

COMMITMENT FOR EVANGELISM

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Introduction

Among those ecumenically inclined and committed for one new human community comprising all nations and all communities of faith, one finds rarely any desire and urge to share the Good News of God's Love in Christ. Why is this so? Have we become shy of the Gospel and our ecumenism provides a respectable cover for it? Or is the problem to be located in the possibility that we have never cared to understand What the Gospel is and what we really hope to achieve through communicating the Gospel? I fear that probably there is a combination of many factors behind our silence and I would like to analyze these reasons. I want also to be able to state that without the Gospel taking deep roots our hope for the One World inhabited by all humankind in the blessed company of God's own self would never become a reality. So let me first seek to justify my assessment about our muted silence and then about the imperative of the Gospel taking roots.

1. *The Reasons for our Silence.*

Religion has been a force of division. Each religion erects a barrier around its adherents and prevents a free flow of communication and on going social relationships between them and people of different faith communities. Each religion also dissipates its own members into different denominations and sects and thus proves to be anti communitarian. The Christian religion established through the communication of the Gospel is no exception. Therefore a commitment to evangelize and a commitment for the new humanity sans all barriers and fences cannot co-exist. Such a stance does have some justification.

All religions tend to be status quo supporting forces. All forms of cultural dominations, social stratifications and political tyrannies most of the time enjoy the support and abettal of the religious establishments of all hues. If peace with justice should be the main stay of the New Community then religious affiliation would be a deterrent rather than a help to establish peace with justice. In as much as the Christian religion established through evangelism has not been an exception to this general tendency of all religions, again, it is far better not to make people Christian and add support to the powers that be

In spite of the fact that Christian religion behaves like any other religion, Christians have come to believe that they are special to God and so they alone will escape the Wrath of God on the Day of Judgement and will be given admission into heaven. Strangely, however, it is this very same arrogance which has also been the powerful motivating force to evangelize with the zeal to save and add some more to their company. "We do

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not nurture that sort of exclusive pride and so we do not feel the need to evangelize.” Such a stance too is legitimate and understandable.

At the personal level, the response to the Gospel has not led to discipleship. Rather it has produced a lot of selfishness. Through piety God is turned into providing the following services- that of a personal body guard through the day, guarantor of success in education and career, match-maker to find a partner within one’s caste, who is beautiful/handsome and fetching good dowry, health care provider and transporter to heaven. The only commitment of the devotee is to be regular at church and to give somewhat liberally to those who promise to offer special prayers in addition to one’s own petitionary prayers. Those of us who are averse to such a travesty of the Gospel become reticent about proclaiming the Gospel. Such a hesitation too is legitimate.

Finally, The Christian Gospel seems to be content to offer a pie in the sky and suggest that the problems of the temporal world could be left untouched as eternal destiny of the individual soul is more important. This is why there is a lack of social concern even about blatant evil which does not come under the religiously legitimated forms of injustice.

If all the above reasons are legitimate why should we be blamed for dissociating ourselves from wanting to pass on the Good News? A good question indeed. What is forgotten is that what passes for the Gospel is no Gospel at all. And, we have not wrestled to understand the real Gospel and be motivated by the real Gospel. We have come to believe that through a tokenist and lip service commitment for justice, through being involved in the promotion of good inter faith relationships, through some half-hearted attempts at an advocacy for a counter culture, through commiserate relationships with activists and social justice movements ... we shall be participating in the process of furthering the Kingdom. By so doing we have reduced the Gospel into a mere ideology. God is nowhere in the picture. Our relationship to God is more to a vague divine principle rather than with God who seeks our partnership and cooperation as a friend. What is desperately needed is a vision of the true God who was made known to us by Jesus. This vision should motivate us to seek to be in relationship with God. Such a personal relationship in turn should lead to a deep commitment for God’s purposes. Only then the reality of God’s grace being met by our responsive faithfulness will make it possible for justice and peace to kiss each other. A ripple effect will be set in motion and it will envelope all of humankind and the whole of creation. Let us see whether this dream can be realized or whether it too would remain as one more idea.

2. *The Message to be Shared*

We noted above that Christian religion shares with all other religions the tendencies to be a divisive force, to be supportive of the powers that be ... This is because the God of religion and the God of Jesus Christ have been equated with each other neatly. The distinction between the two clearly pointed out by Jesus has not been properly perceived. All religions have internalized a demonized image of God, who is partial to his devotees, lends support even to tyrants and despots, and the dominant sections in social formations, who legitimizes all forms of cultural hegemonies and declares, “I will do what I want and all creatures should accept my ways without question and I shall favour only those who are ready to accept my ways.” Most Christians along with people of other faiths also imagine God to be an unmoved mover, one who is responsible for all accidents, natural disasters, epidemics, untimely deaths, congenital deformities, illnesses....As long as such an understanding of God prevails it would be impossible to further the cause of peace with justice in the world. Humanistic atheism is no answer either. A vision of the true God needs to take hold of people’s minds and hearts.

In addition to the Christian religion participating in tendencies common to all religions Christian religion has made its own peculiar bad contributions as well. Its doctrines of election and predestination and its doctrine of atonement also make God more demonic. Only a few have been given the chance to hear the Gospel. And, only a small proportion of those who hear the Gospel respond in faith. As for everything God has to bear responsibility this phenomenon of only a few accepting the Gospel is interpreted as due to God's own choice of those who become believers. All others are by God's own inscrutable decision left out of the pale of salvation. Such an understanding, indeed, is perverse to the extreme and turns God who is love and who is passionately just into an arbitrary and capricious monster.

The redemptive work of Christ is understood in terms of a legal transaction as price paid for sin. What this really means is that atrocious caste overlords who oppress the Dalits (i.e. the deemed untouchable people of India), men who ill treat their wives, callous capitalists who exploit the labourers, political leaders like Bush and Blair who inflict so much pain in the pursuit of their imperialistic political ends ...all can receive forgiveness direct from God claiming that Christ has atoned for their sin and they do not need to seek forgiveness from those whom they have hurt. Some of them also have the audacity to believe that they are instruments of God in bringing God's punishment to those whom they hurt. So they do not even seek God's forgiveness.

In short what has been understood as Gospel is Gospel to the arrogant pious only, it is no Gospel to the poor. Such a Gospel thrives on a demonized image of God. It is based on an improperly conceived vision of God's ultimate purposes. Above all it has no understanding of the way God goes about bringing God's purposes to fruition. What is urgently needed is a restatement of the Gospel in the light of the teaching of Jesus and in the light of a true meaning of his sufferings on the Cross. First and foremost the Church which has been communicating a false Gospel and then the whole world needs to be evangelized with the true Gospel. Let us now proceed to see the Gospel Jesus came announcing and made possible through his life, death and resurrection.

2.1 ***It is Good News about God who Cares for all of Humanity and for the whole of Creation***

God cares for the lost sheep rather than for the ninety-nine that are safe and secure. This means that God is concerned to restore to community those who are ostracized, those who get pushed out, those who are deemed as unworthy of God's love, ...(i.e. all the de-spirited ones and de-spirited groups and sections of human societies such as women, Dalits, the physically challenged...)

God cares for the victims of political tyranny (i.e. 'the mourners') rather than for the tyrants who cause the mourning but have the audacity to believe and assert that they indulge in what they do because they have a mandate from God!! To be specific, people of Iraq, the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the people of the North East India, the people of Kashmir, the tribal peoples of Burma the aboriginal people of Australia, The Muslims of Gujarat, the minorities of Pakistan

God cares for all the landless people rather than for the land lords, for those whose national sovereignty has been infringed upon by colonizers and imperialists...

God cares for all the oppressed rather than for the oppressors of any shade.

We can say that although for outward appearance it is the Cain Community who enjoy God's protection and providential care, it is in fact in the Community of Abel God is really

interested in. This has to be affirmed on the basis of our knowledge that God is a fellow-sufferer and enabler. God spoke to Moses from out of the burning bush, God walked with Shadrach, Meshak and Abed Nego thrown into the fiery furnace as a fourth person and enabled them to walk in freedom right in the midst of the furnace into which they had been thrown hand and foot bound, God was in Christ as Immanuel/Son of Man expressing solidarity with all suffering humanity...

Our task therefore is to challenge the complacent and falsely religious communities of Cain the world over and to be in solidarity with communities of Abel the world over.

3. *God's Way is Through Perpetual Solidarity with the Oppressed*

The Gospel of Matthew and Mark report on just one word Jesus spoke from the Cross, "My God, My God, why have you given me up?" This is a simple echo of Ps 22:1 By so doing they have given us a clear understanding that Christ's cry from the Cross is in fact God's own cry along with all those who are in anguish because of unmitigated oppression and suffering. The Fourth Evangelist explains the Cross as the means of drawing away all those under the grip of the ruler of the world. When people are so drawn towards the victim sector of Humanity depicted on the Cross the wickedness of the outwardly decent world gets exposed and renders the ruler powerless because he cannot hoodwink the people anymore. Thus redemption is accomplished.

Pathos of the oppressed (depicted by the Lifted Up Human One) and God's solidarity with the oppressed are the foundation blocks of the Gospel. Christ did not die to redeem humans from their incorrigible predicament of sin by undergoing their punishment as a surrogate. Rather, sin consists in the inability or even blatant refusal to see in the Lifted up Human One (i.e. in the Collective of the Oppressed) the presence of the eternal I Am. The moment a turn around happens truth dawns on the slaves of sin and they extricate themselves from their service to the Ruler of the World and get gathered around the Lifted Up Human One.

This seeing of the eternal I am is not at all a religious event. It happens in the secular realm. It requires no religious confession or an affiliation to any faith community. It only requires expressions of solidarity with the Oppressed, not with any paternalistic and charitable feelings of magnanimity. Rather, it requires a repentant and an eucharistic orientation. For all those of us who do not belong to the human collective of the victim sector are in some way associates of the Ruler of the World. So the pain suffered by the Collective of the Oppressed is inflicted upon them by our connivance and abetment. Therefore, we need to repent. Through much of the oppression and exploitation suffered, say for example in the case of the working poor the world is sustained. This recognition should inspire us to be thankful. This reorientation helps us in furthering God's Rule.

4. *Our Strategy to Evangelize*

Jesus interpreted his mission as that of binding up the Strong Man (i.e. the Devil) and plundering his goods. John gives the Strong Man of the Synoptics two other names: i. The (Subversive) Liar who leads the religious astray by making them accept a demonized image of God and ii. The Ruler of the World who controls all its structures such as religion, culture, societal structures, politics, economics...The result is that religion and the secular powers join hand to crucify the Son of God himself. But this crucifixion is not just a one time historical event but it is an on going event in the experience of the Oppressed.

Just as Jesus was involved in a struggle throughout his life, so also we need to be armed with the Armour of God and be in struggle. But this struggle takes place wearing the footwear of the Gospel of Peace. For a mere polarization of the oppressed and the oppressors will not lead us towards the New Humanity. There needs to come about a reconciled relationship leading to true community.