

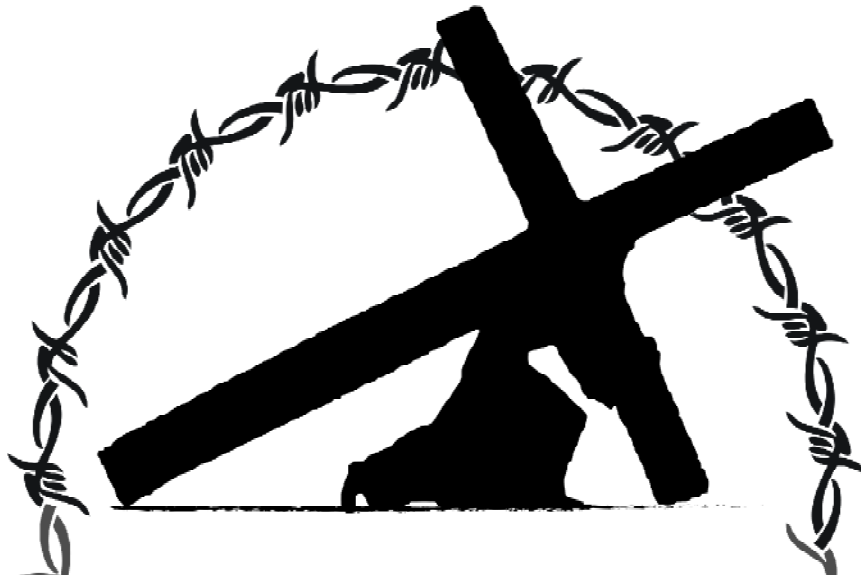
The Ecumenical Family

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Discipleship IN DIFFICULT TIMES

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Cover design : Abel Lalmanpuia Gaikwad

Editorial..... 

Discipleship in Difficult times



Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad

We are living in times when discrimination and violence against Christians and other minority communities are taking on serious forms:

Physical Violence: Time and again we hear of pastors and evangelists being assaulted. Not only individuals but also groups of Christians in a worship service or engaging in festive celebrations are attacked. Not only persons, but also properties are being vandalized. Overwhelming power is used to paralyze minority communities and destroy their will to stand up for their rights.

Structural Discrimination/Violence: In India, structural violence against minorities can be distinctly seen in many areas, some of which are highlighted as follows: the denial of benefits to people of Scheduled Caste background who converted to Islam and Christianity; the police and law enforcing agencies failing in their duty to protect minorities, and even siding with the perpetrators of communal violence; anti-conversion laws being passed in six states – Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh, thereby alleging that Christians are engaged only in proselytization; the new education policy proposed by the government questioning and hence changing the understanding and usage of Article 30 of the Constitution which gives religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer their institutions; the fringe elements of communal organizations as well as individuals in high positions making noises for and engaging in Hinduisation or saffronisation of education.

Symbolic Violence: Christians face symbolic violence mainly on three counts – one, they are looked at as being products of colonialism; two, they are perceived to have embraced Christianity for petty benefits; and, three, they are said to indulge in fraudulent proselytization. Some examples of symbolic violence are: desecration of cultural symbols (icons, images, Bible, crib, etc.); 25th December being declared by the government, as “good governance day”, thereby eclipsing the celebration of Christmas; RSS Chief, Mohan Bhagwat declaring that Mother Teresa’s humanitarian work was motivated by a mission to convert; imposition of practice of yoga, reverence for the cow, and banning of beef eating; and Muslims and Christians, as followers of non-Indic religions, being branded as anti-nationals.

What should be the expression of Christian Discipleship in our times?

This strategic shift by Hindutva forces calls for serious and innovative rethinking on the part of the minorities in dealing with violence against them. Hindutva forces take advantage of the stereotypical perceptions of minorities, most of which is contestable. By not taking visible actions to mitigate such perceptions, contested as they are, minorities, often play into the hands of Hindutva forces. Minorities, in view of their smaller numbers in Indian polity, play second fiddle to the overpowering elements of the majority community. Most Indians are also often seen to be inward-looking as communities. Sections of religious minorities tend to be confrontational, inviting heavy backlash from the majority community. The challenge for the minorities, therefore, is to mainstream themselves in terms of social, political and cultural engagements, apart from development work – health and education, as salt and light.

Living in such times let us be reminded of the words of the Bible: “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.” (Jn.15:18) “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Matt.10:16) “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” (Rom.12:14, 17-18) ■

[Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad is presently the General Secretary of National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and is stationed at Nagpur along with his family. He was also the first Pastor of the English Congregation.]

The Cost of Discipleship Today: Insights from the Life and Work of Jesus Christ



- Rev. Dr. H. Vanlalruata
Pastor, E.C.

Who is a disciple?

The Oxford American Dictionary defines a disciple as: “A person who follows the teachings of another, whom he accepts as a leader.” The disciple of Jesus means one who follows Jesus and obeys His teachings. We may say that a disciple is one who lives with a commitment to Christ, a commitment that makes a difference to the life and relationships and goals of that person.

The Cost of Discipleship.

Jesus Christ called people to be His disciples, to be committed to following Him and count the cost. In Luke 9: 57-62, we see the story of three prospective followers of Jesus. Discipleship is costly because Jesus must have priority over our flesh (Luke 9:57). Secondly, discipleship is costly because Jesus must have priority over our family (Luke 9:59). Third, discipleship is costly because Jesus must have priority over our friends (Luke 9:61).

We are disciples of Christ. We have to remember that to be a disciple of Christ means we must be willing to sacrifice many of the pleasures of this world. We must be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ. We must be willing to die to self, and to live for others. We must daily take up our cross and follow Him.

We are living in a fast changing society where our nation is moving in many diverse ways. The socio-religious and political changes in our country demands that we exercise our professed faith as Christians. We have to pay the price of being followers of Christ. The time has come to exercise our faith in Christ by doing good work, serving others, and taking up the Cross of Christ. Martin Luther said, “*A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.*”

Are you willing to pay the price?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (the Christian who stood up to the Nazi’s and was killed in a concentration camp in 1945) put it this way: “The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death – we give our lives over to death. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”(Greg Ligon, *Bonhoeffer’s the Cost of Discipleship*, Shepherd’s Notes. Christian Classics, 1999)

Jesus lived a life of service to others. He was pressed upon by crowds of people wanting help. He spent many sleepless nights in prayer. He depended upon God the Father for every physical need. Even the animals have a place to call their own, but Jesus had no home. His home was in heaven with His Father. As followers of Christ, we too become sojourners, travelers and aliens living on a planet that is not our home. Our home is in heaven with God. We pass through this life and what we think we possess is really not ours. It belongs to the Lord, and we simply are stewards.

The Reward of Disciples.

The cost of discipleship is great, but the rewards are greater. Jesus said, “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.” (Matt. 19:29). We are the inheritance of Christ. Thank God for the reward of disciples, which is ETERNAL LIFE. ■

THE ESSENCE OF DISCIPLESHIP

(as reflected in *Philippians 2:5-11*)



Upa Dr L N Tuanga

A disciple (from Lat. *discipulus*) is basically the pupil of a teacher.

Discipleship was based on a call by Jesus (Mt. 4:19-20 & Lk. 9:23, for example) which involved personal allegiance to Him, expressed in following Him and giving Him an exclusive loyalty. Peter and Andrew, James and John “left everything and followed him” (Lk. 5:11) and it meant for them “literal abandonment of home, business ties and possessions.” The cost of discipleship is clearly spelt out by Jesus when He declared “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. ... any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” (Lk. 9:23-24; 14:33).

Jesus unequivocally stated His terms and conditions for discipleship to the ‘rich young ruler’ by saying “... ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, ... Then come, follow me’. At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.” (Mk. 10:21-22). Jesus has never revised or toned down His conditions for discipleship; but praise God, a man like Peter could declare to Him in all honesty, “We have left everything to follow you!” (Mk. 10:28). Let us examine ourselves today in the light of this definite meaning of discipleship as to whether we are true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ or not. Let us humbly renew our full allegiance to Him.

Jesus exemplified His demands for discipleship by His own life and example as can be clearly seen in our chosen passage of Scripture viz. *Philippians 2:5-11*. Here Paul says that Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The great characteristics of Jesus’ life were humility, obedience and self-renunciation. Commenting on this verse, Barclay writes “If humility, obedience and self-renunciation were the supreme characteristics of the life of Jesus, they must also be the hallmarks of Christians. Selfishness, self-seeking and self-display destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with each other.”

Another important thought about Jesus in this passage is in verse 7 – “but made himself nothing” which means “*He emptied himself: he made himself of no reputation*”. Paul uses here the most vivid word possible (Gk. *kenoun*, which means literally *to empty* – Barclay) to make clear the sacrifice of the incarnation. Paul also stated the essence of this *sacrifice* in 2 Cor. 8:9 by writing “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” So we can see very clearly that Jesus took it upon Himself to show to His disciples that by His own example He fulfilled the essence of His demands for discipleship through His incarnation, that is, emptying Himself to become man and being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. How wonderful! Praise His name! ■

(Dr. Tuanga is a former E.C. Committee member and is also one of the members who was instrumental in the formation of the E.C.)

DISCIPLESHIP IN DIFFICULT TIMES: INSIGHTS FROM THE BOOK OF DANIEL

A disciple is a person who learns at the feet of his master and obeys what is learnt. Discipleship means to learn and obey at any cost.

Without discipline there is no discipleship. Discipline in every area of life is absolutely necessary.

Discipleship is integrated with absolute trust in the living God, that He will always prove Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him (2 Chron.16:9). Discipleship is also always accompanied by unwavering faith in the Word of God. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).



Prof. Ravikant Kant

To be a disciple of Christ does not mean that the narrow path that one has chosen will be smooth and easy. It demands constant self-denial for which enabling comes from Above. This helps one to remain loyal to the living God against all odds.

Life is full of choices. According to Joshua 24:15, the worldly mind-set has a choice between two evils. But the godly mind-set sticks to one and only one choice - the living God. This rules out all other choices for the true disciple. He stands like a rock on this choice. There is no alternative for him. This choice is a life-time choice, unchangeable in even the most difficult situation. This is what we learn from the book of Daniel.

Worshippers of the true living God, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were chosen along with others for royal administrative training. All trainees were given "a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drinks" (Dan. 1:5). Here came the first test of the four Israelite trainees. Their strong faith in the living God and His Word led them to make the right choice: "But Daniel" (and along with him Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego) "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies nor with the wine which he drank" (Dan. 1:8). They chose to eat vegetables and drink water. The living God proved Himself strong on their behalf. Even with simple food they excelled in their physical appearance.

Another test of choice came (Dan. 3). The king erected a huge golden idol and forced all officers and people to worship that idol. Defaulters would be thrown into a burning fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego had made the life-time choice to worship the living God Jehovah and none else. The king became extremely angry and ordered that the furnace be made seven times more hot than usual. Three Israelite officers were pushed into that fiery furnace. Again the living God proved Himself strong on behalf of them. The king saw not only three persons but also one more who was "like the Son of God". The Israelite officers experienced Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The king was greatly amazed at this miracle and called them to come out of the furnace and he and other officers examined them and observed that on their bodies "the fire had no power" (Dan. 3:27) - a shining testimony bringing glory to the living God.

In Daniel 6 we read about Daniel's discipleship coming under a very difficult situation. Daniel's officer colleagues made a plot to destroy him. They made the king sign a decree that for thirty days everyone should pray only to the king and not to any other god. Defaulters would be thrown into the den of lions. As the true disciple and worshipper of the living God, Daniel as usual went "in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed and gave thanks before his God" (Dan. 6:10). This was reported to the king and so he had to put Daniel in the den of lions. Early the next morning the king went to the den of lions and called to Daniel. "The king was exceedingly glad" (6:23), that Daniel was safe and ordered that he be brought out.

How true : "people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits" (Dan. 11:32) bringing glory to the living God! HALLELUJAH !

Note : All quotations from the holy Bible are from NKJV. ■
(Mr. Ravikant is presently Minister-at-large, Interserve India and resides in Pune along with his wife. He is closely associated with the E.C. and attends E.C. whenever he is in Aizawl.)

ENCOURAGING CONTEMPORARY STORIES OF EXEMPLARY DISCIPLESHIP IN THE FACE OF HOSTILITY



Lalrinmawii Fanai

Jesus said to His disciples, “And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake.” “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). And He also said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12). Jesus said to His followers, “I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:19). And the Bible says that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). So how are we to respond to hatred, hostility, and persecution?

The Bible clearly articulates the proper Christian response to hostility. For example, when we are cursed, we are to return a blessing (Luke 6:28; Romans 12:14). When we are forced to do something we don’t want to do, we are to go the extra mile (Matthew 5:41). If we “suffer for doing good” we are to “endure it” (1 Peter 2:20). These responses are hard to do, but they demonstrate that something supernatural is motivating us, something that transcends mere human nature (Matthew 5:46-47).

The U.S. Department of State says that “Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ.” Each month 322 Christians are killed for their faith, 214 churches or Christian properties are destroyed, and 772 Christians suffer from some form of violence other than death for their faith in Jesus. [<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>]

We live in such times.

But, here are some encouraging responses to hostility and persecution in the past few years:

21 Egyptian Coptic Christians working in the oil fields of Libya for their livelihood, were taken captive by ISIS, pressured to renounce their faith in Jesus and take allegiance to Allah. They were beheaded by ISIS, a video of which was released on the 15th of February 2015. Their last words - “Lord Jesus Christ”.

A response from The People of the Cross who released a powerful video called “Who Would Dare to Love ISIS?” (A Letter from the People of the Cross) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSv4vBcFyvo>] –

“The world is talking about you. Your apocalyptic dreams and spectacular sins are now awakening the Middle East. In your holy war, come to Holy ground, Come, children of Abraham come. The people of the Cross gather at your gates with a Message. Love is coming after you, like a rush of wind grazing over the Pacific. From the hills of the mount of Olives, to the desert winds of Jordan. From the cedars of Lebanon to the Silk Roads of the East, an army comes but with no tanks nor soldiers, but an army of martyrs faithful unto death, carrying a message of life. The People of the Cross come to die at your gates. If you won’t hear our message with our words, then we will show you with our lives laid down. For every throat you slit and every woman you rape, for every man you burn alive and every child you turn to dust, there is blood on your hands brother. But come brothers, come. Come with your blood stained hands. Come with your eyes full of murder for the People of the Cross. Come lay your guns and your knives at the foot of the Cross. A love that is overdue and overwhelming breathes through your cities. Though your sins are like scarlet they can be washed white as snow. Though you call yourselves servants, He will make you sons. Where can you run from His love? Even the darkness cannot hide you. Come brothers come! There is the sound of a rushing rain to remove every sin and bind every wound. You die for your God, our God died for us. The King of kings comes to be the sacrificial Lamb, slain on the altar where we should have been. Jesus Christ, Isa Al Masih walks through the Middle East. There is forgiveness tonight o brother! There is healing for your sins o brother! We are no different. Apart from His blood, we are no worse than the worst jihadist. Christ has been crucified, once and for all. To make sinners like you and me into brothers. Even you. Even now.”

It was later learned that the 21st martyr named Mathew Ayairga from Chad (some say from Ghana) was originally a non-Christian, but when he saw the immense faith of the others, and when the terrorists asked him if he rejected Jesus, he reportedly said, "Their God is my God", knowing that he would be martyred.

Church attack victim shows forgiveness, accused gets bail.

In March 2014, Tokapal block in tribal Bastar region was in the news after an aggressive campaign by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had led to a ban on the entry of and propaganda by non-Hindu missionaries, especially Christians. Many gram panchayats in Tokapal block had passed orders under Section 129 (G) of the Chhattisgarh Panchayat Raj Act banning all "non-Hindu religious propaganda, prayers and speeches in the villages".

Two unidentified men armed with sharp-edged weapons barged into a church in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district and allegedly set ablaze a Bible and other articles on April 17. The incident took place at village Karanji Matagudi Para under Parpa police station limits. The accused launched an attack on the pastor and poured inflammable liquid on him and his seven-month pregnant wife.

A case under sections 295 (injuring or defiling place of worship), 392 (robbery), 452 (house-trespass after preparation for hurt), 435 (mischief by fire or explosive substance), 323 (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt) and 34 (common intention) of the IPC was registered against the unidentified persons.

Bastar police arrested two youths, Mriyam Borai (32) alias Babu from Dharampura area and Akash Singh (27) from Guru Govind Singh ward. When the accused were produced in the court, the Pastor Deenbandhu Sameli gave them forgiveness. In a written letter submitted in court, the Pastor stated that the Bible teaches the path of forgiveness and so does he. The Pastor also sought forgiveness and wisdom for the accused from God. The court granted bail to both the accused.

"I have forgiven them": Gladys Staines

On the night of January 22, 1999, Graham Staines, a Missionary from Australia working among the Leprosy affected people in Baripada and Mayurbhanj had attended a jungle camp, an annual gathering of Christians of the area to strengthen fellowship and for teaching. In the night he was sleeping in his station wagon when it was set afire by a mob. Graham and his two sons Philip (aged 9) and Timothy (aged 7) were burnt alive.

Initial investigations, conducted by the police, pointed towards the involvement of Dara Singh, the adopted name of Ravindra Pal Singh, a Hindu activist who had been active in the region since 1989. On January 29, 1999, the Government of India set up a judicial commission of inquiry under Justice D.P. Wadhwa of the Supreme Court to investigate the murder. The commission submitted a report in March 1999 holding Dara Singh guilty of the crime and the case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation. The CBI submitted chargesheets against the people involved and in January 2000, Dara Singh was arrested from a forest in Mayurbhanj district and trial began in March 2001. The trial ended in August 2003 and judgement was passed in September 2003 convicting Dara Singh and Hembram. In spite of Gladys Staines' appeal for clemency, Dara Singh was sentenced to death and twelve others were given life imprisonment. However, the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in May 2005 by the Orissa High Court, who also acquitted the other appellants.

As the Designated CBI Judge, Mahendra Nath Patnaik handed out the death sentence to Dara Singh and sentenced twelve others to life. Gladys Staines, widow of the slain missionary, said "In forgiveness, there is no bitterness and when there is no bitterness, there is hope. This consolation comes from Jesus Christ. I have forgiven the killers and have no bitterness because forgiveness brings healing and our land needs healing from hatred and violence. God in Christ has forgiven me and expects His followers to do the same. The Bible says: 'To whomsoever you forgive their sins will be forgiven'. Therefore, in the light of eternity we all need forgiveness of our sins to enter heaven."

However, observing that "no individual was above the law of the land," Ms. Staines also said "I have no comments regarding the law taking its own course in crime and punishment. Forgiveness and the consequences of the crime should not be mixed up. We are called to be under subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except God and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. We need to honour both God and man respectively."■

(Contents are drawn from different websites)

[Ms Lalrinmawii Fanai (Teteii) is Executive Director, DevPro, Delhi, and is involved in various other Christian ministries. She enriches the fellowship at E.C. whenever she is in Aizawl.]

DISCIPLESHIP IN DIFFICULT TIMES: CONTEMPORARY YOUTH MODEL



Dheeraj Rai

Our Lord's final words as recorded in the gospel of Matthew chapter 28:18-20 also known as the Great Commission passage, lays the foundational understanding of Biblical Discipleship, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." As we look back and turn the pages of Church history, we find all the apostles and all the early first century believers obeying our Lord's command with their lives. Therefore, with his life as an example, Apostle Paul in his second letter to young Timothy in verse 2 of chapter 2, gives us the Biblical principle of Discipleship.

The gap which links the twenty-first century Christians with the first century Christians is Biblical Discipleship. Discipleship can be best defined as: to teach others by means of God's Word and by your own life example of love, power, faith and evangelism. And in the light of this definition, I would like to talk about a person who in the twentieth century, through her discipleship was able to lead a person into founding the world's largest Christian Organization of the twenty-first century.

Little can be said about Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International (also known as Cru). But there is much more to be said about the person who led Dr. Bill through the discipleship process. The person I am talking about is Dr. Henrietta Mears. Dr. Bill had only begun attending worship services at Hollywood Presbyterian Church and used to read Bible only as a matter of intellectual integrity to study the life of Jesus. He also attended the Church's meeting for young business people as he was a young businessman himself, who worked twenty hours a day. His business was booming and his merchandise was even being exported to different countries. About his spiritual journey he says, "Frankly, I was a happy pagan."

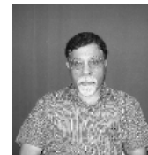
During his study of the life of Jesus, he became aware of his sins and became aware that he needed Jesus Christ. The teachings of Henrietta Mears were instrumental in helping Bill to find fulfillment for that need. It was on Wednesday evening in the spring of 1945, when Dr. Mears was speaking in that meeting of young business people about Paul's conversion from Acts chapter 9, that Dr. Bill prayed to receive Christ.

Bill worked along with Mears in her ministry. It is said that Bill was the spark plug of Mears' ministry machine. It was during this time, he became more aware of his call for ministry among collegiate. Dr. Mears' life example had a greater impact on Bill's life. He learned from her to trust in Christ completely regardless of the situation. She helped Bill see Christ as the Scripture showed. She did not just teach biblical principles but also lived it through her life. Later, the biblical principles Bill had learned from her would be foundational in his personal life and ministry. In 1951, Dr. Bill Bright started Campus Crusade for Christ in the University of UCLA.

There are many Bills walking around us, attending our church, attending our youth meetings. The question is, have we been like Dr. Mears to them? Are we just teaching biblical principles or living it? Dr. Mears did not miss the opportunity, she was obedient to our Lord's command to disciple and her obedience helped Dr. Bill find salvation through Christ and he helped many others to do the same. Will you be Dr. Henrietta Mears to someone like Bill around you??? ■

(Mr. Dheeraj, Staff of India Campus Crusade for Christ, Gangtok, Sikkim, is the most recent missionary to be supported by the E.C. through prayer and finance.)

A REFLECTION OF ARTICLE 25 OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION



Sam Joseph

To reflect on Article 25 of the Constitution of India we should know what Article 25 says. It runs thus: **25. Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.**—(1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion.

(2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law—

(a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice;

(b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Explanation I.—The wearing and carrying of *kirpans* shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion.

Explanation II.—In sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly.

The preamble of our Constitution of India states “..... secure to all its citizens LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;”

The spirit of secularism is upheld through several provisions in the Indian Constitution. The Article 25 is one of the pillars of fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The relevance of this legislation can be judged only if one understands the importance of preserving the pluralistic ethos of the country and the idea of harmonious coexistence of different religions. However by a plain reading of the said article of the Constitution, the said freedom is subject to public order, morality and health and to other provisions of the Constitution under the Part III of the Constitution of India.

While this provision of the Constitution gives us right to profess, practise and propagate religion, the same provision gives powers to the Governments of the States and the Central Government to make laws for regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with the religious practices.

Taking advantage of the restrictions in the said law, the various governments have brought in legislation against conversion from one religion to another. Though the law restricts forcible conversion or conversion by allurement, the law does not restrict anyone from changing their religion freely and voluntarily. In earlier times, no one questioned a person converting from other religions to Christianity. Today the conversion of rich/intellectual people goes largely unquestioned by the people of the majority religion, but when the weaker section of the society or a person from the same, is converted, the majority religious community imputes motives to the conversion. With the present Government at the centre as well as in the majority of the states, it is becoming increasingly difficult for anyone from any other religion to embrace Christianity openly.

The majority religious community in India has been trying to curb the conversion from their religion to Christianity. Christianity has always sought loving and peaceful methods to promote the gospel, but the allegation against the Christians is that they convert people by allurements. In fact, in some states the law has now been made in such a way that even if you tell people to pray to Jesus and they will be healed of all their sicknesses, it will be considered as allurement. Though the Constitution of India under the fundamental rights has allowed us to freely profess, practise and propagate our religion, there are many restrictions imposed by different Governments, more so, by the present government at the Centre and in the majority of the states.

So far we had different political parties in the upper and lower houses of Parliament, and it was not easy to amend the Constitution but now with the party of the majority religious community in power at the Centre and in the majority of the states, they will soon have the required numbers in both houses and will be in a position to make amendments to the provisions of Article 25 of the Constitution. Already we hear some of the elected representatives stating that by 2021, all non-Hindus will be converted to Hinduism and if not they may have to go out of India. Such slogans are becoming louder now because of the present political party in power at the Centre and in the majority of the states. It is high time that we Christians put aside our differences, and come together in earnest prayer to God for our nation and also voice our concerns in the appropriate forums.

(Mr. Sam has been practising Law in Mizoram since 1979 and is presently the Secretary of the E.C.)

RESPONSIBLE EVANGELISM IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

When Christ sent His disciples to all the corners of the earth with the gospel, He knew the hostile reception they would get. So He had prepared them for that. He also gave them direction about the order in which they should spread the gospel. Starting with the familiar surroundings of the Jewish culture and faith, they were to move to Samaria with which they had a shared past. Only after that they were to move on to the alien cultures and faiths of the rest of the world. Although we may think that Jerusalem was a mono-cultural and mono-faith place then, Greek and Roman influence was also present there. So, one can say that Christ indeed sent His disciples to a hostile pluralistic world.



Sam N. Jacob

The story is the same today, probably with one major difference. The apostles preached to a pre-Christian society, but we are called on to preach to a post-Christian society which has seen the worst side of Christian religion and rejected it. Christ knew the problems and complexities His disciples would be facing. That is why He told them not to rush to preach the gospel, but to wait for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. That instruction is relevant for us today as well. As individuals and groups we need to wait on the Lord for the empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit before embarking on evangelistic efforts. Evangelism is not to be done in human strength and wisdom.

Paul and Barnabas were the first preachers to a pluralistic or multi-cultural, multi-religious society. Their dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit is clear through the narration in Acts. Although they were convinced of the call to go to the Gentiles, they waited till the local church at Antioch was with them in their endeavour. Even after they set out, they were prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching in some places and were directed to go to other places which were not in their minds. Being totally under the control of the Holy Spirit is the first requirement for any evangelistic effort.

Pluralistic societies refuse to accept the uniqueness of any one faith. But the message we have is that Christ is unique as a person and as the Saviour. Apostle Paul's message in Athens gives us clarity for the methods of evangelism today. He was familiar with the religion, culture and literature of the people he was addressing. In his speech Paul talked of the culture and philosophies of the people respectfully. That way, he gained the attention of the people. He started with the audience's own understanding of God and showed them the illogicality of their faith before presenting an alternate thought process.

Paul was still addressing a mono-cultural group, though they followed different philosophies. Today, if we speak to a crowd in a market place, we will be addressing people from different cultures, languages and religions. So our task is a little more complicated. We cannot be expected to be familiar with all the cultures and religions of a country like India. So we need to choose our audience and address them accordingly. That means our outreach efforts should focus on specific cultures.

The gospel was originally received and preached by the Jews. So the message of the gospel is embedded in and built up on the Jewish culture and language. Today that is called the Judeo-Christian culture. This thought process and even imagery may not be understood by people from other cultures. Different cultures and religions understand some of the basic concepts of God, sin, salvation etc. differently. That calls for explaining to our audience what we mean by these concepts. Such a communication process will involve listening to the audience and also answering their queries and questions. So our communication has to be a two way process, not one way. In other words, we need to present the gospel through dialogue rather than monologue.

One may think that all these make evangelism a specialist occupation. But in the first century pluralistic society, gospel was communicated not by theologians, but by ordinary believers. But they were equipped by the Holy Spirit. Today also it is the Holy Spirit's empowerment and not necessarily our theological training that can make all the difference in presenting the gospel to the pluralistic society around us. ■

(Mr. Sam Jacob is a former E.C. Committee member. After entering Christian ministry, he is serving the Lord in various capacities, and currently resides in Bangalore along with his wife.)



ONCE TO EVERY MAN AND NATION...

1. **Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, some great decision, offering each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever, 'twixt that darkness and that light.**
2. **Then to side with truth is noble, when we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses while the coward stands aside,
Till the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.**
3. **By the light of burning martyrs, Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track,
Toiling up new Calv'ries ever with the cross that turns not back;
New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth,
They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth.**
4. **Though the cause of evil prosper, yet the truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong;
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.**



Lalnunzawmi
(Manuni)



This beloved hymn was written by **James Russell Lowell, 1819-1891** on December 11, 1845 and was put to music by Thomas J. William in 1890 to the tune of Ebenezer. It has become an inspiration and comfort to the Christians across the globe to this day.

Making decisions can be either beneficial or fatal. Preferring *Dosa* to *Pizza* in a restaurant is quite harmless. You can do it happily. But you are selective about your child's career simply because that will determine the future of your family. There is no bigger mistake than choosing the wrong god, and thus you cannot take it lightly. Everybody has a 'free will' - an opportunity as well as responsibility to make a choice that genuinely affects his/her destiny.



Of all the martyrs and saints, who had not chosen the good way and had not been persecuted? Can we name any person among them who had not faced the test? Jesus Himself is the super model in this regard. Will this not be our choice to walk in our Master's shoes, too?

We all understand what is happening in our country. On paper, India is a Secular State (equal treatment of all religions by the State); however, in reality, the Christians are the victim of injustice, violence and persecution. The authorities turn deaf ears to our groaning. National newspapers and TV News channels often fail to unveil the reality of our sufferings.



This is the time, and we are the ones to make our choice between the cross and the world. God knows perfectly well that His people have been falsely accused and targeted everywhere. The LORD said, "*I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt...and I am concerned about their suffering.*" (Exod. 3:7). Jesus said, "*I know your afflictions and your poverty...I know the slander of those...*" (Rev. 2:9).

Jesus knows His reward - 'the Crown of Life' is incomparably better than anything one can give for in exchange. He encourages us to be faithful even if it means death! (Rev. 2:10). God tests, indwells and delivers His people. It is your time to decide whether or not you will respond to your Master's call to carry your cross. He is the King of kings and LORD of lords. ■



(Mrs. Manuni is the wife of former E.C. Pastor, Rev. Dr. K. Lalrinkima. A homemaker; with a passion for God, she is always ready to serve Him in any way she can.)

HAPPENINGS IN E.C.

I. SPECIAL SERVICES HELD IN E.C. :

A. **ADVANCE CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICE CUM SUNDAYSCHOOL FINAL DAY.** (4/12/16) – The Carol Service was very meaningful and a blessing for those who attended.

Carols/Hymns sung by members in their different languages brought out the richness and variety in the fellowship and Pastor Vanlalruata brought God's Word to the Congregation. Gifts were distributed to the Pastor and few other members of the Congregation as a token of gratitude and appreciation and also for children below 12 years of age.

Sunday School Final Day was a time for prize distribution for Attendance, Final Exam, and Singing and Memory Verse competitions. The annual Report was prepared and read out by Mr. Moab Badding and there was a special number by Sunday school children and a Testimony given by outgoing Sunday school student, Anisha Daniel.

B. **CHRISTMAS SERVICE (25/12/16) :** The attendance was good and Pastor Vanlalruata gave the Christmas message. The Service was followed by a Christmas feast hosted by Mr. Harish Bajaj and family.

C. **NEW YEAR SERVICE (1/1/17):** The New Year message was given by Pastor Vanlalruata and once again the Service was followed by the much-awaited New Year feast provided by Mr. Harish Bajaj and family.

II. GUEST PREACHERS:

a) **REV. DR. ROGER GAIKWAD** [General Secretary, National Council of Churches in India (NCCI)] on 11.12.16.

b) **DR. W. SAM DAVID** [Mission Network Consultant, Christian Medical College & Hospital (CMC)] on 22.1.17.

III. The Congregation was really happy to once again meet –

a) Mr. Alan Sabu, b) Mr. Jaison Joshy, c) Dr. Monisha Daniel and d) Dr. Jesse Skariah.

IV. **TEA FELLOWSHIP EVERY SUNDAY AFTER SERVICE:** Was started from February 2017 and is an enjoyable time when everyone relaxes and interacts with each other over a cup of tea and light snacks.

V. **BLESSING :** Mrs. Sophia and Mr. Yangkahao Shatsang welcomed their latest bundle of joy, a baby boy and their third child on 4.3.17.

VI. **JOB TRANSFER :** Recently admitted members, Mr. Hau and wife Margaret, left Aizawl for Manipur, their new place of posting. May God bless and use them in the new place.

VII. **CATCHING UP WITH THE BALACHANDRANS :** It was great meeting former E.C. members, Mrs. & Mr. N.Balachandran again after a gap of 11 ½ years during their brief visit in April. They actively participated in E.C. life during their stay in Aizawl when he was serving as Secretary to the Government of Mizoram.

Special Services at E.C.

Christmas Carol Service

(4-12-2016)



How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

-Psalms 133:1



Garo



Assamese



Tamil



Español

Spanish



Christmas Carol Songs presented in different languages by members of E.C.

Mizo



Korean



Karbi



മലയാളം

Malayalam



Kuki

Special Services continued...

Christmas Service (25-12-2016)



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

-John 1:14



May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

-Romans 15:13



Life at E.C.



Visiting Korean Team

along with
Pastor
and
some members

(15-01-2017)



Visit by Former Members, Mr. & Mrs. N. Balachandran
(9-04-2017)

WHY THE CROSS IS IMPORTANT TO ME



For Christians, the cross is very meaningful. In some houses we can see a cross hanging on the wall. As Christians we all love the cross though the meaning is not same in everybody's thought.

In those times the cross was a place of curse, sorrow, torture, pain, shame, place for a wicked and a sinful person. That means the person had no place for forgiveness.

In that same place (cross) my Lord was crucified for me and the whole world. He bore the unbearable curse, sorrow, torture, pain, shame, punishment and terrible death for you and me. It teaches me about the love of God and it reminds me of the greatest gift that God has given us. All my sins were washed away through the suffering of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, so that through His dying on the cross I am saved. His death brought freedom for all of us from our sins.

For me the cross is full of love and is meaningful for my spiritual life. It shows me the light, salvation and a place in heaven. It is important to me because it has given me great mercy and grace. And my soul found peace in Jesus Christ.

Thank You Lord for Your eternal love for me, thank You for the cross, thank You for Your death and thank You for Your resurrection for me. "Bless the Lord." ■

(Miss Bathsheba is in the Intermediate Class of the E.C. Sunday School and is a student of Class X.)

JESUS' RESURRECTION - HOW IT IMPACTS ME



Jesus died for my sins. He who is so humble, stood out for our punishments and faced them Himself. He carried the heavy cross up to Calvary and was crucified and died for the sins of you and me. But Jesus Christ rose again from the dead, wonderfully and gloriously!

Nadia Dinpui Bajaj

In my belief, I think that Jesus died and rose again to save us. This resurrection is very joyful and glorious to me, and I consider it a blessing to all the people of the world. His resurrection gives me faith and teaches me to have hope and never give up on myself even in hard and difficult times. He strengthens me with His loving kindness and love. Jesus is with me all the time and keeps me everyday and He always gives me a chance to mend my mistakes. ■

(Miss Nadia is in the Intermediate Class in Sunday School and is a student of Class VIII.)



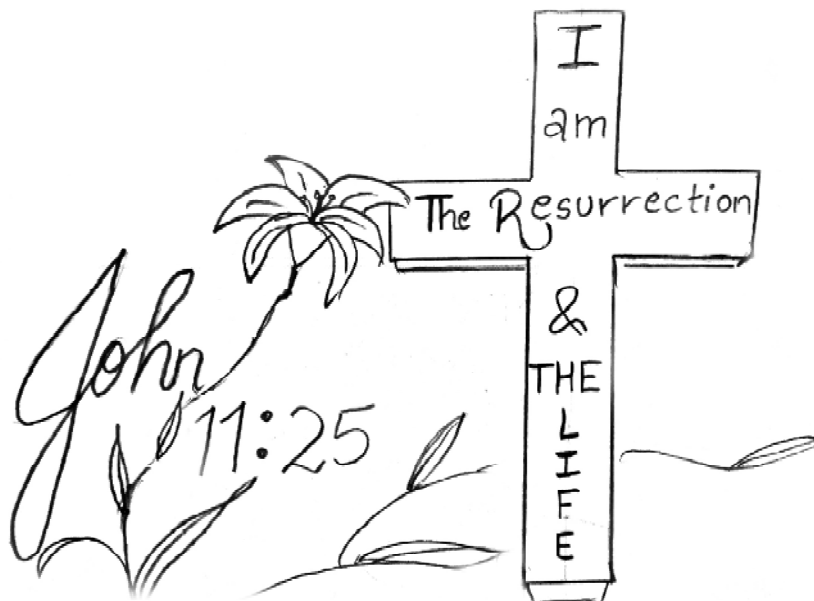
Jed Lawma



(Master Jed is son of former E.C. member, Mr. Tlanthianglima and is presently being home schooled for Class VI, in New Delhi.)



Abigail Lalawmpuii



(Miss Abigail is the daughter of former E.C. member, Mr. Abel Gaikwad. She resides in Nagpur, and is a student of Class V.)



YONEKO - DAUGHTER OF HAPPINESS

The youngest of four children, Yoneko was a joyful child and enjoyed a very special and close relationship with her mother. Japanese families worshipped their dead ancestors and Yoneko's father performed his religious duties without really believing in them. Her mother on the other hand was very religious and followed Tenri-Kyo, a Shinto Buddhist sect and she taught Yoneko all she could about her religion.



Lavi Joseph

When Yoneko was seventeen years old, her beloved mother died of a stroke (her 2nd), much to the great sorrow of Yoneko and the family and the friends who believed that their gods would heal her. After her mother's death, a great void overwhelmed Yoneko and life became empty, meaningless and not worth living anymore. She began to have only contempt for Tenri-Kyo. The following weeks and months were a blur, an agonizing nightmare and she felt like one without a mind, soul or feelings. She found no answers to her search for the meaning of life, no peace, no purpose for life and so decided to end it all.

Late one February night, in a state of great confusion and misery, she jumped in front of a moving train. Two railroad workers jumped out from the train, dragged her from beneath the wheels, gave her the necessary first aid and called the ambulance, thus saving her life. The finest surgeon in Japan performed an emergency operation doing the necessary amputations, etc. When she regained consciousness a week later and learnt the full extent of her condition – that she had lost one arm, two fingers on the other hand and both her legs – she cried bitterly and could not be comforted. She just wanted to end her life. Her older sister Yuriko hardly left her room and her brothers Yasuzo, and Akiyoshi and Yasuzo's wife were her frequent visitors.

Through God's divine leading, some American missionaries and their young Japanese friend Akitoshi Tahara heard about Yoneko, visited and gifted her a New Testament. She resented that as she hated all religions at that time thinking that it had cost her mother's life. They later played a tape of an Easter sermon, when she felt God was speaking directly to her of His unconditional love for her and she came to know that Christ was alive. She ended up accepting Christ as her Saviour as Akitoshi helped her to pray. Yoneko's life began to change and she could laugh and look forward to each new day. She continued to grow in her new faith and dedicated her life completely to Christ and His service.

Yoneko faced many challenges too. Yuriko was engaged but her father did not allow her to get married because of Yoneko which caused tension between the sisters, but they soon developed an understanding between them. Yoneko needed money for an operation that would help her to be fitted with artificial limbs. The church raised the money but her brother Akiyoshi wanted nothing to do with the Christian friends or their help. However, her father agreed and after the artificial limbs were fitted, it took time for her to learn to use them.

Yoneko and Akitoshi Tahara got married after they were both sure it was God's will for them. Her father was happy too. She now had to learn to do various tasks by herself. She earnestly sought God's guidance whenever some new situation troubled her and thanked and praised Him when it was solved. When their first child Marie was born, Yoneko experienced God's love and care enabling her to take care of the baby. Marie was a model baby who seemed to sense what to do to help her mother to take care of her. When she did not need any special help, her second child Ruth was like any other baby. Akitoshi tried to make their small home as comfortable as he could for Yoneko. He moved with his family to Minobu, Greater Tokyo and Okinawa, where he pastored churches, loved the church people and found satisfaction in preaching. They were fruitful in these places and Yoneko grew in her relationship with God.

They soon felt God calling them to do something entirely different and they prayed about it. God brought Ken Anderson of Ken Anderson Films into their lives. Realising how effective good films could be in reaching the Japanese people for Christ, they made the decision to enter the film ministry – preparing Christian films for use in Japan. Ken Anderson met and heard Yoneko's story. Later when the film Yoneko was made, it had a far greater ministry than was anticipated. In Japan where suicide was always a problem especially among the young, it was widely welcomed and appreciated. Suicidal youth drew new courage to go on living because of the film and many souls were saved. When the film was shown in America there was a wonderful response. Many were saved and they made hundreds of new American friends. In Japan, Akitoshi worked with International Films. They confidently looked forward to the future knowing God had even greater avenues of service for them.

Yoneko is so thankful to God that He was concerned enough about her to keep her from destroying herself and tenderly leading her to Christ. She acknowledges that it is because of God's loving, watchful guidance and care that she became the kind of person her name predicted – Yoneko – rice child – daughter of happiness. ■

Source: From the book 'Yoneko - Daughter of Happiness'

(Miss Lavi is always willing and available to use her talents to glorify God and be a blessing to others.)

BIBLE PUZZLE

Find the answers to the questions below and fill them into the tables starting from the appropriate box number for each answer as mentioned in the questions.

(Version used: NKJV)



Jaison Joshy

Questions:

- In which city were the disciples of Jesus first called "Christians"? (Acts 11:26) **{[1] ACROSS}**
- In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus said, "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of _____ **{[2] DOWN}**, in the name of a disciple, assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward". (Matthew 10:42)
- To the disciples in Lystra, Antioch and Iconium, Paul preached, "We must through many _____ **{[3] ACROSS}** enter the Kingdom of God". (Acts 14:22)
- "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples", is a statement from the Prophecy of _____. **{[4] DOWN}**
- Complete this Scripture Verse: "By this all will know that you are My _____ **{[5] ACROSS}**, if you have _____ **{[7] ACROSS}** for one another". (John 13:35)
- When a certain Scribe said to Jesus, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go", Jesus replied, "_____ **{[12] DOWN}** have holes and _____ **{[13] DOWN}** of the air have nests, but the _____ **{[6] DOWN}** of Man has nowhere to lay His head". (Luke 9:58)
- Who was the disciple from Joppa that was raised from the dead through Peter? **{[8] ACROSS}** (Acts 9:36)
- To explain the cost of discipleship, Jesus used the parables of Building a _____ **{[9] DOWN}** and a King going to _____. **{[10] ACROSS}** (Luke 14:25-33)
- The Apostle Peter taught that part of the calling of discipleship is, doing good and _____ **{[11] ACROSS}** for it. (1 Peter 3:13-22)
- Complete these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke. "So likewise, whoever of you does not _____ **{[14] ACROSS}** all that he has cannot be My disciple". (Luke 14:33)

(Mr. Jaison has been part of E.C. for a long time and is now doing his M.Tech in Computer Science in National Institute of Technology, Arunachal Pradesh.)

ATTENTION!

The English Congregation meets every Sunday for Worship at 10 a.m. in the English Congregation Church building, within the Synod Office compound, at Mission Veng.
ALL ARE WELCOME!

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