

Theological Education and Participation in Global Mission

Israel Selvanayagam

An Affirmation

Let me start with a basic affirmation: whatever may be the side effects the primary purpose of theological education is creative and relevant *participation in mission* in all its dimensions. I am tempted to revise the starting lines of St Paul's famous poem on love (1 Cor. 13). Accordingly,

I may read and speak classical languages, but if I do not have a passionate commitment to mission, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of textual analysis and hermeneutics and the knowledge of every philosophical truth; I may have more than one postgraduate degree in Theology; but if I have no inner urge to share the love of God in Christ with others, I am nothing. I may give all I possess to the needy, I may give my body to be burnt in struggles for justice and liberation, but if I have no regard for the salvation of the whole humanity and creation, I gain nothing by it.

If this revision sends any clear signals, then we need to revise traditional understandings of theology and theological education. I don't claim like Thomas Aquinas that 'Theology is taught by God, teaches of God, and leads to God'. Theology is human talk or reasoning about God: not in the sense of 'search after reality' but that of 'response to the historic reality of revelation'. Nor can I accept Anselm's definition of theology as 'faith seeking understanding', because our two millennia of 'seeking' in this regard have not led us to a more clear understanding. Rather, one can argue that it has weakened faith, as western Christendom has shown. Also our rereading of the Bible results in different definitions of 'faith', particularly Jesus' understanding of it as that which is an inherent capacity to transcend, to move mountains.¹

There are Indian Christian theologians who, though having had a western orientation in their theological education, through their engagement with biblical reflection and Indian social realities focus on the love of God in Christ and its implications for understanding humanity and social realities.² Taking our cue from them I suggest that the primary focus of theology is making sense of the greatest twin commandment of loving God with all our being and loving our neighbours as ourselves. It is important to note that this commandment is the core of all the law codes and is crystallised by Jesus from the commandments of the Hebrew scriptures. It is equally important that this core should not be divorced from the story of the Hebrew slaves whom God liberated and chose to be the instruments in God's mission of humanising the whole world. This is the greatest story ever told and the life and mission of Jesus and his movement is part of this story.

Theological education must help to make the fullest possible sense of the twin commandment in its changing context. This means that while there may be some common or universal sense in all contexts, the dynamics and realities of a particular context require the specific sense of that bi-polar love. The love here is holistic, involving head, heart and hand together. We do not want to see either a disproportionate bulge or shrinking of any of these components.

Mission is not saving and nurturing souls for the world of spirits as many have traditionally thought, but mending creation, which includes transforming lives and reconciling communities. The mission is God's and we are called to participate in it in continuation of the life of the 'People of God' with an acute awareness of living in the midst of the 'Peoples of God'. Theological education and ministerial training is meant for equipping all 'God's People' to engage in mission in their concrete context. It is a local act with global vision. The primary purpose of theological education and ministerial training is not the creating of standard shepherds for tending the sheep, but leading the sheep to fight with the 'beasts' that dominate

and destroy God's world. Then, picking up the necessary skills with a view to perform with 'decency and order' the rituals set by particular denominations, and comforting and counselling the people almost as a supplement to a health care service, becomes secondary in the training of a candidate for ministry. Her training should be geared to make her creative, imaginative and communicative in God's mission with and through members of their congregations under their care, with a global outlook and local engagement in their living and working contexts.

The only test for Christian commitment is a conscious awareness of being called to be children of God and disciples of Jesus in order to enjoy intimate relationship with the Triune commune and participate in God's continuing mission. If this test exposes the fact of nominalism within our congregations, that need not weaken the collective commitment to and clarity of mission. Rather it will strengthen it. Maintenance may be necessary, but if it is not directed to the ultimate purpose of mission the church loses its uniqueness in the midst of many religious communities.

Three Indian Pioneers in Participating in Global Mission

As we struggle to define the purpose of theological education, it is important to recognise those who have done in the past. It is most significant to note that most of the Indian Christian theologians of the earliest phase were non-formal theologians, lay thinkers and creative interpreters of the gospel. In this section, I want to highlight three persons who had no formal theological education but who made significant contribution to ecumenical thinking and global mission. All the three lived around 1910 and they cover the northern, middle and southern parts of India.

Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889 – 1929): As a convert from the Sikh tradition through a process of anti-Christian activities, spiritual crisis and mysterious experience of encountering Christ, Sundar Singh joined a divinity school and walked out after, finding it a laboratory where students analysed the scripture more than aspiring to drink it as milk. As a wandering monk he preached the gospel both in India and abroad and he impressed some well-known leaders like Tagore and Gandhi and theologians like A.J. Appasamy in India, and B.H. Streeter, F. Heiler, N. Söderblom and F. von Hügel in Europe. He praised his late Sikh/Hindu mother for preparing him to be a monk and said that he would not want to go to a heaven where his mother was absent. He left his particular church and became the member of the church universal. His mystic union with Christ and occasional ecstasy gave him enormous joy and he met with some ancient sages living in the Himalayas. For him the cross was heaven and he aspired to a martyr's death, which he perhaps achieved on his missionary journey to Tibet, as no one has any clue concerning his death. He criticised fundamentalist groups and their competitive approaches while he himself was doubted by some Roman Catholic leaders regarding his claims to have had extraordinary experiences.

With his very conspicuous appearance, with turban, beard, full one-piece garment and a shawl, and with his only possession being a copy of the New Testament and a blanket, Sundar Singh's influence was considerable. Though he was proud of the *sādhu* ideal he did not recommend it to others but encouraged Christians to lead a life of prayer, humility and simplicity, along with a passion for witnessing to the living Christ through words and service. Many in India and in the West found in him the message of the New Testament embodied, the living Christ reflected and missionary passion personified.

How do we then assess Sundar Singh as a theologian? What he has done is not a contribution to what is known as theology but to a new definition of theology. Heiler, who has collected several conversations, reflections and western opinions, observes:

His message is the pure Gospel of God's revealed love in Christ. It is only the language in which he clothes the old Gospel which is new and original; this, however, is as genuine and pure as it is in the hands of the greatest Christian thinkers; one might almost say that it is even more genuine and pure than that of many classical Christian mystics. For this reason Sundar Singh has the right to rank as an apostle of Christ, as an apostle of India.³

Sundar Singh in fact was not against any critical approaches to the study of the Bible and theology, but he insisted that they could never be a substitute for prayer and living in Christ. As Heiler has pointed out further, he has a special mission to Christian theology and to the Christian Church of the West.

‘Theological research needs to be constantly balanced by living Christian piety if it is not to degenerate into presumptuous speculation, destructive criticism, or empty dialectic. Theology without prayerful piety is like a fountain whose waters have dried up’.⁴

Sundar Singh wrote eight small booklets, which reflect his limited reading but acute observation of actual happenings in ordinary life. His reflections on Christian themes like sin, salvation, Christ, church and sacraments would certainly compare with others in general. What is distinctive, however, is that the reflections are illustrated with personal experience and a tolerance of different viewpoints. Thus just as in diving to find pearls, one has to dive into the spiritual depths to have inner joy. Just like a mother bird allowing herself to be burned by a wildfire to save her chicks, Jesus died for us. Just as the laborious work of a mother to bail out her son from prison transformed him, Jesus’ cross makes a great impact upon us. While we are in the water we don’t feel the weight above our head, but once we are out of it even a jug of water weighs heavy - illustrating the difference between a sinner and a saved sinner. A shivering traveller on a snow-covered mountain found someone struggling for life in the freezing cold. Another traveller who had passed by without helping him was later found dead from the cold, but the second traveler took the victim upon his shoulder and both survived because of their mutual warmth; likewise by serving others we serve ourselves. And so on.

During his visit to the western countries, including Britain, Sundar never failed to point out what he observed to be true. He pointed out how undue material obsession devalued people’s life and worth. At a time when ‘white’ was regarded as superior and celestial, Sunder Singh said that it was possible to have an appearance like an angel outside, but have total darkness inside. He found many people to be like trained animals, able to perform fantastic things but lacking the inherent capacity to transcend and enjoy the sacredness of life. Today spirituality, with its various brands and labels, has become another commodity attracting those who are fed up with an obsession with a consumerism, and what Sunder Singh perceived and experienced is of perennial value.

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) was the daughter of a liberal Brahmin of Maharashtra from whom she secretly learned the Sanskrit scriptures. She herself came to be known as learned (*pandita*) and was an eloquent speaker. She wanted to educate women and liberate them from the clutches of traditional practices. Particularly her heart went out to the Brahmin widows who were not allowed to remarry. She went to England to study medicine but certain limitations of her hearing disqualified her and she was employed to teach Marathi to British soldiers preparing to go to Maharashtra. Her conversion to Christianity during her stay in England shocked the Hindus and gladdened Christians. She returned to India with great determination to reform Hindu society and rehabilitate the Brahmin widows. With a view to challenge the caste system she married a low caste man of Bengal and had a daughter, but her husband died young. The Mukti (liberation) Mission centred near Pune is a living monument of what Ramabai and her daughter did for the education of women and rehabilitation of widows.

It is interesting to note that Ramabai helped to balance the glorious projection of India and Hinduism by other proponents in the West. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) is celebrated as the first Hindu missionary to the West, since his most impressive speech in the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 became famous. He claimed that Hinduism stood for religious harmony and the highest form of spirituality. He won disciples from the West for his Advaita discipline and founded the Ramakrishna Mission. Ramabai with equally impressive personality and eloquence presented the other side of India and Hinduism with special reference to the plight of widows. Sometimes Vivekananda followed her campaign trails and refuted her claims. Today, one of the most important tasks in mission and interfaith dialogue is to strike a balance when countries like India are presented with a one-sided projection. The post colonial politeness among certain groups has led them to nod their acceptance of nonsense. As some of us as mission partners in this country have stressed, we need to ask the

uncomfortable question as to why, in a country of ancient spirituality and many religions, more than one third of more than a billion people of India live below the poverty line and suffer from the disability of illiteracy and from practices of untouchability and crude forms of corruption.

Ramabai claimed to be a disciple of Christ and rejected ecclesiastical authorities and denominational competitions. 'Is Christianity the teaching of Christ or the teaching of a certain body of men?'⁵ She was reacting to sophisticated translations of the Bible, grand ceremonies and dogmas produced by men using their authority in the church. She asked for a simple translation of the words of Jesus, which had the power of enchanting people's hearts. She enjoyed the freedom of interpreting biblical passages (including miracles) in such a way that prompted liberating action and found some Hindu terms to be misleading. Since she believed that the authorised version of the Marathi Bible was tainted by Hindu ideas which were misleading on the one hand, and by higher criticism of the Bible which was irrelevant to sharing the simple gospel with ordinary people, she brought her own Marathi translation of the Bible for the use of common people in mission. She writes:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ was used to save many, many of us from hopeless idolatry and dark sin, and we do not now need higher criticism. I entreat all those who are considering higher criticism to give your time and prayerful labour to the teaching and preaching of the simple Gospel to our people, and not to take the trouble to introducing higher criticism into our theological schools and Sunday schools.⁶

Later in her life Ramabai, like Sunder Singh, gave more importance to her direct experience with living Christ without in any way diminishing her service for the poor and hapless widows. Unfortunately, Ramabai's approach has not been followed through either by feminist theologians around the world or by Indian theologians.

Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah (1875-1945) was the first Indian bishop and the first non-white diocesan bishop anywhere in the Anglican Church. He did not complete his first degree, but claimed to have a special BA - 'Born Again'. His mentor was Bishop Henry Whitehead who taught him the basics in his house. Even before he was consecrated as bishop, he was known as a passionate indigenous missionary and a fine representative of the younger Churches in international and ecumenical gatherings.

Azariah's consecration in 1912 was shrouded with opposition not only by white missionaries but also Indian Christians. But he was mentored by Bishop Henry Whitehead and earlier (1910) had been sent to the Edinburgh WMC where his speech made a big impact. Calling for indigenous forms of church and Indian leadership he concluded the speech with the following words:

You have given the goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS!⁷

Azariah's words are still appealing. While we debate about proper title for those who participate in mission (missionary, mission partner and companion in mission etc) it may not be a bad suggestion to take 'Friends in Global Mission'.

Azariah's challenge to the western Churches was consistent whenever given the chance. For example, he told the western audience at the Lausanne Conference on Faith and Order in 1927:

Unity may be theoretically a desirable ideal in Europe and America, but it is vital to the life of the Church in the mission field. The divisions of Christendom may be a source of weakness in Christian countries, but in non-Christian lands they are a sin and scandal.⁸

While he was known as the champion of church unity in the West, he was acutely aware of the challenges to mission within India. Hence his initiative and leadership in the union movement towards the Church of South India.

Azariah as a missionary was working among the poor Dalits in the Dornakal area of Andhra Pradesh. Gandhi unjustly criticised his work of converting people, but refused Azariah's invitation to come and see for himself. At the same time, B.R. Ambedkar, the champion of Dalit liberation and opponent of Gandhi embarrassed Gandhi and caste Hindus by deciding to quit Hinduism along with his thousands of followers. He was considering the options for the new religion they should join.

Azariah had a personal interview with Ambedkar in 1936 'which deeply embarrassed and disturbed' him, and 'plunged him back into renewed efforts at ecumenism and reform within the church'. Ambedkar criticised the church for denominational disunity and for the persistence within it of caste prejudice.

Azariah recalled later that Ambedkar asked him the question: 'If we become Christians can we be all united in one Church wherever we live? And will we be entirely free from all caste prejudice?' To which Azariah responded: 'I have never felt so ashamed in my life because I couldn't say YES to either question – I could only come away in disgrace. Azariah often recalled Ambedkar's criticism of Christianity when seeking support in his later years for the unification of churches in South India.⁹

The caste-denomination relationship manifested itself in different ways. At a meeting of the General Committee of the Methodist Missionary Society, C. H. Monahan, a leading Wesleyan missionary working in southern India, with over forty years of experience, defending the Methodist entry into the church union movement, observed that "there are Indians who were once, as Hindus, united in caste, but now, as Christians, are divided in Christ. To remedy this state of things is a solemn duty, and no effort must be spared to secure that in the future 'there shall be one fold and one shepherd'".¹⁰ There were also cases when, at times of division within the congregation of a particular denomination, individuals and groups of a particular caste left and joined another congregation of the same caste but of a different denomination. Similar kinds of denominations and reconfiguring of Christian groups in the UK are not less confusing!

Azariah saw the CSI just like Moses who viewed the promised land before his death. Now, CSI, belying all gloating expectations and teasing comments such as being a 'mud horse', has continued to survive since 1947. It is reasonable to argue that if churches in the West had achieved something like CSI as expected, CSI itself would have grown more into maturity and resource sharing. Each major church instead has co-opted CSI into sharing its existing systems as special partners. And of course CSI also has been thoughtless in accepting such offers, instead of being content with the status of friends in mission and continuing to challenge denominations that refuse to die and rise as new churches in particular regions such as south India. If this situation continues CSI might be pushed into being seen as yet another denomination!

Azariah stated, very politely, that unity was the ideal and disunity a weakness in the Churches of Christendom. If, however, he had seen West as the most challenging mission field in today's world he would have thundered with words such as 'sin' and 'scandal'. He would not have accepted the western Church as the trend-setter in our ecumenical journey, as exemplified in the formation of the British Council of Churches, the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland and (as they are now) the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. For Azariah and his colleagues church unity was aspired to not for achieving economy and efficiency but in attaining credibility in mission and as the fulfilment of Jesus' prayer 'that they may be one'. He would not have allowed the pursuit of the ultimate goal of becoming one with the Father (or the Triune commune) but bypassing an organic unity in both spirit and form that would have concretely testified to the incarnation. What is obviously lacking is not thinking and writing and rewriting documents on faith and order, nor planning ecumenical programmes or activities, but the will to be one, and even the faith which Jesus said can move mountains. In fact, it is not difficult to argue

that the fear and hesitation to die to the present denominations and to rise as a new church is because of the confusing of faith with what is familiar in adherence and practice. If we are not able to acquire the Catholic Spirit and move on in faith, what right do we have to expect the unchurched and non-Christians to respond to God's love in Christ and become disciples of Jesus, the original identity of Christians? Let me remind the churches in the 'Christian Lands' of part of the WMC 1910 message to them:

God is demanding of us all a new order of life, of a more arduous and self-sacrificing nature than the old.¹¹

I hope the addressees of this message will take this reminder seriously when they prepare towards Edinburgh 2010

From our favoured perspectives we might attach various shades of truth to the way our respective denominations work. In actual fact, as comparative studies and negotiation documents show, the difference between positions are not as vast as we have thought. Then have we not wasted centuries on the sheer ignorance? We need to realise that in various ways our denominations are cultural constructs of the gospel insights and particular emphases found appropriate in particular historical circumstances. Moreover, there is no church and no denomination that can claim to be infallible and none has exhausted the full dimensions of the gospel. Let us be very clear that there is no truth higher than our belief that God became human and went to the extent of suffering as a criminal on a cross. Our cushion-comfort churches, masks of liturgical vestments and petty doctrines must be stripped bare before the cross. The resurrection has not stopped God's suffering as he continues to suffer in solidarity with the victims of various kinds of oppression and sin. Sometimes our petty doctrines appear to be destroying the kernel of the truth just as when pets savage beloved children!

Towards Bangalore 2010

Bernard Lucas (1860-1921), a Congregationalist missionary from England to southern India, made radical suggestions for creating an atmosphere for the germination of an Indian Christian theology. He was one of the key players in founding the United Theological College in Bangalore in 1910 which became the training ground for some important Indian theologians. He found Hinduism as fundamentally religious and called for co-operation with Christianity for mutual benefit. He presented the divine humanity of Jesus as providing a solution for the tension between the ultimate and temporal in Vedānta. He affirmed that God was the Father of the millions of Indians too and the Spirit was preparing them for the gospel of Christ. He highlighted the appeal of the gospel to the weak and oppressed in Indian society. He was uncomfortable about Christianity appearing to be exotic in India. More significantly, it was Lucas who mourned that 'the Indian Church has produced not a single theologian, nor has it given birth to a single heresy' and continued to state that, 'in India we have a philosophical atmosphere as stimulating, and far more permeating than that of Greece when Christianity first came into contact with it; yet while Christianity has profoundly stirred Hindu thought and feeling, Hindu thought has had absolutely no influence on Christian thought'.¹² Like other missionaries such as Thomas John Slater and Stanley Jones, Lucas also valued the enrichment of Christianity with salient contributions coming from the East. He writes:

The Church does not impoverish herself in giving of her best to the world, but enriches herself. In the religious realm the kings of the East have still yet to bring their treasures into her storehouse. Christianity is of the East, Eastern; and in returning to the home of her birth she will renew her strength and re-invigorate the West.¹³

Lucas repeated the theme 'not to destroy but to fulfil'. Instead of imposing their creeds, he said, missionaries should evoke a richer faith without denying but by affirming. As the backdrop of this thinking was born an important theological institution in India.

It is most significant to note that the United Theological College was established in 1910 as the first ecumenical institution of its kind and composition in the history of theological education and ministerial training. We are preparing for our centenary in which there will be thorough reflections on the shifts and changes of its mission focus both in India and abroad. We will admit it as a failure if our logo statement 'not to be served but to serve' has not been reflected in the life and ministry of the leaders of the church in India majority of whom have been trained at UTC. In its 'mission statement' UTC aims at 'continued participation in the mission of Jesus Christ in the world, equipping students for the ministry of the church'. It is also affirmed that UTC is 'ecumenical in vision and composition, contextual in reflection and action'. The centenary brings us a great opportunity to question how far we are freed from slavery to western thinking and practice, and how far we feel independent, confident and creative in drawing upon the resources of our country and our regions, and experiment with new patterns of ministry and mission.

While having to renovate and replace some of our century-old buildings, we will renew our commitment to doing theology in ways that are relevant to our context. We are thinking of starting some new programmes of both study and service with a view to equipping our churches and their ministers for being more efficient, creative and contextually compelling. For example, while mission agencies in the West train and prepare their candidates for overseas mission, often they do not worry about the need to prepare those coming over as mission or world church partners and research students. The hidden assumption seems to be that those who come to study or work in the UK, for example, do not need such preparation as it has a normative world standard! Apart from my own experience, I have seen many people struggling hard to acclimatise, adopt and adjust. In collaboration with the Synod of the Church of South India and receiving agencies in the West (and Middle East) we will create and implement a course on equipping to study and serve overseas. Also, incorporating some of the existing programmes such as counselling and dialogue centres, we are planning to establish a Centre for Truth and Reconciliation with at least three areas in focus: personal and interpersonal, intra-faith and interfaith, intra-communal and inter-communal. We hope that such a centre will give scope for relevant resources to be mobilised and be pooled from wherever they are available.

UTC stands for academic excellence, as it has been claimed time and again. But what this means in practical terms needs some serious consideration. Does it mean that taking advantage of its English medium of instruction and research it can create a class of scholars in particular areas of study? Does it mean that it produces candidates able to work anywhere in India or abroad? Does it mean pursuing western philosophical theology while Indian philosophy is thought resourceful for theologising in India? Should, for example, the arguments for the existence of God from causation – cosmological, teleological and moral – come to us from Aristotle via Thomas Aquinas and western writers, while the same are available in Nyaya, one of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy? More importantly, how do we use all we read and learn in making our churches mission communities? It is hard to deny when some churches and leaders complain that their candidates lack sensitivity and ability in vernacular communication. Of course there is an element on the part of churches and leaders to reject anything that does not conform to their conservative and fundamentalist positions. Taking that for granted, I still believe that our students can be more comprehensive, confident and communicative in reflecting on biblical passages and theological insights for and with members of the regional congregations they serve.

Parroting the theology of others was commonplace in theological institutions, including UTC, even as late as the early sixties. This is the confession of some Indian theologians who also note that for some of their western teachers even English was their second or third language just as it was for most students.¹⁴ It is remarkable that they have realised this weakness and have introduced creative experiments in ministry and mission, and so have encouraged the younger generation to be more authentic. Perhaps one reason for the earlier 'parroting' was having to deal with a strange language such as English, or the refined form of language such as the Tamil used in the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Madurai. If their writings were governed by cutting and pasting to a great extent, the border-line between ownership and plagiarism becomes very thin. Even if it is true that such selected readings supply an accurate expression for what

they think themselves, they are not free of the guilt of copying others' expressions, unless they acknowledge the source in writing.

More serious is the fact that Indian writers heavily depend on western writers for ideas. Stanley Samartha (1920-2001), a former staff member of UTC and pioneer of interfaith dialogue in the ecumenical movement, having the above situation in mind, encouraged Indian biblical scholars to think afresh instead of simply copying the West. In his inimitable style he writes:

Every time a Biblical scholar in Europe sneezes theologians in Asia should not catch a cold and manifest the symptoms all over the footnotes! To depend on rules of interpretation developed in countries alien to Asian life is a hindrance to the Church's growth in maturity. It reduces our credibility, diminishes our spirit, and distorts the universality of Jesus Christ to whom the scriptures bear witness.¹⁵

With this observation, Samartha has made a useful survey of the Asian contribution to scriptural hermeneutics. He takes the two aspects of Asian reality, poverty and religious pluralism. With regard to the first, he acknowledges scholars who have brought new light to the story of liberation and exodus of the Hebrews, their struggle to establish a community based on love, justice and peace, prophetic challenges to injustice and oppression, Jesus' identification with the poor and the marginalised, the power of the Jesus movement and the vision for a new heaven and new earth, by relating this to the Asian context with their fresh reflection. On the side of interfaith relations, Samartha points out a few scholars who read the Bible as a book of dialogue providing profound insights, not as a book of doctrines and rules.

Since 1987 the biblical field in Asia has seen far more valuable and lively reflections with and without the help of western scholarship. However, the popular notion is that any theological statement, however simple and full of common sense, needs to be authenticated by the support of a western scholar or theologian. Then, the expertise of the Indian teacher is to be in the selected writings of her own field; her responsibility is to check if the student has represented these writings accurately.

It should be said in sympathy with theological students in India that they are called to be faithful to multiple demands on them: their church's expectation, the training institution's special focus and discipline, the academic world etc. Also they feel heavily pressed down under the heap of books and journals which flood their libraries and bookshops, mainly from all the English speaking countries. It is, naturally, hard work for the teacher to sift these materials and help the students with specific pages or paragraphs which may prove realistic. Likewise, we need a class of teachers in theological institutions who are able to encourage and guide students to 'drink from their own wells'. There are great repositories of knowledge unused by Indians, but exploited by foreigners. Nothing can be more glaring anomaly than that a western scholar comes to India, masters the vernacular, interviews people, collects local myths, both written and oral, and publishes in his own language. Now Indian students have to sit at the feet of overseas scholars to study in depth their own religious and cultural heritage at great cost! And it is a fact that the earlier phases of Indian Christian Theology were introduced by western mission partners who worked in India! Moreover, in India, Christian theological education and research is not credited in the secular universities, with a few exceptions, while Indian/Hindu philosophy is. This is in spite of the fact that it was Serampore College, to which all the mainline Protestant seminaries are affiliated, and was established by the Baptist missionaries including William Carey, that (first) gained University status. This is also in spite of the fact that the Christian contribution to education in India is considerable and still in many cases even people of other faiths prefer Christian educational institutions. At the same time, UTC has gained a good name in the theological institutions in the West, and there are great resources for collaborative research, so that our God-talk in global mission becomes appealing.

Sharing Through Exchange

In a globalised world we have common enemies – prodigal children who in the name of freedom and democracy squander the wealth of the owner of the earth, warmongers, commercial institutions who have no regard for the poor and for the balance of creation and sustainability of development, communication media which are over-sensational, fabricating and manipulative. We need to analyse how an international network of politicians, businessmen, sports stars, media celebrities etc, work in collaboration while churches remain divided. Today it is said that when New York sneezes New Delhi gets a cold! Tomorrow it may be the reverse. But even this booming economy does not touch the plight of the poor. It is a challenge for our common mission to save simultaneously the minority victims of diet-related obesity and the majority victims of malnutrition! Fundamentalism of all types – religious, secular, political and economic – is a growing enemy of the gospel. We need to clarify together the distinction between common religiosity and Christian commitment. If religious commitment has the primary aims of prosperity, protection, provision, progeny and peace of mind, in fact, Christianity is the least attractive and competitive in an ambiguous multi-religious world. Whatever religious dimensions we adopt, if they are not subservient to living as a gospel community with the primary identity of God's children and Christ's disciples, we are lost!

There are specific challenges that require special attention. For example, the history of Christianity in India and its national status as a tiny minority is far different from Christian history in the West. In India we may feel the classification of periods such as modern, post-modern, post Christian and so on as totally irrelevant. We do not have the leisure and intellectual curiosity to pursue arguments and counter-arguments for the existence of God – even if these arguments are found in sophisticated Indian philosophy. Our priority is to trust the experience and teachings of someone we have decided to follow. In the West religious pluralism and multi-culturalism are newly emerging issues, but we have lived with them for ages. In the West one can afford to recycle theologies of religious pluralism in terms of exclusivism, inclusivism and relativism or pluralism. We want to talk in terms of 'commitment and openness'. Development in the West is seen as further standardisation of life with more choices even at the cost of new strains and further impoverishing the poor. But as is observed, theological education in India should be committed to millions of people reeling under grinding poverty and disabling illiteracy.¹⁶ Spirituality in the West in different brands is a new commodity for calming the mind and healing emotions, but in India it is suggested as an inherent capacity to combat social evils.¹⁷ If Christian fundamentalism in the West is identified with an evangelical position as one of the many examples of terminological confusion, we talk in terms of 'the good news' (evangelism) versus fundamentalism. And it is time to reaffirm the holistic dimension of the twin commandment of loving God with one's whole being and loving the neighbour as oneself and see all our God-talk from that core point.

Admittedly, our conversations have been affected by the secular ethos of the west where talking about God publicly is undesirable. Theologians in the West have developed a caution about this because God's name is taken in vain for fulfilling vested interests of nations and persons. We are aware that today God is taken into the politics of terrorists of all kinds. But at the same time, we need to hollow God's name by attaching it to our commitment to justice and peace. Also our solidarity with the most vulnerable in the world by word and action, I think, is the primary qualification to talk about God publicly. Therefore we need to be at ease and spontaneous to mention God and God's grace in our public conversations. This could be a challenge for fundamentalist and conservative groups who continue to profane God's name. And if theological education is not able to equip us to talk about God publicly humbly and confidently then it exposes its drift to individual self-aggrandisement.

Let me finish with a note on the importance of exchange programmes within the vision and framework of participation in our global mission through theological education. We have pioneer attempts at field research comparing the situations, for instance, in India and Britain.¹⁸ Exchange programmes for theological students and teachers in most cases have proved to be life-transforming and vision-widening. Mission education and training can be best suited within theological communities which have open commitment to global mission. It is no more only teaching or only learning but doing both

simultaneously. Then theological institutions of the Third Church operate not as the relay stations of western thinking and writing, but as exchange booths for sharing discipleship lived in concrete contexts and commitment to world mission.

End Notes

¹ See Selvanayagam, I., *Relating to People of Other Faiths: Insights from the Bible*, Thiruvalla: CSS-BTTBPSA, 2004, pp. 125-134

² E.g. For Samuel Amirtham's view, see I Selvanayagam, *Samuel Amirtham's Living Theology*, Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2007, pp. 52ff

³ Heiler, F., *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, New Delhi: ISPCK, 1989, p. 245

⁴ Ibid., p. 259

⁵ Quoted, R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 99

⁶ Quoted, Ibid., p. 102

⁷ Azariah, V.S., "The Problem of Cooperation between Foreign and Native Workers", World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910" in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Ed. by M. Kinnamon and B. Cope, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002, p. 330

⁸ Quoted, Susan B. Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V.S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India*, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p. 235

⁹ Ibid., p. 313

¹⁰ "Church Union in South India", *The Kingdom Overseas*, January, 1934, p. 2.

¹¹ *World Missionary Conference 1910: The History and Records of the Conference Together Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings*, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Perrier, p. 109

¹² Lucas, B., *The Empire of Christ: Being a Study of the Missionary Enterprise in the Light of Modern Religious Thought*, London: Macmillan, 1908, p. 17

¹³ Ibid., p.20

¹⁴ See Samuel Amirtham, "Foreword" for *Moving Forms of Theology*, ed. By I. Selvanayagam, New Delhi: ISPCK, 2002, p.

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¹⁵ *The Search for New Hermeneutics in Asian Christian Theology*, Bangalore/Madras: BTESSC/CLS, 1987

Ibid., p. 2

¹⁶ For papers of a conference of theological educators in India, see *Theological Education and Development*, Ed. by G. Robinson, H. Wilson and C. Duraisingh, Bangalore: Association of Theological Teachers in India, 1984

¹⁷ See articles in *Spirituality and Theological Education*, Ed. by H.S. Wilson, Bangalore: The Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, 1986

¹⁸ See Andrew Wingate, *Does Theological Education Make a Difference? Global Lessons in Mission and Ministry from India and Britain*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999