1) Becoming the BRIDGE OF LOVE

Many years ago, flying was a distant dream. But the Wright brothers' invention brought in a new era of flying. What was also impossible became possible when a super-sonic jet broke the sound-barrier. Many of us think that building bridges of love is impossible in this generation, because the world has become selfish and self-seeking. Yes, it seems impossible, but it's possible. However, it has to start with each of us willing to CHANGE our *mindset* and *attitude* before becoming the bridge builder. Building bridges is not for others only; it's for us as well. It's two way traffic.

Pastor Rick Warren said, "You can't win your enemies to Christ, only your friends, so we must build bridges of friendship and love to those who believe differently, so Jesus can walk across that bridge into their hearts." Knowing fully well the incarnational ministry of our Lord Jesus enables us to understand that we are builders of that bridge of love. It began with Jesus and we follow in His footsteps. Someone quoted, "The most useful asset of a person is not a head full of knowledge, but

a heart full of love, with ears open to listen, and hands willing to help.”

I remember a short video clip during the Global Leadership Summit (GLS) in 2014 of the transformation that took place in Louisiana State Prison, one of the bloodiest prisons in USA. A godly man, Cain was sent as the warden. A single day didn't pass without problem of fighting between gang members, murder, sexual assault, etc. After much prayer, Warden Cain decided to bring in Christian leaders from a Seminary to teach Bible courses to the inmates. After few years, the crime rate and related problems went down phenomenally. The bloodiest prison in USA was transform. Murderers became Pastors inside the prison. Drug dealers became Evangelist. Problem-makers became Disciples of Christ. Only because one man, Warden Cain decided to build that bridge of love to the prison inmates. The inmates experienced the fullness of life because Christians were willing to share their life.

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). The world needs love, NOT peace surrounded by guns. The world desires co-existence, NOT forceful invasion. Sadly LOVE is a forgotten word in the society. Everyone needs love. Even animals desire love. We must become the bridge for people to experience the joy of life. We must remember that we were called out to be the fragrance to the world, and we become the hands and feet of Jesus and an instrument to bring fullness of life through sharing the Fathers' love. Albert Einstein remark, “Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.”

(2)The willingness to be *SECOND*

Iyanla Vanzant rightly stated, “The way to achieve success is to be willing to help somebody else get it first.” That's a powerful statement. The world has become a global village and technology has expanded beyond our imagination. The world has created a cut-throat competition; therefore, second best is never an option or a choice. It's always about being at the top or getting to the top at any cost. Everyone strive for the best or number one spot. It is sad that our generation has

become heartless to the needs of others. We have become a generation of I & ME FIRST.

I remember a story that inspired me. One early morning as Ray Blankenship of Ohio was about to have his coffee, he saw a little girl being swept away by a river current right behind his house. He immediately jumps into the river and somehow manages to save the little girl. For his act of bravery, on April 12, 1989, Ray Blankenship was awarded the US Coast Guard Silver Lifesaving Medal. Why is this story unique? No doubt, it's the self-sacrificial act of life-saving. However, what makes it all the more interesting is that Ray CAN'T SWIM. That makes this life-saving story so unique.

If only we had such people in every neighbourhood, the world would have been a better place. Christ had the same attitude during his ministry. He said, "I came to serve, not to be served" (Matthew 20:28). In other words, Jesus is saying that I'm willing to become second and you can take all the credit. By washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus showed the world of his real intention for a better world, that by serving one another, we experience fullness of life.

We must remind ourselves of the Golden Rule, "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12). Though difficult, this is what each of us must bring outside our gate into the world. To imbibe an attitude of servant-hood. Or an attitude that gives more importance and priority to others, because the willingness to be second is about respecting the other person. We must forgo our *holier* than *thou* attitude, which many seem to carry consciously or unconsciously. When we give importance to those outside the wall and let-go of our prejudice mentality, then the world can experience the true fullness of life.

No doubt we all want to be appreciated and being recognized for what we do or achieved. If other takes the credit in a group, we must have the boldness to say from our heart - THAT'S FINE WITH ME. The problem is our ego and pride that gets in our way. Dr. Steve Maraboli says it beautifully, "Every single time you help somebody stand up, you are helping humanity rise." How true!

(3) Boldness to stand for the TRUTH

Chesterton said, "The worst evils in the world today are not falsehoods, but the endless repetition of half-truths." The postmodern generation has been witnessing false teachings and diluted truths, and we all seem to be spiralling down the pathway of destruction and disaster because we are happy receiving half-bake truths. It's like drinking a diluted juice or taking expired medicines.

In 1952, Dr. Albert Sweitzer was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his medical and humanitarian work in Africa as a medical missionary for many years. The following year, in his hometown Chicago, the people organized a welcome party for their hometown local boy who has done them proud. On the day Dr. Albert arrived at the Chicago train station, there were band party and local leaders waiting for his arrival. When he arrived at the station, there were cheers all around and photographers were taking his picture. Being a tall man, Dr. Albert noticed something at the rear of the train. He left his luggage and people waiting for him, and walked towards the back of the train. To their amazement, they saw Dr. Albert helping an old black lady who was finding it difficult to get inside the train with all her luggage. He helped her get into the train and came back to those welcoming him. Everyone was amazed at this act. One journalist commented, "For the first time, I saw a sermon walk." Historically, during this time, there were segregation and racial prejudice against the black in America, and the black people had no right to so many things in their own country. Many white Americans had nothing or would have nothing to do with the black people. And what Dr. Albert did shocked everyone. He did the unthinkable of that time – stood for the equality of all, regardless of class, race, colour, religion, ethnicity, etc.

Knowing the truth and not doing anything is a sin. Moreover, standing up for the truth will always find few takers and make more enemies than expected. From time immemorial, truth has always been a minority, but it has always stood the test of time. It takes more than knowledge or a college or university degree to stand up for what we know is right. Or speak up for injustices that fly around us every day. One thing I have

noticed in all the movies is the triumph of truth over evil. No movies have ever ended in evil triumph over good or truth.

We know corruption is evil and rampage in every sphere of life BUT the Church is silent about it. We know abortion is a crime and evil in the sight of God BUT the Church seems to be silent on this issue. We know forceful collection of money by any groups against God's will BUT the Church is silent about it. Killing a person because of ideological differences is like placing ourselves in the place of God BUT the Church turned a blind eye on these human rights violation. Many issues can be mention where the church is completely silent. Few thoughts for us to ponder. Where does the Church stand on these issues? Why are we silent on these social menaces influencing our lives daily? Why don't we stand up for the truth?

Stephen Covey states, "What you do has far greater impact than what you say." Jesus died for the truth. The early disciples died for the truth. Countless number of Christians have been martyred for holding on to the truth for centuries. The truth is always offensive and doesn't feel good, but embracing it always leads to healing, peace and fullness of life. It is in this situation that we are called to stand up for the truth even if that means danger for our live.

We seem to be OK with compromising with some truths in order to get along with the world, but the end is always disastrous. It doesn't bring peace to the thirsty soul nor does it give comfort to the aching heart. Moreover, it's sad that we are accustomed to half-truths and diluted truths. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). It is truth that sets people free from all kinds of pain, bondage, mend broken relationship, and spiritual yearning. And this is where we come into the picture and proclaim truth and stands up for the truth, so that the world can enjoy life at its best even if it means placing our lives in danger and though there be few takers. It's time we remember the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "Do what you can, with what you have where you are."



News Capsule

Relief Ministry at Dogru, Sirmola and Mymensing (July 24)

The Council of Baptist Churches in North East India in collaboration with APBAid-Rural & Development Arm of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation distributed some relief materials to three villages; namely: Dogru, Sirmola and Mymensing under Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention, Nagaon, Assam. CBCNEI relief team has distributed 177

Silpaulin to the hailstorm affected victims household, which happened on 5th May 2017. The relief distribution works was successfully done along with the help of the United A'chick Baptist Krima executive members. The recipients of the relief materials expressed their thankfulness and conveyed their gratitude to the CBCNEI and APBAid organizations for their humanity service to them in times of need.



Guwahati Pastor's Fellowship (Aug 3)

The Council of Baptist Churches in North East India organized a meeting for all the Pastor's of Guwahati related to the CBCNEI. The meeting was a get together to share the ministry of CBCNEI churches and about the times and changes that we are facing today. About 15 pastor's around the city came to attend the meeting.



Black Day observed at CBCNEI (Aug 10)

The Council of Baptist Churches North East India (CBCNEI) observed the 'Black Day' on 10th August 2017 by wearing black dresses and black badges to raise our protest against the infamous Presidential Order of 1950 and continual negligence of the government to the cry for the rights of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims in the country. A prayer was offered for the dalit Christians and

dalit Muslims. We also prayed for the leaders of the nation that they will change their minds and revoke the presidential order of 1950.

The Council had requested all the conventions and associate churches under CBCNEI to observe 'Black Day' by organising special prayers and other appropriate programmes in the churches and institutions to express our solidarity with the suffering Christians and Muslims of Scheduled caste origin.





Leadership Development Training for Convention Youth Leaders

(Aug 11-13)

Justice and Peace Ministries of the CBCNEI – with Baptist Youth Fellowship in North East India (BYFNEI) organized three days Leadership Development Training for Convention Youth Leaders at CBCNEI Mission Compound with the theme: “*Generation Ignite*”

Luke 24: 32-35. The main purpose of the training was to orient young leaders with mentorships, communication, peer to peer learning, and opportunities to travel and build up their networking with other young Christian believers. Around 30 convention youth leaders from across the states participated in the program.



Relief to landslide victims of Arunachal Pradesh

(Aug 21)

The Arunachal Baptist Church Council in collaboration with the CBCNEI distributed relief material like blankets, rice, utensils etc among the surviving members of the seven families of Laptap village. It was on 11 July 2011 tragic landslide incident in which a sudden avalanche of rocks, boulders and mud completely destroyed and buried their houses with 14 persons alive and left the village shattered and shocked. The surviving family members gracefully accepted the relief items and expressed their gratitude for all the help they received from all corners at the time of their needs.

Shri TanaTagi Tara, Asst. Gen Secy NBCC thanked ABCC team Mr

Norbu Lama, President, Rev(Dr) ChanghaChippo, Gen Secy and Shri KapaLikha, Treasurer for their immediate response and for being physically present with the villager at the time of grief and also for channelling the relief items to the victims families. He also extend thankfulness to CBCNEI for providing the relief materials.



Flood Relief Ministry (Aug 21)

Justice and Peace Department of CBCNEI, assisted the Habitat for Humanity India for relief distributions to the flood affected areas in Morigaon, Assam. Habitat for Humanity India and World Vision India organized a program in response to the Assam flood which





was one of the worst flood in Assam in 29 years. The relief team located one part of Assam which was badly affected by the flood and distributed relief materials to 250 affected families.



Peace workshop on conflict transformation

(Aug 30-31)

Peace workshop on conflict transformation has been organized by CBCNEI in collaboration with Manipur Baptist Convention at Moreh, Manipur for the pastors and deacons at Kuki Baptist Church (KBC) level for two days. The workshop gave them new insight about conflict and on how to solve or transform the conflict peacefully and creatively, the basis of learning was mostly practical and games to

make them involve directly to workshop. About participants took part in the program.



Justice and Peace Committee Board Meeting

(Sep 6)

Justice and Peace Committee Board Meeting was held at CBCNEI Mission Compound. The meeting was chaired by Rev. Benard K. Marak, Chairman, Justice and Peace Committee and the minutes were recorded by Assis-

tant to the Secretary of Justice and Peace Ministries. Out of 12 committee members, eight of them were present in the meeting and three of them apologized for their absence. The Committee Board Chairman led the devotion and he encouraged the members by reading bible passage from the Gospel of Luke 4:18-19, basing on Nazareth Manifestos in order to bring Justice and Peace in the region.



Mission Envisioning program of Each one catch One program initiated by CBCNEI Mission Department.

Following the footsteps of the Great commission in line with the February 2017 Diphu Mission Consultation with the envisioning program of “Each One catch One” the response of Conventions and Churches have been very positive approach. Krima no. 1 under GBC (16th August), Thangal Naga Baptist Association (29th August), Assam Baptist Convention (6th September), Nagaland Missions Movement (8th September), Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention (10th September), Manipur Baptist Convention organized for the Secretariats’ at Guwahati (17th Septem-

ber), MBC Mission Secretaries at MBC conference Hall Imphal (10th October) and Zeme Baptist Church Council (19th October) were the Conventions and Associations that had organized the envisioning program. Through this humble program the call to reach out in our lifetime can be possible in our lifetime. Together we can reap a rich harvest for the Lord.



IRSTS - NECU: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Rev Dr Wati Longchar, Professor of Theology & Culture, Yushan Theological College & Seminary, Hualien, Taiwan

A mapping of both secular and theological colleges is necessary before we launch a new university. There are about 35 secular and technical universities in North East India. What kind of education do they impart? What kind of job do their graduates do? Considering many colleges in North East India, we need to ask - Do we need another university? What kind of job NECU degree holders intend to do for the North eastern people, India as a whole and also for the world? Are we going to impart the same value system of education? Or something unique and different? Locating in the specific needs of the region, what would be a specific/special competence NECU graduates bring to the people of region, and India sub-continent? What competency would NECU offer to the world?

There are 12 Senate of Serampore College affiliated theological colleges in NEI, several ATA accredited colleges and also many independent colleges/seminaries not related to any theological networks. What do they offer? and what kind of job do their graduates do? NECU will have the Faculty of Inter-Religious and Social Transformation Studies (IRSTS) – are we going to offer the same value education? And train students to do the same type of job? Or, do we need a radical departure.

Our Journey

The American Baptist missionaries were the first to start modern education in North East India. The need for a Christian university has been under discussion since 1940s. When Dr. J. Douglas Duffy became the principal of Jorhat Bible College (now Eastern Theological College, Jorhat) in 1953, he proposed for a full-pledged university. With that vision, he constructed the present

buildings in Jorhat but he and other missionaries were heavily criticized for unplanned expenditures - why such a big dormitory? who will come and study? The vision for establishing a university could not be materialized due to financial constraints and also missionaries had to leave India due to political crisis especially in North East India.

After Independence many new central and state sponsored secular universities came up. Since the hills states are pre-dominantly Christian majority, the need of establishing Department of Christianity (or Faculty or Chair of Christian Studies) were initiated by NEICC especially under the North Eastern Hills University (NEHU), Shillong, and the Department of Religious Studies under Nagaland University (NU), Lungmami (both central universities) but could not be materialized due to unknown reasons. The Principals' meeting of theological colleges under CBCNEI in 2010 renewed the need for having a separate university with a strong department of Theology Faculty. Today NECU has become a reality.

Why a Christian University?

Christian affirms that humans are created in God's own image to celebrate fullness of life. Many people are denied of fullness of life through the imposition of wrong education system, unjust structures, cultures and traditions. Jesus of Nazareth deliberately opted for the people in the margin not because they are humble, innocent and pitiable but they are created by God in his own image to celebrate life which involves right, dignity and respect. The denial of education and job is violation of human rights bestowed on every human person. It is Christian conviction that every human being should have adequate education and a decent job, and every person should bring their gifts to make this world better just as the followers of Jesus did all through the history. This can be realized through proper education.

We affirm that there are immense liberative potential in religious and cultural resources for promotion of world peace and justice. One should study religions not from fundamentalist/protectionist perspective but for social transformation based on love, mutual respect, justice and cooperation for common good.

We are also convinced that a university should create jobs for the people, but not unemployment and drop out. Joblessness is one of the major the root

causes of social evil. We are facing problems of dropouts, unemployment and many rural people are forced to live in poverty due to wrong orientation of education, particularly religious studies. It was generally assumed that religious studies is meant to produce exclusive denominational leaders who will act as *poojari* (priest). This narrow orientation of religious studies has resulted in unhealthy competition, mistrust and violence among adherents of different religious communities. Therefore, we propose to introduce Faculty of Inter-Religious and Social Transformation Studies (IRSTS) to intensify social transformation and change for common good. The rationale is elaborated below.

IRSTS – Thinking a different paradigm

The faculty of IRSTS is an alternative paradigm from the existing religious studies. The focus of inter-religious and cultural studies is for social transformation and change. Despite of many limitations, the 16th century Reformation led by Martin Luther followed by the missionary movement gave rise to Protestant theological education in the global south. The early theological education inculcated candidates with a vision for engaging in the communities, for socio-economic and cultural transformation as demanded during their time. The Serampore Trio is a glaring example. But today theological education programs seem to have lost such community transformative temperament. The theological institutions of historical as well as evangelical churches are becoming more preoccupied in clericalism, immersed in institutional management/expansion, protection of denominational privileges and leaning towards prosperity theology. Serious engagement in pursuit of truth, social transformation and justice to challenge the dominant and enslaving elements of current socio-economic, cultural and political realm has been in decline. The bankruptcy of prophetic theological voices on national and international issues such as divinization of cows in India, political populism, religious fundamentalism and intolerance, insurgency movement, corruption in public life, growing unemployment problem, abuse and misuse of power by ruling class, corruption in election system, violation of minority rights, women's issue, etc testify to the lack awareness of contextual realities in theological education. Given the multi-cultural, rich-poor, urban-rural and centre-margin divide in global south, a theological education program needs to be designed to address all sectors of communities within and beyond the congregations. Ministerial programs need to prepare and motivate candidates to be catalysts of

spiritual formation for social transformation within their congregations and also the larger society for the sake and realization of fullness of life for all.

A few critical references on inherited education system, which we still uphold, will suffice why the present model of theological education and religious studies is not relevant in North East India context:

1. It is a fact that the present education system in India (also in most of the global south) is an integral part of colonial legacy. It was designed to maintain the privilege and power of the colonizers and the subjugation of the colonized, and to produce generations of people who will never question, challenge the ruling power but simply accept unjust relationship. Education system is developed not to think beyond what we are told. We were expected to memorize what we were told and were rewarded for reproduction of what were told. Creativity and critical thinking is not given importance. The present education, including theological education is an integral part of colonial heritage and to this day we still follow a modified form yet within the colonial framework giving more importance to classical traditions. This is one of the reasons why graduates seek mainly white collar jobs. Education is designed to make students faithful employer of the master, but not "how many people can I facilitate/empower to make rural people's life better". The increasing number of graduates unemployed in global south is an integral part of colonial education system.
2. We need to acknowledge the fact that present crisis of unemployment, joblessness of young people is the product of colonial education system. Unemployment problem is not so visible in those so-called "developed" countries, e.g. UK 4.8%, Germany 3.9%. Korea 3.6%, Japan 2.8%, Taiwan 3.7% though literacy rate is as high as 100%. What is happening in NEI? The higher literacy rate means the higher unemployment. Students spend 15 years to earn their first degree and parents also spend a large amount of money for children education. After obtaining degrees, many join the "depressed club". Young people who are joining the "depressed club" is alarming. e.g. Tripura

25.2%, Nagaland 23.8%. How can we expect people living in peace and harmony with such high rate of unemployment! How can we expect that there will be no corruption and insurgency movement? Insurgency movement is flourishing and becoming like an industry. Everywhere people are fighting for want of resources and it will continue if we do not change the current education system. We also see theological graduates roaming around without job. Why should we have a university if we are not going to solve the growing unemployment problem? University should contribute towards generating jobs and sustainability.

3. The dominant value system of the present education can be traced back to the Enlightenment paradigm of euro-centric modernity which is deeply rooted on the conquest of nature and the demonization of others, especially tribal/indigenous people. One should maximize all skills to exploit indigenous people and their resources to make the society highly mechanized and industrialized. The booming of economic progress, high-tech life-style and urbanization is seen as the goal of education. One will also notice that the secular sciences and humanities hardly impart religious values towards sustainable development and human community in the colonial education paradigm. Is there any scope in the present university system to integrate religious and moral values? Perhaps, no. This is one of the major root causes contributing to today's world crisis. Unending desire of consumerism without ethics and morality is a threat to life. Many educationists have recognized this serious flaw in the present education system.
4. Has theological education corrected or supported this trend? Both the traditional institutions and neo-theological institutions are engaged in marketing theological education justifying that their specific goal is to prepare Christian leaders. We also need to recognize that there is a subtle linkage between the worldviews of the contemporary market capitalism, its message of economic prosperity through free market policy and the independent neo-evangelical and neo-Pentecostal Christianity promoting the gospel of prosperity. There are more than

100 colleges in big cities like Seoul, Manila, Jakarta, Chennai, and Bengaluru. Even in Nepal with about 2 lacs Christians, there are about 30 theological colleges in Kathmandu city alone. Dimapur is a small city but there are about 45 theological colleges– is this trend not a serious problem? Who are those people teaching in those colleges? Majority of them are graduates of the main-line Protestant theological schools mainly because of the elitist colonial education system. Sadly, some of those institutions operate demonizing other cultures and ignoring contextual realities of the people in margins.

5. The present dominant pedagogy in theological education tends to focus more on cognitive advancement, giving prime importance to transmitting philosophical and theoretical discourse of elitist traditions and resources. That's why our theological curriculum is overloaded with classical theology, history and biblical interpretation. Subjects on social transformation and change of the rural masses are given importance. Due to colonial mindset; many people think that studying theology in the west is superior. Of course they may have better facilities but that does not mean that they offer theological education relevant in our context.
6. Upholding that western university system of colonial era as normative, the other forms of education are relegated as primitive and not important for academic pursuit. Cognitive assessment-examination centered, syllabus controlled, and sheltered/protected campus oriented education is an important aspect of dominant education system and this system alone cannot bring transformation among the marginalized communities like the people of NEI. One will also notice that the present accreditation or affiliation criteria of theological associations or universities are geared towards protecting the interest of elitist system and hierarchy of power.
7. A general assumption is that theology cannot be done without philosophy. The tribal/indigenous traditions are not philosophical deep to articulate theology; and are not valuable resources for doing theology and contain no value for doing God's mission. Tribal/indigenous

people are looked down upon socially and their spiritual traditions are being branded as pagan, heathen, barbaric, savage, idolatrous, primitive, unnatural, uncivilized, irrational, abnormal, evil, demonic and inferior beings. Though majority of the Christians in India (also in Asia and global south) are tribals/indigenous and majority of them come from rural places, they are forced to study dominant classical theology which has almost nothing to do in their ministerial context. We teach our students something which is alien to them. People are enslaved by classical-philosophical model of doing theology. This is the reason why tribal/indigenous ways of being are threatened and we are at the verge of losing ourselves. Can an elite value system that has demonized tribal/indigenous people for centuries transform us? How can such value system give a sense dignity to our people if we do not make a radical departure from the present education system?

8. One of the major concerns of theological institutions are to equip people to serve the poor, powerless and exploited communities, or the people who are victims of injustice. But many theological graduates are not interested to serve in the rural places; sadly many young people are not interested in pastoral ministry, and are more interested in materialism. Strangely, theological graduates who cannot get opportunity to work in urban contexts or white collar jobs are looked down as incapable and who cannot compete with other colleagues. Rural place is seen not only as backward but also a place of punishment. This is one of the reasons why we have many theological graduates who are not employed. Proliferation of theological education in urban places is also an integral part of this education system. Today graduates of both secular and theology are happier unemployed in urban areas than being employed in rural places, whereas people in the rural places are facing lack of leadership. More than 80% (in NEI 87%) people live in rural or semi-rural context but graduates are not given adequate preparation to deal with the problems of rural masses. There is a serious defectiveness in the present education system. Mushrooming of colleges, prayer centres, house churches, NGOs, schools etc., in urban places are manifestations of such phenomenon. Theological education and Christian

ministry are becoming an elitist urban biased profession. The same with regards to secular graduates. What has gone wrong with our theological education and also with general education system? Where is the morality and commitment in today's education system? The above critical comments should not let us to assume that we are discarding the dominant education system. The dominant university system has made tremendous contribution in doing theological research and praxis in the life of the people and church globally. Its contribution towards scientific and critical thinking drawing philosophical resources is highly commendable and we need to integrate some of those tools in our context. However, western thinkers are highly critical today that the Enlightenment paradigm of imparting scientific knowledge rooted on the conquest of nature, demonization and exploitation of people in the margin at the expense of market expansion has caused much damage to the world. It has brought tremendous pain and destruction to marginalized people and natural environment in which we are dependent. They struggle to correct this one-sided paradigm and alternatives have been explored and gradually overcoming in many countries. But we still follow the old dominant colonial education paradigm. It is a great challenge for us to study religion from transformative perspective and also reverse the education system emphasizing on "transformation" of rural masses and of the poor community. NECU can take critical steps to decolonize the elitist system of education and it is here that NECU can make a decisive and significant contribution.

Taking a different Route

Looking at the present reality, we can affirmatively say that the present elitist education system will not bring social transformation and dignity among the marginalized masses. 87% of the population in NEI come from villages and semi-urban contexts and it is estimated that 12.8 million live below poverty line according to the recent national survey. Theological education is to prepare leaders to serve among those people. The leaders need both social and spiritual transformation skills. The people in the rural and semi-urban settings do not need only speculative and grant classical philosophical narrative/con-

struct of theology. In fact, the attempt to co-opt them into elitist paradigm, the minority, rural masses and tribal/indigenous people and also dominant groups assume/think that the rural and tribal/indigenous people are incapable and inferior who need to be integrated into mainstream society, and that their spirituality and tradition have to be discarded as they are product of inferior and uncivilized practices. This has been the experience of rural masses, especially tribal/indigenous people all over the world. We need therefore, an alternative theological education that promotes and emphasizes on:

- spiritual nurturing or spiritual formation for social transformation
- contextual and community centered transformative Bible reading method,
- transformative theology
- de-colonizing critical thinking skill,
- multi-economic community development skill,
- community organization skill,
- social development,
- human capacity enhancement skill
- protection of land and resources
- productive and sustainable use of land,
- preservation of the culture,
- peace education
- gender justice
- health, healing and wholeness
- human rights and justice
- preservation of music and dances from the danger objectification and marketization,
- preservation of identity, customary laws, language and traditional wisdom.

Does the present dominant education paradigm provide this scope? Perhaps, "no" and there is hardly any scope in the present education system. For example, if a course is designed on *tribal indigenous theology*, the dominant community will not register for it unless it is made as a compulsory course. Also some teachers from the dominant communities who teach the course do not take it seriously. Instead of empowering the students, some teachers disempower them. People are not interested to learn from the so-called domi-

nated little tradition. There is something wrong in the system! Therefore, we need do it differently and intentionally to protect ourselves. It is time that marginalized people must stand, think and do it together differently. A university focusing on alternative model locating in the context of the margin can bring a positive transformation in society.

Our Needs

We need a community oriented and transformative theological education that is *academically, and yet passionately, emotionally, practically, pastorally, and prophetically related to and involved in the concrete problems and needs of the people* who face religious violence, armed conflict, displacement, corruption, unemployment, violation of human rights, and continued oppression of minorities, patriarchy, gender discrimination, violence, stagnation of church, demonization of their traditions, cultural practices, poverty, human trafficking, substance abuses, lack of development or one-sided development, forced conversion and re-conversion, empowerment training for both surrendered and active freedom fighters (undergrounds) and other forms of exclusion and discrimination faced by tribal/indigenous people, persons with disabilities, PLW-HIV, LGBTQ, farmers and migrant works. Also due to long years of isolation, people are caught up with many problems and issues, such as

- Colonialization of our culture, history
- Colonialization of our mind
- Identity crisis
- Tribalism
- Racism
- Lack of infrastructure development
- Lack of economic independence and reliance
- Poverty
- Political instability
- Prosperity theology
- Spiritual dryness
- Corruption, moral degradation
- Generation gap
- Employment problem
- Environmental crisis
- Urban-rural divide

- Mass migration to cities in search of jobs
- Idealness of young people
- Migrants workers

Though we appreciate the great legacy of dominant theological education, we realize that uncritical acceptance of dominant education system has contributed significantly to the destruction of self-esteem, other-worldly spirituality, detachment from the world, devaluation of cultural knowledge, and imposition of the belief that tribal traditions and ideas are lesser/inferior than that of the mainstream people. We also realize that the present theological education has not contributed much to economic self-reliance, political justice and social justice, rather promote spiritual pride, elitist attitude, negative attitude to rural and their cultural heritage, power consciousness, unemployment problem, consumerist lifestyle, lack of contribution to social transformation, urban-elite consciousness and spirituality, etc. It is time that we look for an alternative model with global perspective, yet intentionally located in the context of NEI where majority of the people are struggling for economic justice and rights, struggle to liberate from poverty, land rights, development, dependency on government, identity and cultural preservation and transformation of rural community.

IRSTS-NECU must be intentionally located in the context of poor and excluded masses for transformation. We must design a theological curriculum to produce committed persons rooted in *liberative religious and Christian traditions who are hard-working, self-sufficient, truthful, courageous, skilful community organizers and spiritual leaders*. The present elitist philosophical, meditative and anthropocentric education will not address these issues. A paradigm shift from this elitist education system to a transformative movement oriented theological education of the poor and marginalized is thus crucial and imperative for us. This reversal is possible only when theological education is located in the context of the margins. It is here that NECU should take the courageous stand and endeavor to make a difference not only in NEI and India, but also in the world. NECU will bring lot of opportunities to:

- Develop our own theological education for social transformation
- Develop contextually and pastorally relevant theology and ministerial practices
- Generate employment for the people (a university can generate at

- least 1500 to 3000 jobs – direct and related employment)
- Wider international cooperation, collaboration for change
- Promote contextual and dialogical learning
- Promote self-reliance
- Revitalize mission and church life
- Contribute globally in terms of theology
- Inculcate culture of the dignity of labour
- Promote creative entrepreneurship
- Promote ethical values in development enterprises

This alternative paradigm will open wider collaboration with other theological institutions like Serampore, SHUATS, ATA, the department/faculty of Christianity in secular universities and also with other sister institutions nationally and globally. Being committed to provide an alternative theological education focused on social transformation located in the context of margins, NECU will welcome (both nationally and globally) and give affiliation/recognition as per the policy of the University ACT and UGC to those who subscribe to mission and vision of the university and aspire to be the agents of transformation of the people in the margin.

The rationale described above is not new. Under the leadership of Dr. J.H Thumra it was initiated at ETC, Jorhat with the support of German partners (EMW, Germany) and later Drs. K. Thanzauva and R.L. Hnuni initiated at AICS, Aizwal but could not take up as envisioned mainly because of two reasons: (a) They attempted to do it within the Serampore system. Students ended of registering the classical courses to earn credit; the courses are heavily loaded in Serampore system. There was hardly scope for integration of community development, social work and skill oriented development courses. It was like pouring new wine into old wineskin. (b) They relied more on the foreign support, mostly from German partners, without conscientizing our people. People did not own it and so enthusiasm diminished among a few people. We need to learn from this past mistake.

A pastor going to a rural congregation with transformative development skills will nurture the community not only spiritually but also generate at least 20-50 job opportunities for the youth. This will make NEI a zero unemployment region which will benefit not only the region but also the whole of sub-continent and the world. We need to design courses to train committed and skillful:

- Leaders who are committed to transform the world and India
- Leaders who are committed to serve both in the rural, semi-urban and urban contexts
- Leaders who are fully equipped to address the problem of rural and urban masses both spiritually and physically
- Leaders who can be a force for social change
- Leaders who are capable of various multi-task-skills such as farming, health care, marketing and prophetic preaching
- Leaders who can enable people for transformation
- Leaders who can transform the life of rural poor
- Leaders who can interpret the Bible and communicate effectively to the concrete life situation of the people
- Leaders who are able to discern differently and act differently locating in the context of margin and challenge the dominant enslaving power
- Leaders who can handle administration efficiently
- Leaders who can organize people's movement for change
- Leaders who are equipped to help people in times of crisis – person, family and community.

The Faculty of IRSTS-NECU

As per the provisions of the NECU Charter, the Faculty of IRSTS will be an integral part of university. It means that religious studies and theology is to be part of total education at university level. In other words, religious studies are to be done within the larger secular world for mutual enrichment, and also in dialogue with other disciplines for transformation of the world. There has to be mutual interdependence between secular disciplines and religious studies. It also implies acceptability of theological degrees in secular universities not only in India but all over the world. This also means that religious values have to be taught and integrated even in secular disciplines affirming that economic progress, scientific advancement; political movement without theology will lead to destruction.

Re-visioning, thinking and articulating globally, religious studies will be done located in concrete local issues. Religious studies must, first and foremost, address the concrete local problem affirming global vision. In other words, we

need to train leaders who can discern the signs of the times and be prophetic leaders in the given context. It demands rigorous scientific research and critical thinking, yet pastorally relevant, applicable and spiritually nourishing/sustaining education. Academic pursuit not from the elitist-dominant perspective but from the margin-dominated perspective. Life-engaging and transforming theology is to be done from the experience of colonized people.

Vision of NECU– “To provide a wholesome education that is global in perspective, Christian in character and praxis in approach to transform, nurture and empower students for leadership in challenging times”.

Vision of the IRSTS– To creatively engage with life-transforming theology and religious resources to train people to serve society, the church and community as a pastor, a social worker and transformer, a community development enabler, a mediator, a musician, or an educator.

Mission of the IRSTS: To achieve this, based on Christian values and teachings and other liberative religious resources, the IRSTS commits to providing theological and religious education, nurturing transformative leaders and community organizers with academic excellence, quality research, imparting multi-skills for promotion of justice and peace, and integrity of creation, and reconciling and affirming diversity and engaging on the margin of the society that the Gospel of God’s reign will be realized in the society.

Structure: As provision provided by the Charter, there will be a full-fledged faculty of IRSTS under NECU which will be open to all without any distinction of caste, color, creed, religion, sex and sexual orientation. The NECU will provide affiliation to colleges those who wish to be part of university and meet the affiliation criteria of UGC (it is being worked out in line with UGC regulation) and subscribe to the mission and vision of NECU. The affiliated colleges may offer additional courses for those who desire to go for specialized Christian ministry. Some specialized courses under ‘ministry branch’ could be left out, and assigned to denominational church seminaries to offer and conduct licentiate courses of their own for ministerial formation without any reference to the university. The courses can be done for a semester or one year after graduation.

Degrees: In line with Indian and global university system, the NECU may offer the following degrees: **BA** – 4 years (the nature of the courses will be inte-

grated and interdisciplinary approach + project papers – the person should be equipped not only to serve in the church and church related works but also prepare to be a community leader for social transformation); **BA** (hon) – 1 year after BA (focus on ministerial courses or other interest areas of social transformation); **MA** – 2 years (compartmentalized/discipline study. Not only traditional subjects like OT, NT, Theology, etc + thesis, but also Community Development, Diakonal Service, Peace Study, Child Theology, HIV, Disability, etc. Both residential and non-residential programs to be offered); **M.Phil** – 1 year depending on specialization (Specialization course, language course + thesis. Independent but guided research); **Ph.D** – 3 years minimum (Focus on Methodology + thesis)

Concluding Remarks

To start a new university is a huge responsibility. We need to mobilize both human resources and financial resources. We have enough human resources to teach and supervise MA, MPhil and Ph.D. We have also many scholars and experts in secular fields. It is a great advantage that NECU is located near Agriculture University in Medziphima. I am sure we can collaborate in many common areas since our focus is on rural development and community transformation.

Financial needs are a major problem. We are a missionary sending church and our churches spend crores of money in mission work outside of the region. Our churches are capable of supporting professors and infrastructure development. Oversea individual friends and mission partners who are committed to wholistic secular-theological education and mission will extend their solidarity support if we are committed for realization of God's reign on earth; they want to see what we are doing and for what we are committed to; and they also want to learn from us for global peace and progress. People, leaders and churches should know that NECU stands for the viability of the churches and our people, our nation and that NECU is deeply committed in training leaders for all round development of community and committed church leaders and community organizers giving special attention to spiritual transformation and skill oriented education particularly for the drop outs, unemployed youth and rural poor.



Revisiting William Pettigrew's Legacy: A Missional Lesson for the Contemporary Church

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That William Pettigrew, the first Western Missionary to the Tangkhul tribe of Manipur, was a successful missionary needs no repetition. Even though he was not without limitations, he is generally accepted, and rightly so, as the man who was instrumental in turning many tribes of Manipur to Christianity. But why was he so successful in God's mission? What were some factors that enabled him to persist and succeed against all odds? This short article presents three main reasons for his success encouraging the readers to emulate the positive side of Pettigrew's work. He was successful because he was a man wholly given to God and his mission, wholly given to preparation and hard work, and wholly given to the church and the world.

First, Pettigrew was a man wholly given to God and his mission. Pettigrew dedicated his life to God's mission in his early age and spent almost four decades in the mission field. He was born in 1869 at Dalzial, Lanark, Scotland on January 5 to John Pettigrew (1832-?) and Margaret Haddow from Lanarkshire, Scotland (1835-?). He was only 21 when he arrived in India in 1890, leaving the comfort of his home and loved ones including his girlfriend. Pettigrew later returned to England and died in Hendon, London in 10 April 1943.¹

Pettigrew was not only willing to leave the earthly comforts of his life but also was willing to go to one of the least developed places for the cause of Christ. Even after reaching Calcutta, he was deterred neither by the political turmoil in Manipur² nor by the difficult lifestyle of the Tangkhuls. His primary commitment

was to God and his Kingdom. Even though he was hindered by the limitations of his time and context, his primary motivation was his desire to serve God and men. He served the people of Manipur and the Tangkhuls with a genuine concern for their physical and spiritual wellbeing. Contrary to the accusation of some, there is no evidence that Pettigrew intentionally collaborated with the Colonizers or worked for them to advance their cause.

The accusations against the missionaries in general and Pettigrew in particular that they were colonial partners would not be as serious as it might sound to be if we recognize that they, like any of us, were working within the framework and limitations of their context. The limitations of Pettigrew's context had such bearings on his vocabulary and attitudes that it might have prompted some to identify him with the colonizers. At times Pettigrew was apathetic to local culture and customs. His approach to mission in some areas was to prove that the Western ways were far superior to the local customs.³ He also operated on the mentality of what Hiebert called "the flaw of the excluded middle."⁴ In such an approach there was very little room for compromise, dialogue, and renovation. Choosing Christianity meant nothing less than complete rejection of tribal customs and superstitions. Western understanding of truth was too exclusivistic to accommodate any part of the tribal worldview. So, Western positivism replaced the tribal customs and superstitions.

But a sweeping generalization of all his work as colonial agenda based on his few shortcomings is too shallow. All of us to a certain degree absorb and manifest the shortcomings and biases of our culture. It takes intentionality and time for us to become aware of those shortcomings. If we look at the negative remarks that Pettigrew made about the tribal people, most of them were made in his early years of missionary work. As time passed, he came to have a greater appreciation for the local people and their customs, even though he remained skeptical of some of the local customs. Pettigrew never got over some of his negative attitudes towards the local customs. But he was also genuinely concerned about the spiritual and physical well-being of the people. He so fell in love with the people that he earnestly desired and made an effort to return to Manipur state after he buried his wife in the US but was prevented by his ill health and other logistical issues.⁵ Pettigrew's love for the people of Manipur disproves the accusation that he was an intentional collaborator with colonizers.

On the contrary, Pettigrew saw the colonizers as stumbling blocks to his mission. He wrote thus, "There are drawbacks to our work as evangelistic agency, with the missionary allied to the State as he at present is."⁶ Several years later he expressed his displeasure again, "Government restrictions kept the missionaries to one corner of the state and to one tribe only and the Pettigrews gave themselves to the task of winning that tribe for Christ."⁷ It is true that he cooperated with the British in some areas, but he did it with the intent of expanding God's mission. Pettigrew considered working with and for the ruling government as a duty and an occasion to further the kingdom of God. We may disagree with his approach but we ought to give him the benefit of doubt that he did what he did out of sincere heart and genuine commitment to God, people, and the government. Pettigrew was a man of his context. But Pettigrew was also more than a just man of his context. He was a man wholly given to God and his mission.

What lessons can we learn from his life and commitment? His wholehearted commitment to God reminds us that success in mission comes only from God. Paul reminds us that it is God who ultimately brings our work to fruition (1 Cor. 3:6). There is no mission without God. We participate in God's mission and our success in mission is contingent upon his presence and power. Mission flows from God and returns to God. Mission is God's and we participate in his mission. Therefore, like Pettigrew, we must first give ourselves to God if we are to see any lasting success in his work. On the other hand, Pettigrew's limitations remind us that we all are children of our context and therefore are limited in our knowledge and judgment. We must learn to see others from their perspectives too. While baptizing all Western methods and practices as biblical is undesirable, the rhetoric of equating Western missionaries with the colonizers too quickly ignores the sacrifices that Western missionaries made. Were it not for Pettigrew and many other Western missionaries, we would probably not be where we are today. Therefore, we can, and must forgive his mistakes and embrace his contributions.

Pettigrew was a man wholly given to preparation and Hard Work

Not only was Pettigrew a man wholly given to God and his mission, he was also a man wholly given to preparation and hard work. The sheer amount of literacy volumes he published is testimony to his hard work; he accomplished this in spite of his lack of formal education and degrees. There is no record

that shows that he obtained a theological degree or went to college before he arrived in Calcutta in 1890. He went to Livingstone College for about a year not before he came to India but during one of his only two furloughs between 1904 and 1905.⁸ This was the same period of time in which they had their daughter Margaret. He felt getting medical training so important for the mission that he spent his vacation in school while at the same time taking care of a newborn baby. He might not have obtained a higher formal education or degree but he knew the lack of it was no excuse for hard work and study.

At the age of twenty-one, Pettigrew was ready to die for Christ in his pursuit to change, in the words of Chirgwin, the 'savages and the headhunters' of north-eastern India for Christ,⁹ but God was not done preparing him. Through God's providential plan, Pettigrew was not permitted by the ruling government to immediately enter Manipur. He had to stay back in Calcutta for four years learning local languages and preparing for his future mission. God was changing the man who would go out and change others, not very unlike the Apostles who spent three and a half years, day and night, with their master before they were sent out on their mission. One of the great characteristics of many successful missionaries is their commitment to hard work and study, particularly God's Word. William Carey, David Livingstone, Adoniram Judson and many others spent hours in preparation and private study. There is no substitute for hard work and preparation—study, prayer, planning etc.—in mission. Today, we are too quick to jump into theological and missional battlefield without first assessing and mapping the battleground. While I see the urgency of reaching out to others with the gospel of Jesus Christ and appreciate those sacrificing their lives, I wonder whether we, in our zeal and urgency, are sometimes too quick to jump into God's mission without necessary preparation.

Pettigrew was a man wholly given to the church and the World

A third area of Pettigrew's success comes from his commitment to the church and the world. He was a man wholly given to the Church—local and global—and the world. He believed in denominational affiliation when it comes to accomplishing the work of God. He was an Anglican who joined the Arthington Aboriines Mission, an inter-denominational organization, and later became a Baptist. He was in fact an Anglican until the day he entered Ukhul. Even though he became a Baptist, he went to Livingstone, which was not a Baptist seminary/institution. His last rites were done not in an *American* Baptist church,

but in London, probably in an Anglican church. His Baptist identity is forged both out of conviction and convenience. He, being an Anglican, had no problem becoming a Baptist for the sake of God's mission. Even after becoming a Baptist, in 1907 he wrote that he had no problem being assigned to any individual, church, or organization for financial support and the cause of Christ.¹⁰

I am a staunch Baptist and I intend to remain so. In Seminary, almost every day, I stand for Baptist faith and practice in front of my friends from all denominations. I have even earned the nickname, "the Baptist Fundamentalist." But I also believe that my denomination exists to further, not hinder, God's kingdom. For the cause of Christ and his church, I, like Pettigrew, am willing to cooperate with the church of Christ for the glory of God. We must be willing to forego our denominational differences for the gospel's sake. Our particular Christian expression must enrich the universal Christian experience. Local church autonomy is good only as long as it serves its mission. Anything that hinders the expansion of God's kingdom and obstructs the unification of the churches must be critically assessed. The way some Baptist churches assert local autonomy and denominational/regional affiliation at the expense of mission goes against Pettigrew's principle, and more importantly, the biblical principle. We must be committed first to the church of Christ and secondarily to our denomination.

Pettigrew's love for God did not restrict him to love only his church; he also loved the world dearly. He cared deeply not only for the Tangkhuls but the whole of the people of Manipur, including the Meiteis who never became Christians as a people group. Pettigrew was able to render such a selfless service because he saw his service to people as service to God. Following the example set by Pettigrew, we must reclaim the ecumenical spirit of loving and co-existing with our neighboring communities including those who are not Christians. Pettigrew did not see the Hindus as enemies to be conquered with the gospel. It is true that he desired that the Hindus would come to faith in Christ. We do so as well. But just as Pettigrew continued to love and serve them even after they rejected Christianity, we must also do. It will serve us well to remember that one of the main reasons Christianity grew so rapidly in numbers in the Northeast is because of the love of Christ manifested in the lives of the early converts. We cannot win others with our might or intelligence; we can only draw them to Christ through our love for God, love for one another, and

love for the world (John 13:34-35; 15:4-5).

Pettigrew was a man fully given to God recognizing his limitations and God's sufficiency. After three years of initial work in the field in Ukhrul and eight years in India, he concluded his report thus, "the missionary and his wife at Ukhrul are conscious of many failures in their work for the Master, but are still more conscious of the never-fading grace, mercy, and comfort bestowed upon them by the Lord To Him be ascribed all glory; praise, and honour."¹¹ He was a man wholly given to God and his mission, to hard work and preparation, and to the church and the world. May his life be a living testimony for us to emulate.

(Footnotes)

¹ W. Pettigrew, Jonah M. Solo, and K. Mahangthei, *Forty Years in Manipur, Assam*, 97-98; Ancestry.com: <http://home.ancestry.com> and <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>

² Singh, *History of the Christian Missions in Manipur*, 3-4. Just before Pettigrew arrived in India, five British officials were brutally murdered by the local people in Manipur, causing temporary statewide curfew/bandh.

³ Pettigrew, "A Tour Among the Tangkhul Nagas," *The Baptist Missionary Magazine*, vol. LXXXVII, 51.

⁴ Paul G Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10, no. 1 (January 1982): 43-47.

⁵ Singh, *History of the Christian Missions in Manipur and Other Neighboring States*, 355.

⁶ Pettigrew, Solo, and Mahangthei, *Forty Years in Manipur, Assam*, 64.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸ William Pettigrew, Personal Letter to Aitchison, 1907. Livingstone College was established in the memory of the missionary David Livingstone in 1893 to equip missionaries with the basic tools of medicine and surgery, not to supplant medical professional medicine. *Guys Hospital Gazette* vol 14, 368. (357-376) August, 11 1900; *The Quiver*, 1905, 853-858. Read about Livingstone here https://books.google.com/books?id=vapMAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA856&lpg=PA856&dq=Where+is+London's+Livingstone+College+now?&source=bl&ots=04CnyJ5vLb&sig=O2LG3kq0UJEdqJ3I3LXQD58As6c&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewi8vN3V4p_PAhUp7IMKHWD6CIYQ6AEINDAE#v=onepage&q=Where%20is%20London's%20Livingstone%20College%20now%3F&f=false.

⁹ A. M. (Arthur Mitchell) Chirgwin, *Arthingtons Million: the Romance of the Arthington Trust*, (London, Livingstone Press, 1936), 75-76.

¹⁰ William Pettigrew, Personal Letter to Aitchison, 1907; Pettigrew, Solo, and Mahangthei, *Forty Years in Manipur, Assam*, 18.



500 Years of the Reformation

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"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason – for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves – I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen."

The above quotation is the famous response of Martin Luther, the reformer whose writing launched the seismic changes in the church in sixteenth century Europe and beyond. Some versions of the famous speech include the phrase "*Here I stand*", which, according to historians is a later edition.

Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor summoned Luther to the Diet of Worms (a town near Frankfurt, Germany) in 1521, to make him to retract his criticism against the church. Luther defended his disputations and refused to recant and it was here the famous speech of Luther – "*Here I Stand*" – was given in defence of his new interpretations about the church and God's grace for human salvation.

Across different traditions of the church as well as secular areas of socio-political and cultural aspects, Martin Luther remains one of the most influential Christian thinkers and reformers linked with foundational ideas

such as, individual freedom, justification, relationship between state and religion, social welfare, education of the mass etc. Luther's writings are numerous including sermons, hymns, letters, table talks, catechism, and translations of the Bible into German. The following three of his writings form the foundation of his reforms, known as the Reformation treatises: *To the Christian Nobility of the Germany Nation, on the Improvement of the Christian Estate* (1520) *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church: A Prelude* (1520) *On the Freedom of a Christian* (1520). In these three pivotal writings, Luther developed his insights and disputations presented in his famous 95 Theses.

Apart from theological writings, Luther also composed hymns. The hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God* is composed by him in 1529. This hymn is often known as the Reformation Anthem. Luther employed hymns to teach the ideas of the Reformation: justification by faith alone through the grace of God solely proclaimed in the scripture. For instance, the hymn "*Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein*" (translated as Dear Christian, one and all, rejoice) has ten stanzas summarising the whole narrative of the redemption through Jesus Christ. Along with hymns composition to explain the reformation theology of justification by faith alone, Luther also made congregational singing popular in the liturgy. Hence, hymn singing in the church also have its roots in the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Martin Luther's disputations and new interpretation of the Bible profoundly challenged the existing church under the papal authority at Rome, and began the Protestant Reformation, which has left numerous legacies and enduring heritage of theological writings and even distinct church traditions. Scholarships continue to be vibrant and critical in engaging the theological understanding and interpretations of Luther.

The year 2017 is marked as the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. There are many events organised around the world in commemoration of the Reformation: publishing houses producing new books on Luther and the Reformation; lectures, exhibitions, concerts, pilgrimages, seminars, academic consultations, special worship services, theatre pre-

sentations etc. (www.luther2017.de)

Luther, was a professor of the Bible, who nailed the 95 Theses at the door of the Wittenberg church on October 31, 1517. Luther's 95 Theses were prepared as arguments against existing teachings and practices of the church in the sixteenth century. While historians debate whether the 95 Theses were really nailed to the door of Wittenberg's church, Luther's 95 Theses surely triggered revolutions, schisms, and ushered in modern Europe from its medieval captivity. It set in motion the Reformation and multiple reformations within Christianity and European history, consequently the modern world.

Luther arrived upon the new insights on salvation and assurance of salvation as he began to study and prepare lectures on Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The central theme of Luther's reforms was justification by grace alone. The righteousness of God was God's gift of unmerited grace. This new understanding inspired Luther to critique the existing teaching of the church – that good works, certificates of indulgences and the church could mediate salvation. Luther vehemently disputed these errors in the church.

One of the gravest errors was the promotion and selling of indulgence certificates. Indulgence was certificate of salvation bought by money and charity works. Johannes Tetzel was one of the famous proponents of the indulgence in Germany. Luther criticized this false teaching as recorded in one of his memorable critic: "They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory." (*Luther's Works* 31:28).

Luther prepared his disputation that human justification could not be bought by human efforts such as good works or money or indulgence but by God's grace alone and received solely by faith. The keywords that undergirded the Reformation and its many forms are the famous Latin phrases: *Sola gratia*, *Sola fide*, *Sola scriptura* (grace alone, faith alone, scripture alone). While Luther remains the central figure for the beginnings of the sixteenth century Reformation, it is important to recognise his many companions, conversations partners, and interlocu-

tors, whose interpretations and renderings of the Bible were as critically important to the reforms that were initiated. Some of the important contributors to the Reformation and its seismic changes were: Philip Melancthon, Katharine von Bora, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin among many others.

By refusing to recant his new interpretations of the Bible, Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X in 1521. To simplify the many events and centuries long history this act set in motion, the excommunication of Luther and the subsequent events began the parting of the church into Roman Catholic and the Protestants – the rubric term given to the variety of Christian groups that held on to the basic teaching of Luther – salvation by God’s grace alone as opposed to good works or the church as encapsulated in the Latin phrase: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation). In more than one way, seeds of the ideas for western civilization post-medieval period were sown in the Reformation that Luther’s disputation provoked. As noted earlier, individual freedom, hymn singing in the church (and therefore the stirring cantatas and oratorias of J.S. Bach, F Handel have their roots in the church music Luther started), translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, relationship between state and religion, rule of law, and mass education all trace their beginnings to the reforms Luther initiated.

The Reformation, however, was complex and multi-faceted, including divisions and rancour. For instance, the difference between the Radical Reformers and Luther, most vividly reflected in the painful memories of condemnation and violence. With this historical backdrop, it is important to know that Baptists and Lutherans have been in conversation beginning the last quarter of the twentieth century. Out of the conversation of the joint commission, a report is available, titled, *Baptists and Lutherans in Conversation: A Message to Our Churches*, (1990) This is the Report of the Joint Commission of the Baptist World Alliance and Lutheran World Federation.

What might be worth revisiting as Baptist Christians in the region of North-east India, in this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation? There are

obviously variety of issues and themes that the Reformation initiated and continue to be debated as well as create divisions among different Church traditions, not least the theology and practice of baptism. Luther wrote and commented on a range of issues – economic and political life of citizen, separation of state and religion, family and marriage, daily practice of worship apart from theological doctrines. Hence, Luther continues to excite, challenge and provoke critical discussions and provides theological insights.

It might be worthy to reflect critically the voice and role of the church in the larger society in relationship to the endemic corruption and apparent worship of mammon that have given raise to many ills in the society, not least the Christian communities.

The church is simultaneously mute and complicit with the corrupt powers and centering of wealth. When the prophetic tradition of Christianity has ample resources for the church to be prophetic and name sin as sin, the church seems to be mute amidst the endemic corruption that marginalises all and the most vulnerable in the society. Where there is corruption, there is discrimination and victimisation of the people. And in a simple way, God's kingdom is one of justice, integrity and compassion. God's kingdom is not about the corrupt who are akin to the white-washed tombs; God's kingdom includes those who love him and lives the gospel in faithful relationship to the whole creation.

The church is complicit with the cancerous corruption, because it receives resources without any interest to know the source of the resources. Further, the church is complicit with the endemic corruption because stewardship and accountability of the resources are apparently minuscule. Exclusive and parochial tendencies and practices – often found expressed in discrimination of gender and the other as demarcated by many categories (viz., language, region, class, tribe, church etc) – prevalent in the church bespeak of poor stewardship of human resources and the variety of gifts the church as a community possess.

Maintaining of status quo and traditional programmes are apparently the

focus of the church today. Critical reflection and constructive preaching of the good news which is flourish of the good life for all creation need be renewed. It would be worthwhile to recall Luther's distinct emphasis on the church that is rooted and centred on Christ, which transforms the members to be faithful members, as demonstrated in the following words:

I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding It possesses a variety of gifts and yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. (Large Catechism)

For Luther, Jesus Christ, the scripture and the proclamation of the good news were all part of the Word, which was the foundation of the church, called and created by God, and in which the life and work of the church had its source and purpose. Therefore, in the church, "we teach with the Word, we consecrate with the Word, we bind and absolve sins with the Word, we baptize with the Word, we sacrifice with the Word, we judge all things by the Word." (*Luther's Works* 40: 23)

The church is called to renew its commitment as transformed people, called to be agents of change and transformation in the world, because it is more than a human institution but a new creation as transformed and inspired by the Word that is life and the flourish of life all. And a return to the scripture for critical study and reflection promises wisdom for renewal to be prophetic in our commitment to justice as kingdom of God entails. The words in Matthew 25:40, "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,[a] you did it to me'" is more than an eschatological rendering of the bad and the good. It is also interpreted as just stewardship and rectitude. The church is faithful as a community justified, restored and renewed by Christ, when it lives the Word, the good news to all.



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