

Christian Dalits



A Research on Christian Dalits in India

For the Mission Department
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FOREWORD

“Many people have the idea that everything in India is booming business, but there are millions of Christian brothers and sisters who are literally in the shit.”

Dick Kleinhesselink¹

Little people know about the existence of the Dalits. Maybe they are aware that there's a caste system in India, but that almost 200 million individuals suffer from it – that is new to them. I can't blame those people, because before doing this research I was one of them. Still, it is unacceptable to not know about the Dalits and their lives. Dalits are often treated as worse than animals. Day in day out, they have to suffer humiliation and atrocities of any kind². For a westerner the things they have to go through are unimaginable. That is not to say though that we shouldn't try, on the contrary: it is our job to try. To be aware, is the least we can do.

In a sense that is one of the aims of this research: to make people aware. But, to do that is quite simple: you just have to spread the word or let people watch a documentary. Search for 'Dalits' at the internet and after five minutes you are aware. That's not that difficult, right? So, before reading any further, I am urging you to take a look at addendum 1. All that you need to know about the plight of the Dalits is right there. Read it and never forget it.³

What is striking is that while it is easy to find information on Dalits as a whole, it is much more difficult to find something on Dalit Christians. News is often or about Dalits, or about Christians – never about Dalit Christians. That is why another purpose of this research is to give a better understanding of this group. This is needed for two reasons. First, for a Christian it is important to know about your fellow Christians in other parts of the world, so that you can learn from them. Second, organisations and peoples who work with Christians in India, should know about the Dalit Christians. This report can give them instruments to mean more in the lives of these Christians.

The mission department of ICCO and Kerk in Actie saw this need and asked me to fulfil it. For fifteen weeks, which was short, I tried my best to do so and the result is this report.

My hope is that in it they will find what they were looking for.

My gratitude goes to all who supported me in this research and helped me with getting the right information. It was very special to meet all of you – be well!

30-07-2009, Zwolle

Elze Sietzema-Riemer

¹ In interview, 01-07-2009.

² These atrocities are summarised in addendum 1.

³ There is, of course, much more that you can do. One of the things is to watch one or more documentaries. In my 'works consulted' you can find a few documentaries of which some of them are available on YouTube. Watch it and let other people watch it. Let the people know.

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INTRODUCTION

Dalit Christians are officially non-existent in India. The reason for this is that one cannot be a Christian and a Dalit at the same time. Being a Christian means that you leave your Hindu caste-status behind and move on to follow Christ, into a faith where everyone is equal in the sight of God. Right?

Unfortunately this is not the way the cookie crumbles in India. The caste system is so much intertwined with the Indian culture that it is virtually impossible to escape from it. So, Dalit Christians are still downtrodden, still Dalits. The oppression and discrimination won't stop when converting to another religion, although many converts still hope so. Fact is that caste follows you wherever you go, even into the Church, purely because the caste system is fixed in the minds of the Indian people. On the one hand this makes the situation more complex and hard to transform, but on the other it offers hope: we know where to begin. More important: the Dalits know where to begin. That's why over the years a movement stood up with Dalit Christians who are aware of their oppressed and unjust position and who want to be free. But the path to their liberation is steep.

On one hand, this research will show why it is so difficult for Dalit Christians to escape the caste system. On the other, it will give strategies for freedom and instruments for outsiders. The core question that has to be answered with this research is:

What can the mission department of ICCO/KiA mean for the Dalit Christians in India?

To answer this question, first some other questions have to be answered:

1. How does the life of a Dalit Christian look like?

In chapter one, this question will be answered. Attention is given to their characteristics, the discrimination they have to face, their lives in comparison to other Dalits and finally to their understanding of the Christian faith.

2. What should be the role of the Church, nationally and internationally?

This question will be answered in chapter two. It is important to get a better understanding of the role of the Church in the problems of the Dalit Christians, because ultimately this can strengthen and deepen the relations between Churches. The chapter begins with examining the problems the Indian Churches are facing in doing something about the discrimination of the Dalits. Second, the question is answered of what the role should be of the Indian Church. Last, the same question is answered for the Church worldwide.

3. What should be the role of any organisation involved in mission in India?

In chapter three, this question will be answered. Enclosed in it are things that people who are involved in mission activities in India, should be aware of. In the first place there is Dalit theology. This form of liberation theology says a lot about the experience of the Christian faith of Dalit Christians. Then, some liberation strategies are presented. The reason for this is

that, Christian or not, Dalits seek liberation. So, helping the Dalits is to be in solidarity with them and support them in their struggle for liberation.

In the conclusion an overview of the main findings is given and the core question is answered by giving a number of recommendations, meant for the mission department of ICCO/KiA.

Method

These questions will not be answered by myself. Of course, I have written this report, but the answers come from different people who are all much longer involved in this subject than I am. So, I strived to let them speak through me.

The research is mainly based on literature. I have been reading a lot of books on Dalits and Christianity in India, combined the views of the authors and likewise created the (sub)chapters. In addition I have held eight interviews and sent questionnaires through email to two people. For a large part these interviews are used to found the statements of authors. The interviews were for me personally very enlightening, but in most cases too subjective to really state something. It is the story of one person or in the case of the theatre group CARDS, of one group, whereas the books are mostly based on research and so multiple sources. So, scientifically these interviews have less value than the books, also because in much cases there was the problem of language. CARDS for example have much interesting things to say, but because they all didn't speak English that well, it was difficult for them to give words to their thoughts. But, this all doesn't mean that the interviews are not used. All the interviews are captured on tape and are available for anyone to listen.⁴ Moreover, there are some striking things to claim on the basis of them. In most cases I have asked the same questions and comparing the answers with each-other, led to some interesting insights. In the conclusion I will come back at this. There is one interview that proved to be particularly useful: that with Monodeep Daniel. The interview was about Dalit theology and was really eye-opening. That is why I wrote down the entire interview and captured it in addendum 7.

Before moving on to Chapter one, let me first introduce to you the people that I have interviewed:

Monodeep Daniel introduces himself as follows:

"I am working among the Dalit communities in the city and suburbs of Delhi since 1989. Our strategy is to bring social change through the education of children. Therefore I have educational programmes both formal and non-formal for this purpose under the Delhi Brotherhood Society, which is a monastic community in Delhi (Protestant). In the Centre for Dalit Studies I am involved in various capacities, both as student registered through the Centre at the Free University and Vice-Chairperson. Here we are involved in doing Dalit Theology, Dialogue with other contextual theologies and publishing."⁵

⁴ Contact me if you wish to listen to a particular interview.

⁵ Monodeep Daniel in an email to me, 24-07-2009.

Elske van Gorkum works for ICCO since 1990 and since 2005 she is occupied with the Dalit issue which contains Dalit lobby. Elske played a big role in establishing and maintaining the Dalit-relations ICCO has today. Thanks to her ICCO now has relations with, among others, REDS, Dalit Foundation, NCDHR, the Dalit Netwerk Nederland and IDSN. Because of her experience she now is a great source of information on various Dalit issues.

Dick Kleinhesselink writes the following:

“As one of the Program officers in the current Mission Department in ICCO&KerkinActie (PCN), and before in the integrated Mission-Worlddiaconal Asia-Desk, a large part of the partnerships with Christian churches and organisations in India automatically include relating to the Dalit-issue. One of the tasks of church-related partnership and project funding is emphasizing on support for the poor and needy. In that way Christian churches and Dalit-communities are the minorities who need our attention. We, as mission-organisation, maintain relations with India since 1970; and however logically because the vast majority of Christians in India are ‘Dalits’, there is no written policy that we only relate to Dalits. I myself are in this job, relating to India, since 2005, and in the current Mission Department mainly supporting Theological Education Centres in the Southern part of India.”

Kasta Dip: I am the Coordinator for Dalits & Tribal Concerns of Church of North India and also the Coordinator for South Asia Christian Youth Network. I am a Dalit and my work is to sensitize the congregations in socio-economic and political concerns, particularly about the struggles of the oppressed and marginalized such as dalits, indigenous communities in their self-development, dignity and wholesome life.

CARDS is a broad community based organisation, with a Christian management, in and around Guntur / India, specially dedicated to work with Dalit-tribes. They are motivating backwards communities by setting-up village groups, schools for outcasts, advocacy and awareness building through drama and theatre-group performances, spiritual training, and much more. CARDS is handling much of the regional primary- and high school education on behalf of the state government. ICCO/KiA has have a rather long term engagement with CARDS in supporting one or more programmes, by exchanging and visiting (to Dutch congregations) and by financially supporting uplift activities of staff.

1. CHRISTIAN DALITS

In the following chapter the focus lies on answering the question: how does the life of a Dalit Christian looks like? In subchapter 1.1 some difficulties, inherent on this issue, are explained. Subchapter 1.2 is about the features of the Dalit Christians and 1.3 focuses on their discrimination. In subchapter 1.4 the Dalit Christians are compared with other Dalits in terms of welfare. Last, in subchapter 1.5, it is explained what being a Christian means for Christian Dalits.

1.1 A Few Comments on the Side

First of all, *the* Dalit Christian does not exist. Being a Christian may involve very different practices of marriage or worship in different regions.⁶ This means that 'Dalit Christians' represent a wide, multi-dimensional spectrum which should be held in mind when thinking about Dalit Christians.

The second consideration has to do with the naming of Dalits who are Christian. So far I called them 'Dalit Christians'. But, as the attentive reader may have noticed, I titled this chapter: 'Christian Dalits'. This has a reason. The most common phrase to use is Dalit Christian, so that is why I began with using this term. However, along the way I realised that this term is not correct. It is in fact a matter of which word is the noun and which is the adjective modifying it. As will become clear later on, Dalits constitute for almost the entire Christian population in India. Moreover, Christian Dalits are more stipulated by being a Dalit than by being a Christian. The main reason for this is that once converted to another religion, the discrimination continues. Also, as became clear in the various interviews, the identity of Christian Dalits has far more to do with them being a Dalit than by them being a Christian. The third reason, of why it should be 'Christian Dalits', is formulated by John Webster, namely, that 'Christian Dalit' conveys a greater sense of solidarity with other Dalits, than does 'Dalit Christian'.⁷ All in all, reason enough to choose 'Dalit' as the noun and 'Christian' as the modifying adjective.

The first sentence of the introduction states that Christian Dalits are officially non-existent in India, but why this is, is still not answered. It has got to do everything with the third consideration, that is, the difficulty of knowing the number of Christian Dalits in India. Christian Dalits are not recognised by the government. The first phrases about not being a Dalit when you are a Christian, is a logic used by the government to exclude Christian Dalits from the Reservation System.⁸ Later on in this rapport, the discriminatory consequences this

⁶ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), 6.

⁷ John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi: The Indian Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), 1992), iii.

⁸ John C.B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: an Examination of Perspectives* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 90.

has for the Dalits will become clear. But this lack of formal recognition as a social category also creates some difficulties for this research. In the first place, there is an almost complete data vacuum when it comes to Christian Dalits, in contrast to the considerable information and statistical data that is available about the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes: the constitutional categories. This is also acknowledged by Satish Deshpande from the University of Delhi, which conducted a study on the current social scientific knowledge about Dalits in Muslim and Christian Communities.⁹ The matter is made more complicated by the fact that a lot of Dalits feel embarrassed by their caste and have the tendency to deny it. Deshpande writes the following about that: “The argument is routinely offered that something other than pure caste identity – poverty, illiteracy, backwardness etc. – is responsible for the prejudiced reactions of the so-called ‘upper castes’ against the members of the so-called ‘lower castes’.”¹⁰ Altogether, it becomes clear that conducting a research about the Christian Dalits is a difficult task. On a smaller scale it also means that it seems almost impossible to get a grip on the total number of Christian Dalits.

1.2 Features of the Christian Dalits

In the following subchapter I will shortly examine the features of the Christian Dalits. First, their number is explained and then, a picture is drawn of the daily reality of the Christian Dalits.

1.2.1 Their Number

The difficulty of determining the number of Christian Dalits does not mean that people have not given it a try. The most prevailing view is that Dalits constitute around seventy percent of the Christians, which is, although a minority, a 24-million-strong community in India.^{11 12} The number of Dalits of all religions lies around the 200 million. Most people in India are of the Hindu religion; they seem to cover eighty percent of the population.¹³ In a country that has one billion inhabitants, this means there are approximately 800 million Hindus. Overall, these figures should tell us that 200 million people in India are still downtrodden and discriminated against. Furthermore, all religions other than Hinduism are minorities.

What does this mean for the Christian Dalit? First of all, this depends on where one lives. In the north of India there are very few caste Christians; roughly seventy percent of the Church members are Dalit.¹⁴ Consequently, the Christian Dalits in this part of India do not suffer as

⁹ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), 2.

¹⁰ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), 7.

¹¹ Priyanka P. Narain, *A high price for religious conversion?* (The Wall Street Journal, livemint.com, 12-03-2009).

¹² Anton Akkara, “Christianity is part of our national heritage” Indian prime minister tells Kobia (WCC, 20-10-2008).

¹³ Robert J. Stephens, *Sites of conflict in the Indian secular state: secularism, caste and religious conversion* (Michigan: Gale Group, Journal of Church and State, 22-03-2007), 5.

¹⁴ Interview with Monodeep Daniel, 16-06-2009.

much discrimination as the Christian Dalits in the areas where there are more high castes, like the south, where many of the atrocities against Dalits are committed.¹⁵ Second, this means that a Christian Dalit is not only discriminated against because he is a Dalit, but also because he is a Christian.

1.2.2 The Daily Reality of Being a Christian Dalit

All of the sources studied for this research seem to agree on the point that the Christian Dalits still suffer on a daily basis. In this way they are not any different from other Dalits. John Webster writes in his book 'Religion and Dalit Liberation': "Although they form a majority of the Christian Community, they have been an oppressed majority." Farther onward he adds: "Like other Dalits, Christian Dalits live in a caste-based society and their conversion has not been able to change that fact."¹⁶ This last thought is shared by the bulk of the authors investigating the lives of the Christian Dalits. The reason that one will not lose his Dalit-status when converting to Christianity, is well formulated by M.R. Arulraja in his book 'Jesus the Dalit': "Those who commit atrocities against Dalits do not differentiate between Christian Dalits and non-Christian Dalits. For an Indian, a Dalit is a Dalit, whether Christian or not."¹⁷ So, being a Christian or becoming a Christian doesn't change the status of a Dalit, let alone will it change his life in terms of his well-being: for an Indian he is still a Dalit. Earlier on I mentioned that the number of Christian Dalits is an estimated seventy, some would even say eighty or ninety, percent of the total number of Christians. Together with the fact that in India Christianity is seen as an foreign, western religion and converting to it is almost seen as betrayal, this has some serious consequences for the daily life of the Christian Dalits: the suppression intensifies. This is illustrated by the Orissa violence, in December 2008. While these events testify about extreme violence towards Christian Dalits, the suppression also becomes visible in other forms, namely, in the ways they are discriminated against.

1.3 The Discrimination of Christian Dalits

The ways in which the Christian Dalits are discriminated against are very widespread and complex. For now, this means that in order to understand it, we have to categorise the discrimination. I have chosen the following categories, and by this the chapters: 1.3.1 discrimination by fellow Indians, 1.3.2 discrimination by the state, 1.3.3 discrimination in the Church, 1.3.4 discrimination of Christian Dalit women. These subjects are in my opinion the most important to understand the life of a Dalit who is also a Christian. This also follows from the insights of James Massey, himself a Christian Dalit and a prominent in this area of research. He states that the Christian Dalits suffer threefold discrimination: "one at the

¹⁵ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 145.

¹⁶ John C.B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: an examination of perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1999), 89.

¹⁷ M.R. Arulraja, *Jesus the Dalit* (Secunderabad: Jeevan Institute of Printing, 1996), VI.

hands of members of the Indian society in general; two, from the government of India...; and three from Christians of upper caste/class background¹⁸”.

With this selection I do not cover all forms of discrimination, for the reason that some forms, I would even say most, apply to all Dalits, whether Christian or not. And because in this research the focus lies on the specific features of the *Christian* Dalits, this kind of discrimination will not be thoroughly discussed, though some of it can be found in chapter 1.3.1. To find out more about the discrimination of the Dalits, see appendix 1.

1.3.1 Discrimination by Fellow Indians

In this part we take a look at why Christian Dalits are unique in terms of the discrimination they have to face. Are they treated differently from other Dalits?

For a large part they are mistreated the same as other Dalits in the sense that they too are Dalits. And, as was said earlier, for an Indian, a Dalit is a Dalit. But there is more to it than that. It seems that Christian Dalits are treated even worse than Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist Dalits. In the first place, in the eyes of the Indians, Christian Dalits made the ‘mistake’ of embracing the Christian faith, in addition to their ‘crime’ of being born in an untouchable caste.¹⁹ The consequence of this is that Christian Dalits are in fact twice discriminated: as Dalits and as Christians.²⁰ This becomes clear in the atrocities they have to face as Dalits but also as Christians. For a great part this has to do with the resentment Indians feel for Christianity as a ‘western religion’. Godwin Shiri also noticed this in his case study among the Christian Dalits in the South of India:

“It was reported that some of the most common rebukes which they suffer include: ‘Why do you come here for help? You go to your Padri!’ and ‘You better go to England or America for help!’ Apparently these rebukes/insults make no secret of the non-Dalits’ disapproval of the Madigas’ conversion to Christianity! It was observed that while non-Dalits generally treat all ‘untouchables’ with contempt, they treat converted Dalits with greater contempt.²¹”

In addition to this, Christians have a particular place in the Indian society, in the sense that those who know that you are a Christian, would take it for granted that you are a Dalit and treat you as one.²² This becomes clear in the following story, told in the photo book ‘Dalit Lives’ of Paul van der Stap and Elisa Veini, about Sudhakar David, NCDHR associate in Hyderabad:

¹⁸ James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with a Special Reference to Christians* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 97.

¹⁹ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 240.

²⁰ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 114.

²¹ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 110.

²² M.R. Arulraja, *Jesus the Dalit* (Secunderabad: Jeevan Institute of Printing, 1996), 14.

“My wife and I went to see a house. We were driving in the jeep of the organisation, so the house owner thought that we were quite something (grins). When everything was almost settled, he suddenly saw that my wife didn’t have a tilak (a red dot that Hindu women wear on their forehead) and he became suspicious. Were we Hindus? he wanted to know. No, we said, Christians. That was sufficient information, because ninety percent of the Christians are Dalits. We could forget about the house.”²³

This point is also confirmed by Kasta Dip, when he said in the interview: “We form maybe less than 3 percent of our population, so we are a religious minority and any religious minority is also treated like a Dalit.”²⁴ In other words, Christian Dalits suffer because they are ‘untouchables’ and because they are part of a minority.

Finally, their Christian identity estranges them from their counterparts belonging to Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist religions.²⁵ This also intensifies the discrimination.

1.3.2 Discrimination by the State

The National Commission of Scheduled Caste states that untouchability is only prevalent within the Hindu fold, and accordingly there is no untouchability in Christianity.²⁶ To even state this is discriminatory, knowing what we know now. Moreover, these words have some serious consequences for the daily lives of Christian Dalits and their future perspectives.

The main issue here is that Christian Dalits are excluded from the Reservation System. This system is fixed by Indian law and is a form of affirmative action whereby a percentage of seats in the public sector are reserved for the Scheduled Castes, namely, the Dalits²⁷. But, only for the Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist Dalits – Muslims and Christians are denied those benefits, as a result of a presidential order in 1950. They don’t get the Scheduled Caste status, whereas under Article 17 of the Constitution it is clearly stated that no one is allowed to motivate untouchability.²⁸ The Indian People’s Tribunal on Untouchability writes the following about this in its publication ‘untouchability on trial’: “So in that case, under the

²³ Paul van der Stap, Elisa Veini, *Dalit Lives* (Rotterdam: titojoe documentaries, 2005), 16.

²⁴ Skype interview with Kasta Dip, 25-06-2009.

²⁵ M.R. Arulraja, *Jesus the Dalit* (Secunderabad: Jeevan Institute of Printing, 1996), 17.

²⁶ Indian People’s Tribunal on Untouchability, Text Editor: Abid Shah, *Untouchability on Trial* (New Delhi: Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), 2008), 132.

²⁷ Sukhadeo Thorat explains the system as follows: “The government’s approach towards the SCs primarily draws from provisions in the Constitution, which legally abolished the practice of untouchability and the discrimination arising out of untouchability (article 17). The Constitution guarantees equality before the law (Article 14); provides for the promotion of the educational and economic interests of SCs and for their protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46); provides for special measures through reservation in government service; and also reserves seats in democratic political institutions (Articles 330 and 335, 73rd Amendment Act, 1992). Finally, the Constitution provides for the establishment of a permanent body to investigate and monitor the social and economic progress of SCs on an annual basis.” Extracted from page 1 in his book *Dalits in India: Search for a Common Destiny* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2009). Farther on, on page 5, he writes: “Both the scope and extent of the reservation policy are confined to the state-run and – supported sectors. The SC workforce in the private sector, which employs more than 90 per cent of the SC workers, remains unprotected from possible exclusion and discrimination.”

²⁸ Indian People’s Tribunal on Untouchability, Text Editor: Abid Shah, *Untouchability on Trial* (New Delhi: Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), 2008), 132.

SC/ST Act, the hierarchy of the religions should be prosecuted. But the National Commission of Scheduled Castes tells that it is only the Hindu religion that motivates untouchability. Isn't this a paradox?²⁹ By denying the Muslim and Christian Dalits those benefits, the state is violating its own laws that are meant to safeguard the equality of all people, irrespective of caste and creed distinctions.³⁰ But that's not all. Shiri Godwin found out that Christian Dalits not only get this treatment when they plead for Scheduled Castes benefits, but also when they make a request for ordinary state benefits, meant for Other Backward Classes and for economic weaker sections.³¹ In this way the state does not only discriminate on the basis of religion and thus a denial of religious liberty, but they also punish those Dalits who have had the courage to exercise their religious liberty and convert to Christianity or Islam.³² Not surprisingly many Christian Dalits conceal and deny that they are Christian, in order to get the benefits of reservation.³³ This was also confirmed by the interview I had with CARDS: "In our education we don't say that we are Christians, because then you don't get a scholarship. That's why in school we say we are from the Scheduled Caste. Like that we are getting a scholarship for our study."³⁴

The implications of the earlier mentioned presidential order reaches farther than the deprivation of Christian Dalits from the reservations. It also negates them the protection to which they are entitled when they would belong to the Scheduled Castes. Hence, they cannot claim protection under the Untouchability Offences Act of 1979 or the Civil Rights Act of 1955 or the Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989. So, if Christian Dalits are assaulted, they cannot call upon any provision of the Constitution or Act.^{35 36}

Finally, there is one other way in which the state discriminates the Christian Dalits, namely, through India's seven state-level Freedom of Religion Acts, also known as the 'anti-conversion laws'.³⁷ According to the CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) briefing of 2008 on religiously-motivated violence and discrimination against Christians in India, these acts

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 239.

³¹ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 240.

³² John C.B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: an examination of perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1999), 90.

³³ M.R. Arulraja, *Jesus the Dalit* (Secunderabad: Jeevan Institute of Printing, 1996), 31.

³⁴ Interview with the women in the theatre group CARDS, 04-06-2009.

³⁵ Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 2000), 158.

³⁶ The Indian People's Tribunal on Untouchability writes the following about this in its publication *Untouchability on Trial*: "The plight of Dalit Christians is the most hardly known and is seldom talked about. The community is so powerless and so small in numbers in comparison to the population of other communities that in most of the cases they have not been able to access social justice. The only way most of the atrocities have been retained is in memory...I cannot file a case under the SC/ST Act. Dalit Christians are psychologically affected by this subjugation. This make them shy away from approaching the law or the judiciary." Extracted from page 131.

³⁷ For an example of such an anti-conversion law, see addendum 2 – the 'Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act'. For more information about how this works in reality, I recommend the documentary 'a question of faith' by Journeyman Pictures, available on youtube.

‘pose a threat to freedom of religion through their restriction of religious conversions and their damaging normative effect on religious minorities.’³⁸ In addition, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, states in her 2008 report on her mission to India that these laws raise serious human rights concerns.³⁹ She is concerned that these laws are being used to belittle Christians and Muslims.⁴⁰

All in all, despite the official abolition of discrimination based on caste and religion through laws, the discrimination still continues and even more so for the Christian Dalits. Instead of trying to end this, the government is making it worse.

1.3.3 Discrimination in the Church in India

Earlier on we established that despite conversion to Christianity, Dalits remain Dalits.⁴¹ Shockingly, this is also the case in the Churches in India. This means that the Dalits who turn to a religion that should give them freedom, don’t get any freedom. This part will discuss how this works and how the caste system still plays an important role in the Churches, even though it has lost its divine sanction.⁴²

First, the question has to be answered of how it is even possible that there is discrimination in the Churches. It started with the early missionaries: they were not able to put an end to the caste system in the Churches; instead they maintained the status quo.⁴³ That is why Ambedkar, undoubtedly the most important person for the Dalits⁴⁴, criticised the Christian missionaries ‘who took so much pain to denounce idol worship’ but did little to unseat the idol of caste.⁴⁵ And when time elapses, it gets more and more difficult to do something about it. So today, Churches have a hard time fighting it. Moreover, there are still many people who don’t want to change the situation, mainly because they still believe in their

³⁸ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *India: Religiously-Motivated Violence & Discrimination against Christians* (Surrey: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 2009), 9.

³⁹ Asma Jahangir, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief: Addendum: Mission to India* (United Nations: General Assembly, 2008), 22.

⁴⁰ Asma Jahangir, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief: Addendum: Mission to India* (United Nations: General Assembly, 2008), 16.

⁴¹ John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi: The Indian Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), 1992), 234.

⁴² John C.B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: an examination of perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1999), 91.

⁴³ See for more information on this, the book *The Dalit Christians: A History*, by John Webster.

⁴⁴ Unfortunately, this is not the place to dwell on the person of Ambedkar. But, to have a good understanding of the Indian culture as a whole and specifically of the Dalits – one really has read more about Ambedkar. I would suggest, to begin with, the book *Annihilation of Caste*, from Ambedkar himself. It is also available online on the website <http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/web/index.html>

⁴⁵ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 23.

hearts that Dalits should be downtrodden⁴⁶, and they just want to keep the power in their own hands.⁴⁷

But, with what kind of discrimination are we dealing here? A very worrisome place where one can find discrimination is at schools:

“Our children face educational discrimination because we are poor. In Jhansi, there are very good Christian schools. But while children from other castes are able to study there, poor Christian children are thrown out by sixth or seventh grade because we cannot afford the fees.⁴⁸”

These schools are Christian institutions and the Church refuses to take responsibility for this outrageous form of discrimination. James Massey puts it like this in an interview:

“Take the case of elitist Christian schools. How many Dalit children have been admitted to them so far? These schools cater almost entirely to the 'upper' caste elites, Hindus and others. So, in this sense the Churches we have are not the Church of Christ. Christ tells us to love our neighbours as ourselves. Who are the neighbours of the leaders of the Church? Are they the starving Dalits, who may share their Christian faith, or the rich industrialists who are sucking the blood of the poor and who send their children to elitist Christian schools in air- conditioned cars?”⁴⁹

Farther on in the interview he also blames the Church of North India for not doing enough to eradicate this form of discrimination.

Another place where discrimination occurs is in the Church itself. Here we can find several forms of discrimination.

Clergy representation

Most of the literature reports that very little Dalits cover any positions in the Church.^{50 51} It seems like the Church is in the hands of the high castes, which is strange given the fact that the majority of the Christians are Dalits. Elske van Gorkum gave an example of this in the interview I had with her:

“You could see this even at the Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits of the World Council of Churches in Bangkok, in March 2009. There was not one Dalit among the delegates of the Church of North India and the Church of South India. And this conference was entirely about Dalits!”⁵²

⁴⁶ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), XI.

⁴⁷ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 121.

⁴⁸ Kamal Joseph, founder of the Ideal Christian Association in Jhansi in the article *A high price for religious conversion?* (12-03-2009) by Priyanka P. Narain, found on Livemint.com (the wall street journal).

⁴⁹ Yoginder Sikand, *Interview with James Massey*, (Christian Persecution India Articles, 25-02-2005).

⁵⁰ Indian People's Tribunal on Untouchability, Text Editor: Abid Shah, *Untouchability on Trial* (New Delhi: Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), 2008), 132.

⁵¹ Joshva Raja, *Mission Challenges from Contemporary India* (Birmingham: Queen's Foundation, 2009).

⁵² Interview with Elske van Gorkum, 02-06-2009.

Worship

In some places it is still not possible to worship God together with the high castes. For example, Dalits have to sit separate from high castes in the Church⁵³, often on the floor. Furthermore, in these Churches, Dalits have absolutely no liturgical participation whatsoever. Another form of discrimination is that Dalits who want to take Holy Communion were not allowed to drink from the cup, *before* the high castes did. Otherwise the high castes would get polluted by them. For these reasons there are now a lot of Dalit Churches⁵⁴ in these, mostly rural⁵⁵, areas, so they don't have to be afraid of any discrimination when they want to worship God.⁵⁶ But, to be fair, there is little known about this subject. The examples of discrimination that are given here are possibly outdated. More research has to be done to find out what kinds of discrimination the Church is facing today. For now it is important to remember that there *is* still inequity in the Church⁵⁷; despite the fact that the Christian Bible is full of passages where one can read that we should treat each other as equals and with love.

Inter-dining and inter-marriage

It seems like the Christian Dalits suffer also caste discrimination at the hands of their non-Dalit co-religionists. Godwin Shiri's case study found that: "While the Christian households of non-Dalit origin are found to be maintaining active social relationship with many non-Dalit castes and communities, as far as Christian Dalits are concerned they are found to keep a clear distance."⁵⁸ An example of this is that high castes won't allow Dalits in their house. Another form of discrimination is that inter-dining and inter-marriage, between Dalits and higher castes, is still a big taboo. Christians from a non-Dalit background are more likely to marry someone from the same caste than from the same religion.⁵⁹ So, marriages between Dalits and non-Dalits are very uncommon, also within the Christian community.

1.3.4 Discrimination of Christian Dalit Women

Sadly, Christian Dalit Women are the worst victims in this all. It is well known, at least I hope so, that the Dalit women in India are one of the most oppressed groups. Often they are referred to as 'double Dalits'. Their position is horrifying: they are treated as less than animals because they are Dalits and on top of that, women. Being raped is not that uncommon for a woman in India. But, the question here is: does this also counts for the Christian Dalit women? Although this question deserves its own research, for now I can only present what came along about Christian Dalit women in the literature and the interviews.

⁵³ This is also seen in the primary schools, where the Dalit Children have to sit at the back of the class.

⁵⁴ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), 11.

⁵⁵ Joshua Raja, *Mission Challenges from Contemporary India* (Birmingham: Queen's Foundation, 2009).

⁵⁶ To see more about this, watch the documentary *India Untouched* by Stalin K. Also available on youtube.

⁵⁷ This is confirmed by all the participants of the interviews (who knew something about this issue).

⁵⁸ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 225.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

The most significant piece of information on this came from the CARDS women. In the interview with them it became very clear that Christian Dalit women are still subjugated. They suffer more because they are women. Also, they are expected to be a housewife, or, as Manoj Manjari Kumar put it: “The role of women is limited to child bearing and rearing and not to ask many questions⁶⁰”. The idea I got from the CARDS women is that women are constantly busy with working, and get no respect let alone appreciation.⁶¹ In addition to this, all the respondents of the interviews confirmed that the treatment of women is still a very big issue in the Christian community. Some of them were more optimistic than others. The CARDS men for example acknowledged that there is problem, but they gave the impression that they were fighting it – by treating their own wife with respect and love or by speaking up when they see other men treating their wives badly.⁶² It also seems that in rural areas the treatment of women is worse than in the urban areas. According to Kasta Dip this can be explained by the fact that in rural areas the men are less educated.⁶³ He is thus convinced that education could help tremendously in fighting the discrimination of women.

Moving on to the literature, the picture gets even grimmer. In ‘Caste Out!’ David Haslam writes the following about the essay ‘Fontiers’ of Kamal Raja Selvi:

“She describes Dalit women as ‘fourth class citizens’. She tells how in some Christian communities the women have stepped forward to fill gaps in leadership. A woman may have a white-collar job. But at home she has still all the dirty jobs to do. Being educated or employed does not offer freedom, it can even make life worse. Of course, ‘Christian men know and accept that all are equal and that all are made in the image of God’, but if they put that into practice they undermine their easy life. Men pay all kinds of compliments to women and proclaim their freedom but at home the woman is an ‘unpaid servant, a child-baring machine’.⁶⁴”

Godwin Shiri saw during his case study a ‘deep-rooted male-domination ideology’, which was, according to him, less admitted and practiced more. He also draws the conclusion that the lives of Christian Dalit women are more miserable than that of the men.⁶⁵ Finally, going to the police when something bad happens to you as a woman is not a good idea – they seem just as prone to abuse Dalit women as anyone else.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Questionnaire via email with Manoj Manjari Nanda Kumar, 05-07-2009.

⁶¹ Interview with the women in the theatre group CARDS, 04-06-2009.

⁶² Interview with the men from CARDS, 16-06-2009.

⁶³ Skype interview with Kasta Dip, 25-06-2009.

⁶⁴ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 82.

⁶⁵ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 245.

⁶⁶ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 87.

1.3.5 Reflection

And yet, people all over the world still believe that the world's largest 'democracy' (India), is doing well – very well. They figure: caste discrimination is by law illegal, so the problem must be solved. The opposite seems true now. The discrimination that this research covers is just the tip of the iceberg. Day in day out people are struggling to stay alive, physically and emotionally. And the worst thing is that the government of India is hugely in denial.⁶⁷ This denial runs so deep that even the Indian people themselves will say that the caste system is history. And then, *if* there are any problems at all, India itself should solve them – the rest of the world should mind its own business. But history shows that India is *not* resolving its problems and international attention is necessary. That's why the Indians I spoke are more or less saying: the people all over the world should know of the problems the Dalits are facing. Awareness is the key, at least, to start with.

1.4 Christian Dalits' Welfare in Comparison

Based on the Status Report by the Department of Sociology of the University of Delhi, on the Current Social Scientific Knowledge on Dalits in Muslim and Christian communities.

With the previous chapters we have established that the Christian Dalits suffer discrimination, despite their faith. But how is this in comparison with Dalits from other faith groups? And what does this discrimination say about their overall welfare? In the following chapter this will be discussed by means of the status report of the University of Delhi; in my view a very important piece of information for this research.

According to the report Christian Dalits suffer the most caste inequality of all Dalits, this applies to both rural and urban India^{68 69}. This is due to the fact that among Christians there are more castes represented than in any other communities. Moreover, the non-Dalit Christians, and especially the upper caste Christians, tend to be much better off.⁷⁰ Hence, there is more inequality and thus discrimination. The least caste inequality is found with the Muslim Dalits. This does not mean, however, that their standard of living is any better. Surprisingly, in terms of proportions of population in poverty or affluence, the Christian Dalits are relatively better off than most of the other Dalit communities, except for Sikh

⁶⁷ Robert J. Stephens for example writes in his article *Sites of Conflict in the Indian Secular State: Secularism, Caste and Religious Conversion* (Michigan: Gale Group, 2007): "On the international arena, it is a deplorable fact that the Indian Government is not willing, or rather strongly opposed to dealing with caste discrimination as an international human rights problem. This was the position taken already in 2001 at the World Conference against racism in Durban. But in 2008 it again became painfully clear that India refuses to accept caste discrimination as a serious human rights body of the UN." Extracted from page 4.

⁶⁸ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), 50.

⁶⁹ See addendum 3.

⁷⁰ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), 63.

Dalits, who are even better off.⁷¹ This means that Christian Dalits are generally more successful than other groups. More specifically, Christians from all castes score as one of the best in terms of the amount of graduates, in comparison to other faith groups.⁷² Also striking is the finding that Muslim Dalits, in almost all categories, are worse off than Christian Dalits. With respect to proportions of population in poverty or affluence, Muslim Dalits are 'unquestionably the worst off among all Dalits, in both the rural and specially the urban sector, being completely absent in the affluent group'.⁷³ This is probably due to the given that there is not much caste differences in the Muslim group: they all seem to be poor. Also among the urban Muslims there seems to be a serious poverty.⁷⁴

In economic terms, all Dalits are basically the same. When looked at the average levels of consumptions there is not much difference. Only in the top 25% there is seen difference, but overall: 75% are economically indistinguishable from each other.⁷⁵

In terms of occupational structure, Christian Dalits in urban India have the highest 'regular wage' proportion.⁷⁶ Again, here the Muslims are at the bottom slot. In rural India however, in this category, they are not the group that is worst off. This is because they seem to be somewhat better represented among the 'self-employed in agriculture'.⁷⁷

Finally, with respect to educational levels, the Muslim Dalits are still the worst off. Again, the Christian Dalits are at the top: they are a little better off in rural areas, whereas in urban India they are significantly better off. Buddhist score the highest here, because the high proportions of graduates and or higher degrees.⁷⁸ Of course, education is still very much a problem for all Dalits, since the non-Dalits are doing much better in this respect, specially the upper castes.

All in all, the insights that this report has given are very interesting. It seems that the plight of the Muslim Dalits needs more attention than it gets now. The writers of the report were very clear about the Muslims: they are the worst off. The Christian Dalits at the other hand are doing relatively well. Of course, they are still Dalits and by that still subjugated, this also becomes clear in the finding of the report that there is still a lot of discrimination among Christians. This is very worrisome and of great importance for this research. But next to this is the message that in comparison with other Dalits, they are quite capable of moving away from their dominated status. This is not to say that this group doesn't need any attention. It is to say that together with the Christian Dalits, attention should be given to the other Dalits as well. They are also suffering.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See addendum 4.

⁷³ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), 63.

⁷⁴ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* (Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 2008), 64.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

1.5 Christian Dalits' Comprehension of Christian Faith

To complete the picture of the lives of Christian Dalits, one task remains: understanding the 'Christian' in 'Christian Dalit'. How do Christian Dalits perceive the Christian faith, what does it mean to them?

One thing is clear: it is very different from what we, westerners, are used to. The main reason for this is that Christianity has a whole different meaning for Dalits. Ultimately, Dalits look for dignity and justice and it is in the Christian faith that they can find this. In this way, being a Christian means to oppose Hinduism and its caste system. This is also the reason that Ambedkar converted to Buddhism:

"Because we have the misfortune of calling ourselves Hindus we are treated thus. If we were members of another faith none would dare treat us so. Choose any religion which gives you equality of states and treatment. We shall repair our mistakes now. I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power."⁷⁹

This quote from Ambedkar is very important in this regard, for, according to the literature and various interviews, it is the main reason for Dalits to convert to any religion, including Christianity. After Ambedkar's conversion, many Dalits followed for they understood that it was indeed one of the things they could do to resist the caste system. Unfortunately, as we have seen, even converted they can't escape it.

This reason to convert also shapes the Christian Dalits' comprehensions of Christianity. What matters for Christian Dalits is *ethics* – a way of life that leads to transformation, and not so much meta-physical explanations.⁸⁰ Godwin Shiri's findings on this are very interesting. Through his case study he found that Dalits' faith perceptions 'do not appear to be overly other-worldly or innerly spiritual but rather well bases on existential premises.' An example of this is Christian Dalits' perception of sin, which are mostly socio-ethical in nature. So, sin means things like stealing, causing physical violence, being irresponsible and so on. In this sense, sin is not so much perceived in a spiritual sense and thus, 'original sin' and 'bondage of sin' are of no great concern to them.⁸¹ Instead, it carries a strong social or corporate and justice dimension to it. This is also true for the concept of salvation. Shiri puts it like this: "For most Christian Dalits if doing bad things is 'sin', doing good things is 'salvation'.⁸²" What strikes me the most in Shiri's description of what salvation means for Christian Dalits, is that Jesus as saviour is not mentioned once. Being saved by Jesus doesn't seem to be an important concept for Christian Dalits. This becomes very clear in the interview with Monodeep Daniel when he said:

⁷⁹ As quoted in: Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 2000), 134.

⁸⁰ Sukhadeo Thorat, *Dalits in India: Search for a Common Destiny* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2009), 140.

⁸¹ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 230.

⁸² Ibid.

“We see the experience of rejection in Christ. So, the Dalit experience of alienation, of rejection, we see in Christ. For instance, for us, to see the death of Christ and relate it to us as an idea of substitution is very difficult for us. I mean we don’t need anybody to die for us. We all die every day. How does the death of Christ substitute our killings every day? It doesn’t. It does not relate to us. But solidarity does. Solidarity is salvation for us.”

Hence, Jesus suffers *alongside* the Dalits and not specifically *for* them. This is further explained by James Massey:

“Now, Jesus, who was born in a desperately poor family, spent the whole of his life working for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. That is why for me, as a Christian, it is a natural expression of my faith commitment to be involved in the movement for Dalit liberation, because Jesus, the person in whom I have put my faith, became for me what I am today—Dalit, oppressed and despised, in order that I and millions of others like me could be liberated. But if Jesus is my source of inspiration, people from other faiths may have their own sources from which they draw their strength, and that is fine by me.”⁸³

In this way, Jesus is an example to follow, just as Ambedkar was. Another important characteristic of Dalit theology is interesting here, also formulated by James Massey:

“Western Christian theology is based on the classical Greek dualism between the this-world and the other-world, between matter and spirit. In contrast, Dalit theology is deeply rooted in this world, in the this-worldly experiences and sufferings of the Dalits, and, rather than promising the Dalits a place in heaven, it inspires them to struggle for transforming this world to bring justice for the Dalits.”⁸⁴

He then continues:

“If at all dialogue has any meaning for us Dalits, you have to tell us how much your faith can contribute in improving the lives of the millions of our people who are living in conditions worse than slavery. If religion cannot do so, then of what use is it? So, for us religion has worth only if it helps us in our struggle for liberation.”⁸⁵

In this all it becomes clear that Christian Dalits’ existential status deeply affects their faith perceptions and that they have adopted a quite remarkable holistic perception of Christianity.⁸⁶ According to Shiri, this is due to ‘the indescribably difficult living conditions they live in’ and the ‘consequent struggle for survival’.⁸⁷

So, despite all the odds against it, many Christian Dalits chose to remain Christian. It is the promise and the hope Christianity offers them that make them to stay. It gives them tools to

⁸³ Yoginder Sikand, *Interview with James Massey*, (Christian Persecution India Articles, 25-02-2005).

⁸⁴ Yoginder Sikand, *Interview with James Massey*, (Christian Persecution India Articles, 25-02-2005).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 231.

⁸⁷ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 249.

fight the inequality and inspiration in the person of Jesus. But it seems that their experience of the Christian faith is totally different from the other Christians in India: the high castes. And because the high castes control the entire Indian Christian Church, this is a big problem. The discrimination of the Christian Dalits run so deep that their existence seem to be neglected in the Indian Church, for they continue with the traditional theology without any openness to the experiences of the Dalits.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ This was also confirmed by Monodeep Daniel and CARDS.

2. THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

In terms of discrimination, the position of the Christian Dalits in India still isn't any better from the position of other Dalits. In some cases it is even worse, for they are not only Dalits, but Christians also. Besides, among Christians there is a lot of inequality and also discrimination, this is also very apparent in the Churches. Furthermore, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Christian Dalits' experience of the Christian faith seems to be quite different from the traditional theology. The question then arises: what should be the role of the Church in this, in India but also internationally? How should they deal with this issue? The answers to these questions can be found in this chapter, and are based on literature research. First, the problems that the Church in India is facing with regard to the Christian Dalits will be examined. After that, the questions above will be answered.

2.1 Problems of the Church in India

The Church's biggest problem is their unwillingness to meet the needs of the Christian Dalits. There are some who acknowledge the plight of the Dalits and who want to do something about it, but as a whole, the Church is incapable of doing just that.⁸⁹ This was also acknowledged at the conference on justice for Dalits in Bangkok, this March: "We were reminded in challenging and sometimes emotional terms of the continuing prevalence of caste in the Church and the silence of the Church in addressing caste both inside and outside the Church."⁹⁰

The reason for this is something which was also mentioned in the previous chapter, namely, that the governing of the Church is in the hands of the upper castes. So, although the Indian Church is a Church of the Dalits, it projects an 'elitist' image.⁹¹ This has some serious consequences for the Church in India and the Christian Dalits in particular. First of all, despite many promises, their situation is not getting better because they are with the Christian community: "When we converted, the Church had promised us equality and promised to protect our interests and undertake measures for us. But what we got is more discrimination."⁹² This is for example seen in the Christian educational institutions, which are almost inaccessible for Christian Dalits.⁹³ And then it is just a matter of time that Christian

⁸⁹ K.E. Rajpramukh, *Dalit Christians of Andhra: Under the Impact of Missionaries* (New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2008), 80.

⁹⁰ Dennis Frado, David Haslam, Roxanne Jordan, Mikko Malkavaara, Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Robina Winbush, *The Bangkok Declaration and Call* about the Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits at Bangkok (Geneva: World Council of Churches and The Lutheran World Federation, 21-24 March 2009), 2.

⁹¹ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 74.

⁹² Kamal Joseph, founder of the Ideal Christian Association in Jhansi, in the article *A high price for religious conversion?* by Priyanka P. Narain. (The Wall Street Journal, livemint.com, 12-03-2009).

⁹³ James Massey, *Towards Dalit Hermeneutics: re-reading the text, the history and the literature* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 64.

Dalits begin to doubt their conversion: they have lost any right to reservation and they realise that they are not getting anything from the Church.⁹⁴ This disappointment can then eventually lead to Dalits reconvert to Hinduism, as was seen for example in Chennai, where last April about thousand Christian Dalits reconverted to Hinduism.⁹⁵

At this moment, the leadership and the management of the Church in India is not joining the Dalits in their fight for freedom. As John Webster writes in his book 'The Dalit Christians: a History':

"In that struggle the Church has proven to be weak, ineffective and often an instrument of caste oppression, even though it is predominantly Dalit in composition. The Church must repent and become the shalom community God created it to be, living and acting in solidarity with all Dalits."⁹⁶

This difficulty of the Indian Church to effectively play a liberative role is further explained by Felix Wilfred, a prominent on Dalit theology, in his book 'On the Banks of Ganges':

"First of all there is a general association of Christianity with colonialism. Closely connected with it is the fact that Christianity is seen in India as a 'foreign' religion, which is not only due to historical reasons, but also because of the current practices of the Church in its life, worship, structures, etc. Further, there is the fact of the strong institutionalisation of the Church which started from the 19th century onwards. What is to be particularly taken note of is that the Church is associated with many institutions in the urban areas catering the upper classes. It is true of all parts of India and Asia at large. This strongly institutionalised image of the Church with a lot of money, power and resources, and rooted strongly in the urban setting, puts it in no position as truly an agent of liberation for the Indian masses of the poor who are mostly concentrated in the Indian villages. Moreover, it is a fact that the Church in its practice is very much along the lines of following a simple social-welfare or developmentalist [sic] approach. This is in marked contrast to the demands of the situation wherein liberation is very much bound up with political questions."⁹⁷

All in all, the Church has to overcome quite a few problems. These problems all have to do with the Church being in hands of the caste people. To turn things around, the Church should start with trying to understand the Dalits and subsequently listen to them. After all, the Indian Church is for a great part the Church of the Dalits.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Priyanka P. Narain, *A high price for religious conversion?* (The Wall Street Journal, livemint.com, 12-03-2009).

⁹⁶ John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi: The Indian Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), 1992), 235.

⁹⁷ Felix Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002), 109.

2.2 What Should be the Role of the Indian Church?

The majority of the authors share the conviction that the Church should be more holistic.⁹⁸ At the moment, the Church is far from that, while Dalits seem to really need this. They want for example education, economic assistance and pastoral care, things the Church is not offering.⁹⁹ But, according to James Massey, that's not all: "A radical change, a genuine paradigm shift in mission outlook, is needed in order to become an authentic, prophetic Church, truly committed to Jesus crucified and to the mission he entrusted to it in India."¹⁰⁰ He then gives a few suggestions about what the role of the Church should be in the Dalit issue. First, he suggest an incarnation model, summarized in John 1: 1-14 and Luke 2: 1-7. This model is about God who, as a human being, became a Dalit, the poorest of the poor. Through this he showed his complete solidarity with the Dalits and so, the Church must follow him in this. Second, the Church should look more closely at their doctrine. Third, the Church should redefine its concept of mission, in the sense that it must be more holistic in nature. Last: "The Church in India should know that millions of Dalits in general, and about 1.5 million Dalit Christians, are still waiting to receive the whole of salvation, because so far they have only been offered the half of salvation which speaks of 'saving their souls'."¹⁰¹ This last suggestion has a lot to do with the Church identifying itself with the Dalits, something that is also mentioned a lot in the literature.¹⁰²

Another proposition comes from Rev. Dr. Joshva Raja. In his publication 'Mission Challenges from Contemporary India' he proposes a fourth way in missiology: Christian communities should be encouraged to engage with other faith communities, in order to 'address together the issue of poverty and thus all other related issues'.¹⁰³ In this he clearly sees an task for the Indian Church. Felix Wilfred agrees with him when he writes in 'On the Banks of Ganges': "The Church can play an important role in the social transformation of India and the liberation of the oppressed by forging relationships with people of other faiths and working together with them."¹⁰⁴

John Webster draws a great deal of importance to the person of Ambedkar. In his book 'Religion and Dalit Liberation' he acknowledges that Ambedkar has been of great influence on Dalit theology. Manohara Prasad too stresses the value of Ambedkar in Christianity: "If Christianity, and the message of Christ is relevant to Christians all over the world including

⁹⁸ To name some: David Haslam, Godwin Shire, James Massey.

⁹⁹ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 137.

¹⁰⁰ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 75.

¹⁰¹ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 76.

¹⁰² For example Joshva Raja in *Mission Challenges from Contemporary India* and Felix Wilfred in *On the Bank of Ganges*.

¹⁰³ M.R. Arulraja, *Jesus the Dalit* (Secunderabad: Jeevan Institute of Printing, 1996).

¹⁰⁴ Felix Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002), 108.

Dalit Christians, so is the struggle and teachings of Dr. Ambedkar to all Dalits including Dalit Christians.¹⁰⁵”

Last but not least, is the cry for a better educational system. Godwin Shiri and David Haslam both agree that the Church’s ‘almost insignificant contribution in the field of education is beyond comprehension’.^{106 107} Also Felix Wilfred wants the Church to do much more in this area:

“Education is perhaps the most important means for the empowerment of the Dalits and it will determine their future destiny... For many institutions, it calls for a radical revision of their policies and creation of appropriate new means and structures that will enable the education of Dalit boys and girls in large numbers... Churches do not grand admission to many Dalit students.¹⁰⁸”

The issue of education was also of great concern to Monodeep Daniel. As almost all the people that I have interviewed, he sees education as the key to liberation. But he also sees that the role of the protestant Church in India is ‘notoriously backwards’.¹⁰⁹ He explained that while the catholic Church has already agreed to give admission to all catholic children, the protestant Church have yet to make that decision. That means that even till today many Christian Dalit children are refused at the Christian schools. Clearly, this should change.

2.3 What Should be the Role of the International Church?

When asked this question in interviews, the answer always revolved around ‘awareness’ and ‘solidarity’. Because many people outside India are oblivious to the problems in India, the first thing that should happen is that people at least know about these problems. Next, Christians all over the world should be in solidarity with the Dalits. This is also an important feature in the literature. James Massey, for example, writes the following: “The Christians and the Churches, both nationally and internationally, can indeed play an effective role in the Dalit issue provided they are willing to be in solidarity with the Dalits by following the incarnational model of Jesus Christ himself.”¹¹⁰ David Haslam also sees a role for the International Church:

“It is time now, perhaps long past time, for the world outside India to get involved. Casteism is the apartheid of today and it needs the same commitment and some of the same tactics and strategies from the world community to challenge it and root it

¹⁰⁵ N. Manohara Prasad in *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: A Centenary Tribute* by Arvind P. Nirmal and V. Devasahayam (eds.) (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 1991), 18.

¹⁰⁶ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 40.

¹⁰⁷ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 251.

¹⁰⁸ Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 2000), 155.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Monodeep Daniel, 16-06-2009.

¹¹⁰ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India’s Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 77.

out... The World Church must challenge the Indian Church as – eventually – it challenged the South Africa Churches in the ‘60s and ‘70s.¹¹¹”

Another way the international Church could support the Dalits in their struggle is by pressurising the Indian government. This is also mentioned by David Haslam as a strategy for outsiders. He speaks of ‘persuading, shaming or challenging’ the Indian government.¹¹² This seems needed since the government is failing in handling the situation. This strategy was also proposed by Joseph D’souza during the NZR meeting in Amersfoort, when he said: “Nothing but a concerted global opinion is going to bring this down – shame is the best instrument to reach this goal: bringing down the caste system.”¹¹³

Furthermore, it is important that Churches keep an close eye on the money they send to India. It doesn’t arrive automatically at the right place. An example:

“We know there is a lot of donation coming into India to help poor Christians. What I want to know is where it all is going. What I see is that priests who used to travel on cycles now have cars and fancy homes to live. But they don’t have Rs900 to help for a boy’s education.”¹¹⁴

And when foreign Churches support programmes in India, they should always ask how it is challenging the caste system.¹¹⁵

In conclusion, there is enough to do for the World Churches. But the most important thing is that the Churches, as in the words of the Bangkok declaration, ‘take Dalit liberation and solidarity up as a central mission objective’^{116 117}.

¹¹¹ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 146.

¹¹² David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 160.

¹¹³ Joseph D’Souza of the Dalit Freedom Network, during the NZR-meeting of 02-04-2009 in Amersfoort.

¹¹⁴ Kamal Joseph, founder of the Ideal Christian Association in Jhansi in the article *A high price for religious conversion?* (12-03-2009) by Priyanka P. Narain, found on Livemint.com (the wall street journal).

¹¹⁵ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 157.

¹¹⁶ Dennis Frado, David Haslam, Roxanne Jordan, Mikko Malkavaara, Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Robina Winbush, *The Bangkok Declaration and Call* about the Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits at Bangkok (Geneva: World Council of Churches and The Lutheran World Federation, 21-24 March 2009), 5.

¹¹⁷ The Bangkok declaration and call is a very interesting piece of paper in this regard. See addendum 5.

3. THE ROLE OF A MISSION ORGANISATION

Over the years, the way we do mission has changed. For example, it has become much more holistic and its character open-minded. This doesn't make life easier for people involved in mission, on the contrary. Every situation calls for another approach, another focus. Because programme officers move around on a playground which is getting bigger every day, the meaning of mission becomes quite vague. What to do is not that obvious anymore. And when in India, it becomes even more difficult. That is why it is important to answer the question: what should be the role of an organisation involved in mission in India? This last chapter aims to do this, by looking at what different authors have to say about this subject. Because most of the authors do not give a clear-cut answer to this question, I divided the chapter in two themes that were frequently found in the literature. The first is 'Dalit theology'. In this section attention is given to what this means and why it is needed. The second topic is 'liberation'. The idea behind this is that people who are involved in mission in India, should know about the ways of Dalit liberation.

3.1 Dalit Theology

When doing research on Christian Dalits, it is impossible to escape the phenomenon of 'Dalit theology'. This form of theology is up and rising in India, because it serves the Christian Dalits with an alternative for the traditional theology. Moreover, it is a key to their liberation.

1.3.1 Why is it Needed?

The main reason for why Dalit theology is needed, is because the current theology¹¹⁸ originated from the experiences and background of upper caste Christians.¹¹⁹ This is a problem because, as a result, it is not relevant to the majority of the Christians: the Dalits. While the high castes are busy with searching for ways to give their faith an Indian and even Hindu impression, the Dalits are trying to survive. And so, the traditional theology has failed them and continuously does so. That is why there is a need for another expression of Indian Christian Theology.^{120 121}

When looked at more closely, there are several elements of this traditional theology that are particularly inapplicable for the Dalits. Examples are individual salvation, personal holiness and the emphasis on other-worldliness. According to James Massey this only provides a 'half

¹¹⁸ Both European-based 'systematic theology' and contemporary Indian Christian Theology.

¹¹⁹ James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with a Special Reference to Christians* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 169.

¹²⁰ James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with a Special Reference to Christians* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 173.

¹²¹ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 48.

salvation' to the Dalits: in it 'no effort was made to relate the teachings of the Christian faith to the life of the people'.¹²² Moreover, these concepts do not stimulate Dalits to face and fight the oppression, on the contrary, it becomes a means of escapism from the reality of their suffering.¹²³

Dalit theologians seem to agree on this: the time of being powerless victims is over. Every single Dalit has to stand up and face his oppressor. Freedom is the ultimate goal and everything should be in line with this. So too religion. If it does not contribute to the improvement of the lives of the Dalits, it is of no use at all.¹²⁴ And because traditional Indian theology does not, there is a need for a theology that does: Dalit theology.

1.3.2 What is Dalit Theology?

Beginnings

Dalit theology is a new kind of liberation theology. It began in the 1980s, when some Christian Dalit thinkers started to express themselves theologically, based on their experiences as Dalits. Among the early writers on Dalit theology were M.E. Prabhakar, K. Wilson, V. Devasahayam, Arvind P. Nirmal, Bishop M. Azariah and James Massey.¹²⁵ Reason for this was a movement, begun in the mid-1970s, of Christian Dalits' effort to 'educate, agitate and organize'.¹²⁶ Out of this, Dalit theology has emerged.¹²⁷

Inspiration

A great source of inspiration, in the 1980s till today, is the person of Ambedkar.¹²⁸ His ideas about the liberation of Dalits are for a great deal incorporated in Dalit Theology. An example of this is what Monodeep Daniel said in the interview, when asked about what mission should involve in India: "It should follow the line of Ambedkar with his organisation, education and resist principle, but then in its widest sense."¹²⁹

Features

Maybe one of its most important features is that it is a theology by Dalits. It sounds obvious, but it shapes the entire theology. It announces a break with the traditional Indian theology, for reasons mentioned in subchapter 1.3.1. What follows is a kind of methodological exclusion, in which Felix Wilfred sees a tension: "...it has to keep both the methodological exclusion and theological inclusion of all others without which it may not qualify itself as a

¹²² James Massey, *Towards Dalit Hermeneutics: re-reading the text, the history and the literature* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 58.

¹²³ James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with a Special Reference to Christians* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 113.

¹²⁴ Interview with James Massey. In this regard the rest of the interview is also very interesting, see addendum 4.

¹²⁵ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 48.

¹²⁶ One of the most important lessons from Ambedkar, for Dalits.

¹²⁷ John C.B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: an Examination of Perspectives* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 61.

¹²⁸ John C.B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: an Examination of Perspectives* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 54.

¹²⁹ Interview with Monodeep Daniel, 16-06-2009.

Christian theology.¹³⁰ With being a theology by and for Dalits¹³¹, it also concentrates on the lives of Dalits. This means that its most important aim is to liberate the Dalits. Without this, Dalit theology would make no sense at all. In his book 'Dalit Christians of Andhra', Rajpramukh formulates it like this: "Its concern is not mainly what would happen to the soul after the death, but what happens to the human beings to have their human dignity and honour as anybody else."¹³² Likewise, Dalit theology is a movement 'from below': it is 'interested in the horizontal relations rather than vertical revelation', which is eminent in the traditional 'from above' theology.¹³³ In this way it is also a social movement.

According to James Massey three elements play an important role in Dalit theology: 'the aspiration of Dalits for fuller liberation, the recognition that God is on the side of the Dalits and the conviction that Christ is the model for the struggle, a struggle which continues today through the Holy Spirit.'¹³⁴ Solidarity is also a very important feature of Dalit theology. James Massey recognises a two-sided solidarity: first, in history God has shown his own solidarity with human beings, second, being in solidarity with Dalits of other faiths and ideologies.¹³⁵ But this solidarity can also be seen in another role of Dalit theology, namely, creating awareness among non-Dalits of Dalit suffering and pain.¹³⁶ Furthermore, solidarity plays a role in the person of Jesus. His life and suffering was not on behalf of the victims, but in solidarity with the victims.¹³⁷

Last, in his book 'Downtrodden' James Massey distinguishes five elements of the role of Dalit theology:

- It must address the Dalits themselves about their state and their dawning consciousness of themselves: heighten understanding and raising awareness;
- It must also address non-Dalits: make others aware;
- Raising the consciousness of the Christian community as a whole: Dalit theology must challenge the Church to change;
- It must enable ordinary Christians to take an active role in the struggle of the Dalits;

¹³⁰ Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 2000), 160.

¹³¹ K.E. Rajpramukh, *Dalit Christians of Andhra: Under the Impact of Missionaries* (New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2008), 67.

¹³² K.E. Rajpramukh, *Dalit Christians of Andhra: Under the Impact of Missionaries* (New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2008), 74.

¹³³ K.E. Rajpramukh, *Dalit Christians of Andhra: Under the Impact of Missionaries* (New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2008), 68.

¹³⁴ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 138.

¹³⁵ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 62.

¹³⁶ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 138.

¹³⁷ K.E. Rajpramukh, *Dalit Christians of Andhra: Under the Impact of Missionaries* (New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2008), 71.

- It must create the possibility of fuller liberation or salvation, based on the Christ-event of redemption.^{138 139}

3.2 Liberation Strategies

Because mission departments and organisations in the West are often very much involved in justice issues, it is important for them to know what justice means in a particular area and for a specific group of people. For Dalits justice means liberation – that is the goal of their struggle.¹⁴⁰ But to know this, is not enough. The issue is so complex that finding liberation seems almost impossible. But in the literature several strategies are given. For organisations involved in mission from the West into India, and also Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, this is very useful information, since they can incorporate this in their programmes. Furthermore, it is an important subject for Dalit theologians, since freedom is what they are after.

According to James Massey, Dalits need to pass four stages before they can achieve full liberation:

1. Establish a common identity;
2. Become conscious of their state;
3. Be in solidarity;
4. Enter into the process of liberation.¹⁴¹

But since this is a little vague, let us look at more concrete suggestions of how to attain liberation. The first person to look at then, is Ambedkar. In almost all the interviews I had with people from India, elements of Ambedkar's thought were present. Through this report several elements of Ambedkar's thought on the liberation of the Dalits have been mentioned. First, there was the idea of converting to another religion as a means of fighting the caste system. Second, one of the most important lessons of Ambedkar passed by: 'educate, agitate and organise'. The first one, educate, was mentioned as a liberation strategy by almost all the Indian participants of the interviews.¹⁴² It seems to be that education is really one of the most important themes in the struggle against the caste system. The reason for this is quite simple, as I mentioned before in chapter one: the caste system is in the minds of the people. So, perhaps one of the most important areas to address is the Dalit psyche.¹⁴³ A third important strategy of Ambedkar, not mentioned

¹³⁸ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 63.

¹³⁹ In this research I haven't got the chance to examine the concept of Dalit theology further. The information I have given here is very minimal. But, to get a better understanding about Dalit theology I recommend to read the interviews with James Massey and Monodeep Daniel, see addendums 6 and 7.

¹⁴⁰ James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 78.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Monodeep Daniel, CARDS, Kasta Dip,

¹⁴³ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 125.

before, is promoting inter-marriage.¹⁴⁴ Together with inter-dining, it is still a big taboo in India (see also page 9), even to such an extent that horrible revenge practices can be the result. It was only recently that eight family members were brutally murdered because their 21-year old relative secretly married a girl from a higher caste.¹⁴⁵ Even among Christians it is very uncommon to socialise or even marry someone from a different caste. Many Dalit leaders believe that braking down the barriers of 'eating and mating' would destroy the dynamic of purity and pollution and consequently the very basis of caste.¹⁴⁶

In his book 'Religion and Dalit Liberation', John Webster describes four strategies for freedom:

1. Acquisition of political power;
2. Economic independence;
3. Internal social reform;
4. Religious change.¹⁴⁷

These strategies are based on what the modern Dalit movement did, and still does, to fight the caste discrimination.

In addition to the strategies for liberation, there is another thing mission organisations and departments both from the West, and from within India itself, can do to participate in the struggle of the Dalits: it is important that any organisation supporting development in India, asks itself how its programmes are challenging casteism.¹⁴⁸ Maybe the discrimination is not that visible for an outsider, but that does not mean that it isn't there and that it isn't a big problem. In this regard, the Indian government should also be challenged, for the fact that they deny the problem. Pressure from outside can do a lot, so organisations should also focus on persuading and even shaming the government.^{149 150}

¹⁴⁴ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 35.

¹⁴⁵ Ludette el Barkany, *Kastensysteem India lokt eerwraak uit* (Dutch Christian Daily, called Trouw: 12-02-2009), 10.

¹⁴⁶ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 166.

¹⁴⁷ John C.B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: an Examination of Perspectives* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 12-13.

¹⁴⁸ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 157.

¹⁴⁹ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 160.

¹⁵⁰ Also said by Joseph D'Souza of the Dalit Freedom Network, during the NZR-meeting of 02-04-2009 in Amersfoort.

CONCLUSION

This report has shown that Christian Dalits have to face more discrimination than other Dalits, for the reason that Christianity is a despised religion in India. The discrimination is worse for them for several reasons:

- In the eyes of their fellow countrymen, Christian Dalits betray them by converting to a western religion;
- Christian Dalits are part of a religious minority, which, in terms of discrimination, is the same as being a Dalit;
- The state doesn't recognise Christian Dalits, for they claim that caste is not part of the Christian religion. Result is various forms of discrimination on the side of the state, including the denying of the Reservation Rights;
- Because relatively much different castes are represented in the Christian community, there is more discrimination among Christians as in other religions.

Despite these difficulties, it seems that Christian Dalits are not the worst off in terms of welfare. More than other Dalits, they are capable of fighting this discrimination and their oppressors. A reason for this can be that they use Christianity as a way of liberation. This becomes specifically clear in the liberation theology that they have created: Dalit theology. By this theology Christian Dalits are stimulated to fight their current status and climb the economic ladder. However, they seem to stand alone in this fight, since they don't get any help from the Indian Church. Instead, they face more discrimination.

In this all, Christian Dalit women are the worst victims. Although some would say their treatment is a little better in comparison to other Dalit women, they still are treated backwards.

Further, it was noted that the plight of Muslim Dalits need more attention than it gets now. According to the research by the department of sociology of the university of Delhi on the current social scientific knowledge on Dalits in Muslim and Christian communities, the Muslim Dalits are the worst off in almost every respect. The report also stated that the Christian Dalits are doing relatively well. So, the lesson learned here is that all Dalits, and specially the Muslim Dalits, need attention – not just the Christian Dalits.

Interviews

When comparing the interviews with each other, some interesting things become clear:

- When talking about discrimination in the Churches, there were a lot of contradictory messages. That there *is* discrimination in the Churches is clear, but to what extent is not;
- All the interviewed people had trouble with understanding the meaning of Christian-mission. All seemed to have a different picture in mind;

- Everyone was aware of the bad treatment of women, also in the Christian community;
- Almost everyone saw education as one of the most important things in the struggle of the Dalits against the caste system.

What remains is the answer to the main question of this research:

What can the mission department of ICCO/KiA mean for the Christian Dalits in India?

The best way of answering this question is by giving some straightforward recommendations, following from this research. Everything that has been written so far represent the view of various people who are considered experts when it comes to Dalits. Here, all their opinions come together and are translated in recommendations for the mission department of ICCO/KiA.

First of all, the list of things to do is never ending. Giving part of this list wouldn't be useful, since no one would know where to begin. On the other hand, all those things that has to be done are equally important, so choosing which things should get priority proved to be a difficult task. When making this decision I looked at several things:

- Does it take the scope of the mission department into account?
- Does it correspondent with the policy of the mission department?
- Is it making use of the special position and character of the mission department?
- Is it feasible?

My aim is to give recommendations that are concrete, in the sense that they are workable and clear. Hoping that they satisfy all these requirements, the recommendations that I chose are the following:

1. MORE RESEARCH ON DISCRIMINATION IN THE CHURCHES IN INDIA

During the research it became clear that there is still a lot of discrimination, even in the churches. But nobody seems to know to what extent: they only could say something about their own experiences in their churches. I found one case study which gave an excellent picture of the ways that Christian Dalits are discriminated.¹⁵¹ The problem with this study is that it is old and consequently not very representative. There is a need for a better understanding of this problem and then specifically in the churches which stand in close contact with the mission department. Several methods can be used to obtain this understanding:

- a. Carry out a research on this subject;
- b. Devise and carry out a Dalit discrimination check for churches;

¹⁵¹ Shiri, G. *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997).

The IDSN created a Dalit discrimination check for companies to help companies prevent discrimination and exploitation of Dalits in their Indian operations and suppliers.¹⁵² When I asked the respondents of the interviews about a similar check for churches, the responses were positive. The overall view was that it really could give an insight into this situation. Of course, this is not something the mission department should do by itself. There can be a close cooperation with IDSN: they designed the check and it is worth asking if they have any interest in creating a similar check for churches.¹⁵³

2. CREATE AWARENESS AMONG PCN MEMBERS

As I wrote earlier in the foreword: little people know about the Dalits and their misery. This is absolutely unacceptable and ICCO/KiA can and should do something about it. They have the possibility to spread the word and make people aware, based on the simple fact that they are supported by and in close contact with the PCN churches. In short: they are in a good position to reach the people in those churches. One could begin with:

- a. Translating the Bangkok Declaration of March 2009 (see addendum 5) in Dutch and putting it on the KiA/PCN website with the request of a follow-up during the next PCN-Synod.

Furthermore, I suggest the following actions:

- b. Create an information folder on the subject and spread it around in the churches;
- c. The screening of a film or documentary;
- d. Giving the people the chance of signing a petition.

I could go on for a little while, but I'm well aware of the fact that what I'm suggesting here are things that are normally part of a campaign. Although I understand that a campaign is a huge enterprise in every respect, I don't think it is an excuse not to do it. Hundreds of millions of people are in need of this attention; people and Christians like us are suppressed day in day out – and the people here don't even know about it. Recently, Joseph D'Souza paid a visit to the Netherlands, for the same simple reason: the people should be aware and we, who know about the Dalits, should be advocates of the Dalits. It is our job to spread the word. When I was at the NZR-meeting where he spoke, everyone of the people present tasted this need and were enthusiastic to give it the response that it deserved: take action. So, among the organisations there is a consensus that something should be done. The problem is that one should take the initiative: this could be ICCO/KiA. I have no doubt that others will follow and I also think it is possible to take this action in cooperation with other organisations.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² For more on this discrimination check, consult the folder IDSN created. It can be found on their website www.idsn.org, search for "Dalit Discrimination Check".

¹⁵³ An suggestion by Elske van Gorkum: Peter Prove from the LWT can be contacted in this regard, he has a lot of international contacts and could advise in how to approach the churches.

¹⁵⁴ Operation Mobilisation, for example, are very much involved in the Dalit issue and willing to take action where needed.

3. FORMULATE 'MISSION' MORE CLEARLY

During this research I discovered that many people have a problem with 'getting' the concept of Christian mission. Particularly the partners of the mission department were not able to formulate mission in the same way as the mission department. I think the reason for this is that the mission department itself is a little obscure about what mission should involve. For example, one thing that is important is the communication of the gospel. But what then *is* the gospel, is it something multi-interpretable? This is not further explained in any of the documents. After doing this research, it is still not clear to me what 'mission' means in 'mission department'. And what are the considerations when assessing project proposals? These are just a few of the questions that arose when doing this research and in the policy documents I couldn't find answers. I am sure I'm not the only one with these questions and that is why I think it would be really helpful to create a document that is available to any outsider, and which also explains the various terms that are being used. Such an explanation is really necessary, since one word can mean a lot of things. Such a document would also help in the communication with partners.

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Photo on the front-page is retrieved from the website:

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Fatusch Productions

2008

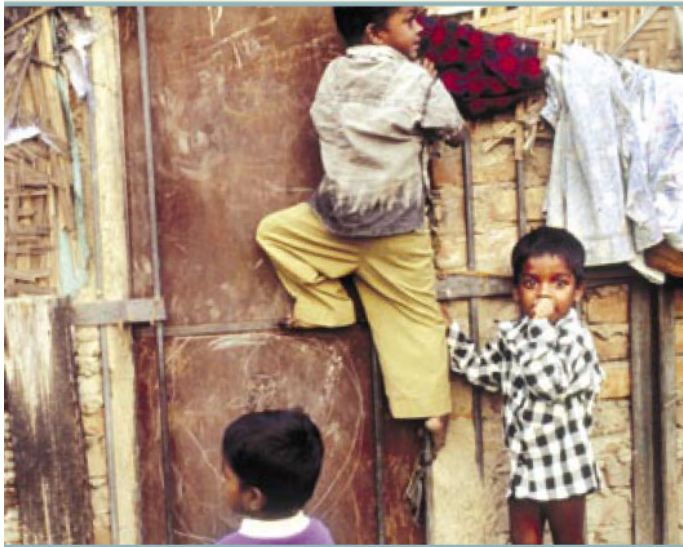
"I'm a Dalit, how are you?"

Based on "Lesser Humans" by Stalin K/Drishti Media Collective and "Resilient Rythms" by Gopal Manon/Other Media Communications. Produced with the support of IDSN.

ADDENDUM - 1

CAST AN EYE ON THE DALITS OF INDIA

166,635,700 of them



Impoverished and excluded
Abused and humiliated
Denied justice
Exploited
Untouchable

HOW CAN THIS
STILL BE GOING ON
IN THE 21ST CENTURY?



What is the caste system?

Historically the caste system has formed the social and economic framework for the life of the people in India. In its essential form, caste as the system of social and economic governance is based on principles and customary rules that:

- Involve the division of people into social groups (castes) where assignments of rights are determined by birth, are fixed and hereditary.
- The assignment of basic rights among various castes is unequal and hierarchical, with those at the top enjoying most rights coupled with least duties and those at the bottom performing most duties coupled with no rights.
- The system is maintained through the rigid enforcement of social ostracism (a system of social and economic penalties) in case of any deviations.

Thus the doctrine of inequality is the core and heart of the caste system. Supported by philosophical elements, it constructs the moral, social and legal foundations of Hindu society.

What is caste-based discrimination?

The UN defines this kind of problem as 'discrimination on the basis of work and descent'. It is an ancient form of oppressive, hierarchical social organisation that ordered people according to their family of birth. It has remained in place despite its legal abolition because of its religious sanction, the social and economic persecution of those who broke caste 'rules' defining the work done and the segregation between castes.

The Brahminical system stated that those born into families not recognised within the major caste categories would be 'untouchable' and could never come into contact with the caste Hindus, lest the dominant groups be physically and spiritually defiled. Far from being a remnant of the past, caste discrimination continues in both its traditional, rural forms of physical and occupational segregation and economic exploitation, in access to land and to criminal justice, in modern Indian schools and universities, in marriage and dining, and in access to the new employment opportunities provided by India's information technology boom.

Who are the Dalits?

Those who are beneath the entire caste system – and are therefore literally 'outcaste' as well as 'untouchable' – call themselves 'Dalits'. The word "Dalit", meaning "broken" or "ground down", is used by 'outcaste' people themselves to describe at the same time their oppression, their identity and their collective power for emancipation. They are the non-people, the ones that all belonging to the 'varnas' (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras) can content themselves with being above. The caste system has nevertheless been applied to Dalits to divide them into many sub-castes. The use of the word 'Dalit', encouraged by great Dalit leader Dr. Ambedkar, has enabled the development of a collective identity among all the 'outcaste' people, whatever their sub-caste, ethnicity or religion. The government nevertheless use the term 'Scheduled Castes' for Dalits.

Does caste discrimination still exist in India?

- To this day, those from higher castes will not marry Dalits
- To this day, Dalits are the only ones who do the occupations considered degrading in Indian society, such as cleaning human waste, giving news of death and working with leather.
- To this day, most caste Hindus refuse to eat or drink with Dalits.
- To this day, Dalits showing signs of economic or social mobility or emancipation are cut down to size by the dominant castes via shocking acts of violence and humiliation known officially in India as 'atrocities'. The vast majority of perpetrators of these acts enjoy impunity.

What about the law?

Many laws, as well as the Constitution itself, have been introduced in India banning caste discrimination, untouchability and their manifestations. Special legislation exists to counter manual scavenging (manual cleaning of human faeces), bonded labour and even 'atrocities' (see below). Special Commissions have been set up to monitor progress in eradicating caste discrimination. Affirmative action measures have been introduced and have to some extent enabled access for some Dalits in public sector employment and higher education.

The problem is not the law, but its implementation. At all levels, there is a lack of political will to ensure that the laws are applied on the ground. Untouchability, bonded labour, poverty, manual scavenging, segregation, landlessness and violence are the everyday reality, whatever the laws and special measures are.

Dalit Women

Gender biases reinforce the impact of caste discrimination, and Dalit women face double discrimination in all spheres of life. They are more affected by poverty, and a majority of them experience physical or sexual violence from dominant castes, often used intentionally to sustain the oppression of the Dalit community.



DALITS OF INDIA 3

DESPITE THE FACT THAT "UNTOUCHABILITY" WAS ABOLISHED UNDER INDIA'S CONSTITUTION IN 1950, THE PRACTICE OF "UNTOUCHABILITY" – THE IMPOSITION OF SOCIAL DISABILITIES ON PERSONS BY REASON OF THEIR BIRTH IN CERTAIN CASTES – REMAINS VERY MUCH A PART OF RURAL INDIA. "UNTOUCHABLES" MAY NOT CROSS THE LINE DIVIDING THEIR PART OF THE VILLAGE FROM THAT OCCUPIED BY HIGHER CASTES. THEY MAY NOT USE THE SAME WELLS, VISIT THE SAME TEMPLES, DRINK FROM THE SAME CUPS IN TEA STALLS, OR LAY CLAIM TO LAND THAT IS LEGALLY THEIRS. DALIT CHILDREN ARE FREQUENTLY MADE TO SIT IN THE BACK OF CLASSROOMS, AND COMMUNITIES AS A WHOLE ARE MADE TO PERFORM DEGRADING RITUALS IN THE NAME OF CASTE.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Where can one see untouchability?

A 2006 study on untouchability rural in India covering 565 villages in 11 States has revealed the extent to which Untouchability – officially banned under the 1950 Constitution – continues to be the daily reality for millions of Indians.

...IN GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Despite being charged with a constitutional mandate to promote social justice, various local institutions of the Indian State clearly tolerate and even facilitate the practice of untouchability

- 37.8% of the villages: Dalits made to sit separately in government **schools**
- 27.6% of the villages: of Dalits: prevented from entering **police stations**
- 25.7% of the villages: of Dalits: prevented from entering **ration shops**
- 33% of the villages: public **health workers** refuse to visit Dalit homes
- 23.5% of the Dalit villages: don't get **mail** delivered to their homes
- 14.4% of the Dalit villages: Dalits not permitted to enter the 'panchayat' **Local Government** building
- 12% of the Dalit villages: Dalits denied access to or forced to form separate lines at **polling booths**
- 48.4% of the Dalit villages: denied access to **water sources**

...IN MARKET ACCESS

- 35% of villages surveyed: Dalits barred from **selling produce** in local markets
- 47% of villages with **milk cooperatives** prevent Dalits from selling milk, and 25% prevent Dalits from buying milk

...IN WORK

- 25% of villages: Dalits paid **lower wages** than non-Dalits, work longer hours, have more delayed wages and suffer more verbal and physical abuse
- 37% of villages: Dalit workers **paid wages from a distance** to avoid physical contact

...IN RELIGION AND RITES

- 64% of Dalits: restricted from entering Hindu **temples**
- Almost 50% of villages: Dalits prevented from accessing **cremation grounds**

...IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

- 73% of villages: Dalits not permitted to **enter non-Dalit homes**
- 70% of villages: Dalits and non-Dalits **cannot eat together**
- 35.8% of Dalits: denied entry into **village shops**

Atrocities against Dalits

Atrocities are an official category of crime in India defined by The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The Act defines atrocities as crimes such as:

- forcing Dalits to eat obnoxious substances
- dumping excreta or carcasses in Dalit premises
- assaulting a Dalit women with intent to dishonour or outrage her modesty
- using a position of dominance to sexually exploit a Dalit woman
- parading Dalits naked or with painted face or body
- forcing Dalits to do forced or bonded labour
- dispossessing Dalits of their land and forcing Dalits from their homes
- preventing Dalits from voting
- corrupting or fouling a Dalit water source
- publicly humiliating Dalits
- using fire or explosives to damage Dalit property
- fabricating evidence in order to convict innocent Dalits

Crimes against Dalits

According to official Indian crime statistics, averaged over the period 2001-2005:

27 atrocities against Dalits every day

13 Dalits murdered every week

5 Dalits' homes or possessions **burnt** every week

6 Dalits kidnapped or abducted every week

3 Dalit women raped every day

11 Dalits beaten every day

A crime committed against a Dalit **every 18 minutes**



IMPUNITY



DESPITE ELABORATE PROVISIONS IN THE CONSTITUTION AND OTHER LAWS, IT IS AN UNFORTUNATE REALITY THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND EXPLOITATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES AND OTHER WEAKER SECTIONS PERSIST. THERE ARE REPORTS IN THE PRESS ABOUT ATROCITIES AGAINST PERSONS BELONGING TO THESE GROUPS AND THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH THEY OCCUR IS A CAUSE FOR DISQUIET. THE HUMILIATION WHICH PERSONS BELONGING TO THE SCHEDULED CASTES IN GENERAL AND THE DALITS IN PARTICULAR SUFFER EVEN TODAY, MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY AFTER INDIA PROCLAIMED ITSELF TO BE A REPUBLIC, IS A MATTER OF SHAME.

JUSTICE AS ANAND,
NHRC CHAIRPERSON,
FOREWORD TO ATROCITIES REPORT 2004

THE PROBLEM STARTS WITH REGISTRATION OF THE CASE ITSELF. POLICE RESORT TO VARIOUS MACHINATIONS TO DISCOURAGE SCHEDULED CASTES/SCHEDULED TRIBES FROM REGISTERING CASE, TO DILUTE THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE VIOLENCE, TO SHIELD THE ACCUSED PERSONS FROM ARREST AND PROSECUTION AND, IN SOME CASES, THE POLICE THEMSELVES INFLECT VIOLENCE... USUALLY WHERE ATROCITIES GET A LOT OF PUBLICITY, THE LOCAL OFFICIALS PROMPTLY PROVIDE COMPENSATION AND RELIEF TO THE SCHEDULED CASTES VICTIMS TO TIDE OVER THE PUBLIC CONCERN. BUT THEIR RESPONSE TO OTHER INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE IS CHARACTERIZED BY APATHY, NEGLIGENCE AND PASSIVITY.

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF INDIA

How can there be impunity when the laws are there?

7,099 or 18.70% of crimes against Dalits were pending with police at the end of 2002. The number of cases pending with the Courts was at the same time 126,009 or 77.69% of all cases brought to court.

It appears that only 21.72% of the total cases were disposed of during the year. Out of the disposed cases, 2.31% ended up in conviction.

INDIAN MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT

That was in 2002. By 2005, Indian police statistics show that things had worsened:

23.9% of crimes against Dalits were 'pending investigation' by the police at the end of 2005

80.2% of crimes against Dalits were 'pending trial' by the courts at the end of 2005.

Dalits and poverty

If you are a Dalit in India...

- you can expect to have 4 years less to live than others.
- you can expect more than half of your children to suffer from under-nutrition.
- one third of the women in your community will be anaemic.
- for every 100 Dalit children born in your community, 12 would already be dead before they reached their fifth birthday.
- only 1 out of every 5 children in your community would not drop out of school, and only about half would even become literate despite the fact that around 2/3 of Indians are literate. You would have less than 1 in 600 chance of gaining a postgraduate diploma (if you are a woman, make that 1 in 1,200).
- you have an unemployment rate of 5% compared to 3.5% for others, you are half as likely to have fixed capital assets and four times as likely to become a bonded labourer, joining the estimated 24.4 million other Dalit bonded labourers.
- one in every three in your community will be poor while the 'touchable' communities will have a 4 in 5 chance of escaping poverty.

Disparity still increasing

Government policy is supposed to not only reduce Dalit poverty, but also to reduce the staggering gap between Dalits and non-Dalits. This policy is failing. While poverty generally is reducing in India, the main beneficiaries are non-Dalits. The Indian Institute of Indian Studies has shown that in both cities and rural areas, the gap between Dalits and non-Dalits has been increasing since at least the early 1990s. The increasing gap between the untouchable castes and the dominant castes is more than just number-crunching: it also represents an increase in the relative power of dominant castes to exploit the Dalits in neighbouring villages.

Dalits and slums

Caste discrimination is often thought of as a purely rural phenomenon, but official slum data alone show that this is not the case. 79.8% of Dalits live in rural India. Their over-representation in rural India means that they only account for 11.78% of India's urban population. However, they are highly over-represented in the 'official' slums of Indian cities, where they make up 17.4% of the population, or 7.4 million Dalits. Since Dalits are not highly present in the recognised slums of Mumbai, if we look at some of the major cities of India we see even greater disproportions in the number of Dalits living in slums with almost one third of slum dwellers in Chennai, Delhi and Bangalore being Dalits.



DALITS OF INDIA 7

Special Dalit occupations...

Manual Scavenging

According to government statistics, an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers who clear faeces from public and private latrines and dispose of dead animals; unofficial estimates are much higher. An activist working with scavengers in the state of Andhra Pradesh claimed, "In one toilet there can be as many as 400 seats which all have to be manually cleaned. This is the lowest occupation in the world, and it is done by the community that occupies the lowest status in the caste system."

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Temple Prostitution

In India's southern states, thousands of girls are forced into prostitution before reaching the age of puberty. Joghinis, literally meaning "female servant of god," usually belong to the Dalit community. Once dedicated, the girl is unable to marry, forced to become a prostitute for upper-caste community members, and eventually auctioned off to an urban brothel.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH



CAST AN
EYE ON THE
DALITS
OF INDIA

ADDENDUM - 2

Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003

Act 24 of 2003

Note: the amendment refers to this Act as 22 of 2003 and the discrepancy isn't explained.

An Act to provide for freedom of religion by prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means and for the matters incidental thereto. It is hereby enacted in the Fifty-fourth Year of the Republic of India as follows:

1. Short title and commencement

- (1) This Act may be called the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003.
- (2) It shall come into force on such date as the State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint.

2. Definitions

In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

- (a) "Allurement" means offer of any temptation in the form of:
 - (i) any gift or gratification, either in cash or kind;
 - (ii) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise;
- (b) "Convert" means to make one person to renounce one religion and adopt another religion;
- (c) "Force" includes a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including a threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication;
- (d) "Fraudulent means" includes misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance;
- (e) "Minor" means a person under eighteen years of age.

3. Prohibition of forcible conversion

No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet such conversion.

4. Punishment for contravention of provisions of Section 3

Whoever contravenes the provision of Section 3 shall, without prejudice to any civil liability, be punished with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to three years and also be liable to a fine, which may extend to rupees fifty thousand:

Provided that whoever contravenes the provisions of section 3 in respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to the Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to four years and also be liable to a fine which may extend to rupees one lakh [one hundred thousand].

5. Prior permission to be taken from District Magistrate with respect to conversion

- (1) Whoever converts any person from one religion to another either by performing any ceremony by himself for such conversion as a religious priest or takes part directly or indirectly in such ceremony shall take prior permission for such proposed conversion from the District Magistrate concerned by applying in such form as may be

- prescribed by rules.
- (2) The person who is converted shall send an intimation to the District Magistrate of the District concerned in which the ceremony has taken place of the fact of such conversion within such period and in such form as may be prescribed by rules. Collected by the All India Christian Council, < www.christiancouncil.in > Page 2 of 3
- (3) Whoever fails, without sufficient cause, to comply with the provisions of sub-sections (1) and (2) shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to rupees one thousand or with both.

6. Prosecution to be made with the sanction of District Magistrate

No prosecution for an offence under this Act shall be instituted except by or with the previous sanction of the District Magistrate or such other authority not below the rank of a Sub-Divisional Magistrate as may be authorised by him in that behalf.

7. Offence to be cognizable

An offence under this Act will be cognizable and shall not be investigated by an officer below the rank of a Police Inspector;

8. Power to make rules

- (1) The State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, make rules for carrying out the provisions of this Act.
- (2) All rules made under this section shall be laid for not less than thirty days before the State Legislature as soon as may be after they are made, and shall be subject to rescission by the State Legislature or to such modifications as the State Legislature may make during the session in which they are so laid or the session immediately following.
- (3) Any rescission or modification so made by the State Legislature shall be published in the Official Gazette, and shall thereupon take effect.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS

Reports have been received by the Government that conversions from one religion to another are made by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means. Bringing in a legislation to prohibit such conversions will act as a deterrent against the anti-social and vested interest groups exploiting the innocent people belong to depressed classes and will enable people to practice their own religion freely. It will also be useful to maintain public order and to nip in the bud the attempts by certain subversive forces to create social tension. The Government has, therefore, decided to enact a law to prevent conversion of religion by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means.

This Bill seeks to achieve the aforesaid object.

AMIT SHAH

MEMORANDUM REGARDING DELEGATED LEGISLATION

The Bill involves delegation of legislative powers in the following respects.

Clause 1. - Sub-clause (2) of this clause empowers the State Government to appoint, by

notification in the Official Gazette, the date on which the Act shall come into force.

Clause 5. - (i) Sub-clause (1) of this clause empowers the State Government to prescribe by rules, the form in which prior permission under this sub-clause is required to be taken;

(ii) sub-clause (2) of this clause empowers the State Government to prescribe by rules, the form and the time limit within which the person converted is required to give intimation under this sub-clause

Clause 8. - Sub-clause (1) of this clause empowers the State Government to make rules for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of the Act.

The delegation of legislative powers as aforesaid is necessary and is of a normal character.

Dated the 11th March, 2003

AMIT SHAH.

ADDENDUM - 3

SC = Scheduled Castes

OBC = Other Backward Castes

UC = Upper Castes

Figure 19

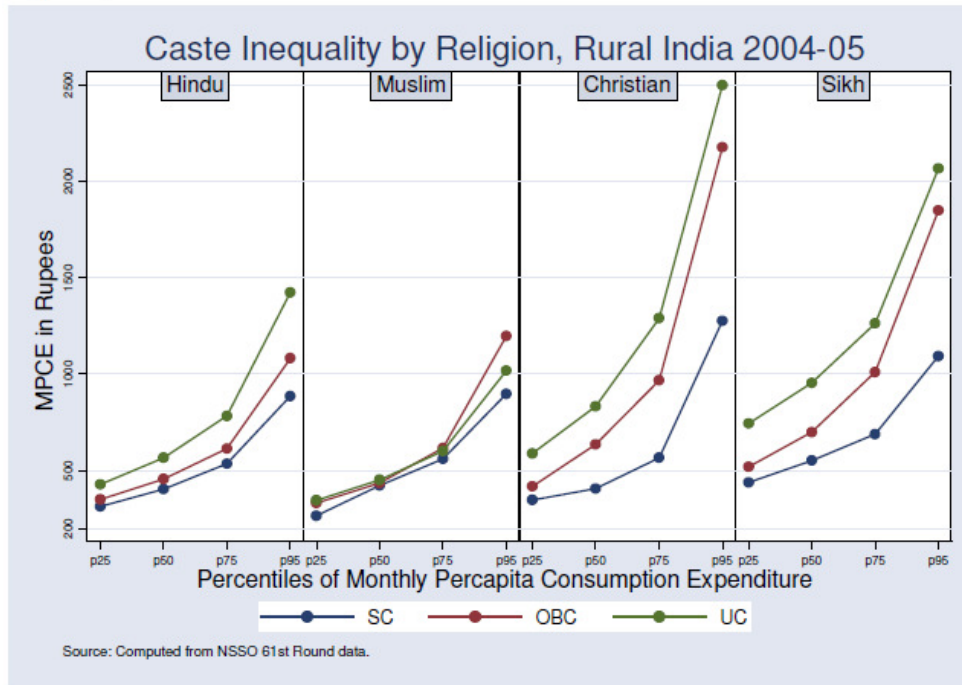
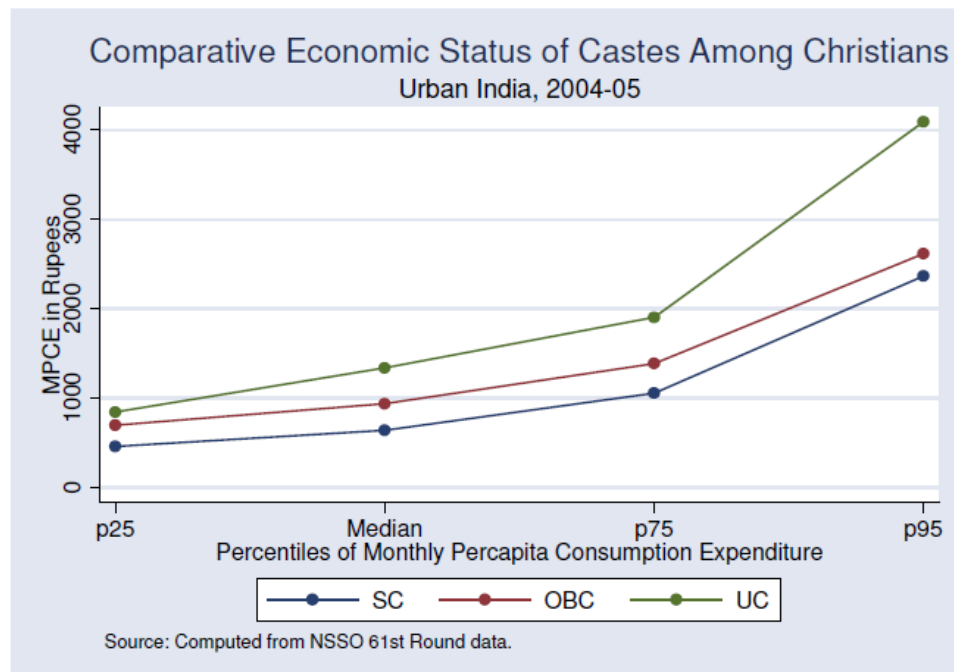
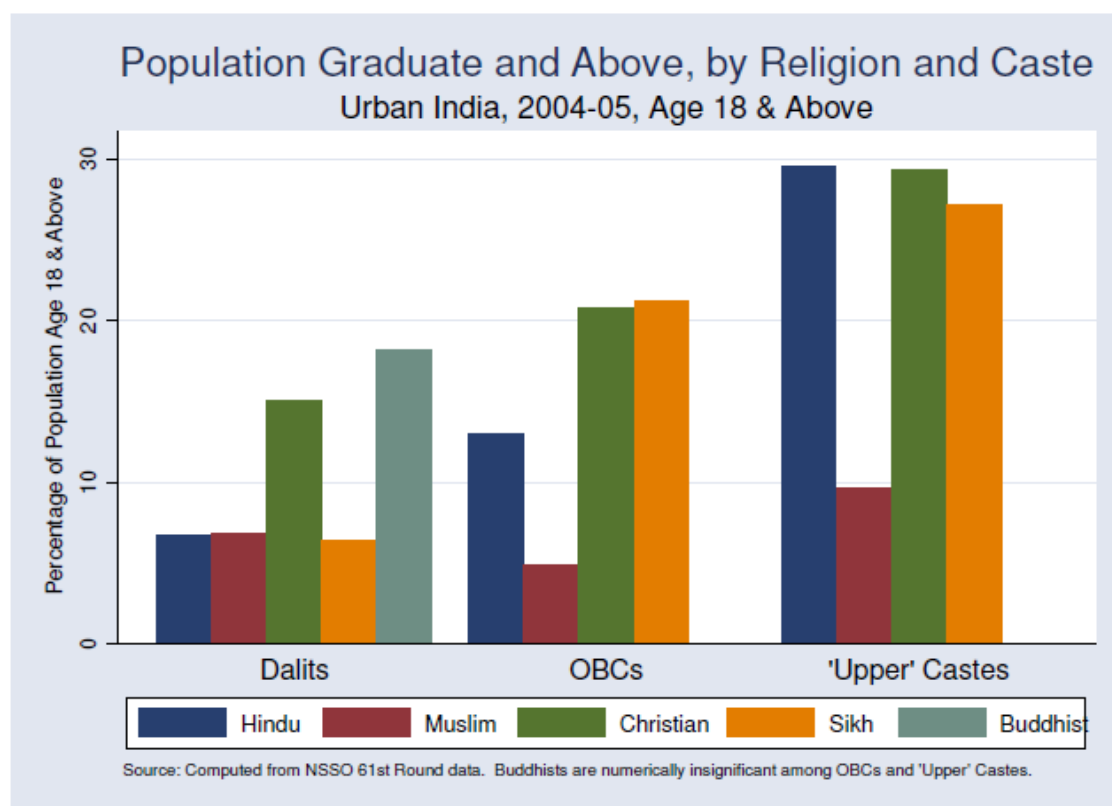


Figure 18



ADDENDUM - 4

Figure 28



ADDENDUM - 5



WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
OKUMENISCHER RAT DER KIRCHEN – CONSEIL OECUMENIQUE DES EGLISES – CONSELHO MUNDIAL DE IGREJAS



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits
March 21-24, 2009, Bangkok, Thailand

The Bangkok Declaration and Call¹

1. The Declaration

1.1 Introduction

The Dalit Samaritan woman asked Jesus, “Where can I find this living water?”²

We came together as almost 100 participants, the great majority from churches and Christian bodies across the world, with advisers from other faith communities, to address the largest systemic violation of human rights in today's world, caste-based discrimination (CBD). As Dalits and friends of Dalits we came from caste-affected countries, mostly India, but also Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nigeria, as well as from other countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America and the Pacific. We were called together by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). We gathered on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (March 21). We were hosted by the Church of Christ in Thailand, to which we express our gratitude.

We were addressed by Dalits and representatives of other communities experiencing inherited social exclusion, activists, academics, bishops and church leaders. We engaged in Bible study, worship and prayer which created a strong foundation both for understanding caste and our call to action. We discussed, debated, learned and built a great sense of solidarity around our total rejection of CBD. We all learned more about Dalit history and culture, Dalit women's experience, recent atrocities such as those in Kandhamal, Orissa³ and Khairlanji, Maharashtra⁴, and growing Dalit

¹ This document was prepared by a group of ‘listeners’ on behalf of the participants of the conference. These were: Mr. Dennis Frado, USA, Rev. David Haslam, UK; Rev. Roxanne Jordan, South Africa; Dr Mikko Malkavaara, Finland, Rt Rev. Dr Isaac Mar Philoxenos, India; and Rev. Robina Winbush, USA. This was done to enable them, as friends of Dalits, to formulate their own responses in solidarity with Dalits and in the light of their experiences during the conference. The conference discussed the document, agreeing to its intent and structure and proposing some changes to the content. Two younger Dalit activists, Ms Rama Devi Hansraj and Rev. Raj Bharat Patta then joined the listeners group to work on further amendments to the document, before handing it over to the organizing staff group for final editorial revisions.

² John 4:11

³ Dozens were murdered, many injured, and property destroyed and looted following the 23 August 2008 murder of the leader of the militant Hindu organization, VHP, in the Indian state of Orissa. However, what was generally described as Hindu-Christian inter-communal violence expressed underlying caste tensions. The rampage that radical VHP followers went on after the murder (for which Maoist insurgents claimed responsibility) targeted Christian communities. Most Christians in the Kandhamal, Bargarh and Koraput Deogarh districts of Orissa are Dalits or Adivasis (tribal or indigenous people). State and federal governments and law enforcement authorities stood by and

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resistance to CBD. We were told that “Dalit” is the chosen name of the former “untouchable” communities which although it means “crushed” signifies their resistance and hope.

At the opening worship, it was said, “Today, regardless of where we come from, which church we represent, we all become Dalits. Not only for today and during this conference, but also for our life until Dalits are liberated, we all become Dalits.”

And, with sadness and anger, we heard many stories of the suffering of Dalits - murder, rape, mutilations, beatings, humiliation, extreme poverty and the daily grinding discrimination and exclusion that is the lot of so many millions of Dalit people.

1.2 The Confessions

We were reminded in challenging and sometimes emotional terms of the continuing prevalence of caste in the church and the silence of the church in addressing caste both inside and outside the church. The representatives of the churches of the countries more directly affected by caste⁵ wished to confess their complicity with CBD and to acknowledge that caste remains deeply entrenched in their churches today. This is manifested in leadership struggles, use of resources, unwillingness to challenge the authorities and failure to support victims of caste atrocities. These representatives also confessed the prevalence of patriarchy in their churches - which both reinforces casteism and creates double exclusion - and also their failures to support struggles for justice elsewhere.

The representatives of the churches in less-affected countries (LACs) and the wider ecumenical family wished to confess their ignorance with regard to CBD, their failure to study or explore this systemic oppression and their failure to accompany churches and communities suffering CBD.

During the meeting we were reminded by our Southern African colleagues of the declaration in the midst of their liberation struggle that “apartheid is heresy” and that “racism is sin”. Likewise, we too wish to confess that “caste discrimination is a crime” and that “casteism is sin” because it contradicts the Christian teaching that all are created in the image of God.

In this document we speak primarily about CBD, but we recognize CBD is a product of the caste system, which Dalits believe needs to be annihilated to end social injustice, oppression and exclusion.

waited for days before reacting to the violence. Only after four days was a state of emergency declared.

⁴ On 29 September 2006, four members of a Dalit family in Khairlanji village of the Indian state of Maharashtra's Bhandara district were raped, mutilated and bludgeoned to death by fellow villagers. The ‘provocation’ for this attack was the fact that members of this family were educated and asserted their right to a life of dignity despite their poverty. When the sole surviving member of the family reported the crime, the police showed a characteristically disinterested and even contemptuous attitude to the investigation.

⁵ A debate emerged concerning the terminology of “caste-affected countries” (CACs) and “less-affected countries” (LACs). Some preferred alternative expressions such as “more directly affected countries” and “differently affected countries”. However, all agreed that caste, casteism and caste-based discrimination affect not only those South Asian countries most often associated with these phenomena, but is a truly global concern. This conviction is based on (i) the Christian understanding of *communio* – with the suffering of one member of the body of Christ affecting the whole body, (ii) a general ethical understanding of relationships in community, and (iii) the salience of caste throughout the South Asian diaspora globally.

1.3 The Acknowledgements

Firstly, we acknowledge that our primary concern is with India, as here about 200 million⁶ people are affected, but we are also concerned for the millions⁷ in other countries discriminated against on the basis of caste -- or "work and descent" as the United Nations (UN) calls it -- including in Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka as well as the Buraku community in Japan, the Osu community in Nigeria and similar communities elsewhere, whose experience and expression of struggle differs. For example, Dalits in Nepal are currently battling for proper recognition in the new Constitution. Many of our recommendations have particular reference to India.

We also acknowledge that CBD is a reality today resulting in routine social exclusion and discrimination; extreme vulnerability to violence; sexual abuse against Dalit women and children; trafficking; discrimination in schools and institutions of higher education; lack of access to disaster relief and mitigation measures; exclusion from markets, water sources and public services and public places; and reprisals when Dalits demand equality and justice. This is a systemic discrimination which permeates structures of governance, media and the criminal justice administration.

Secondly, we wish to acknowledge and to recognize the failure of the international community to address CBD. For those countries with involvement since colonial times, especially Britain, this failure dates back centuries. It includes the conditions under which independence was negotiated and subsequent political and economic relationships. The international community's common failure was most clearly revealed in the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban, where over 200 Dalit activists sought to raise CBD, and the international community turned a deaf ear, to its shame and disgrace. Because of the collusion of other governments with the Indian government, the international community declined to address caste there and at many subsequent UN meetings.

Thirdly, we wish to acknowledge the additional sensitivities raised by this issue in the context of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Hindus. We acknowledge the right for all to preach, profess and practice their faith. We reject extremism and religious fundamentalism in every faith. We welcome interfaith dialogue that confronts casteism and upholds human dignity, especially Dalit liberation.

*Our God who is present everywhere, particularly in the struggles of our people,
Let your name be proclaimed by our acts of justice and truth,
Help us to realize your sovereignty by being in solidarity with one another,
Inspire us to do your will – to resist, confront and transform, as you have,
Give us daily your grace to share our food, resources and ourselves with others, as you
shared your life with us,
Lead us not into the temptation of practising caste and being self-centred,
Deliver us from all kinds of oppression and discrimination
For your reign, power and glory shall come unto us when all of us live in the spirit of
community governed by the values of dignity, mutual respect and equality.
Amen.⁸*

⁶ This figure includes 166 million (government statistics, 2001) plus Dalit Christians and Muslims.

⁷ Some global estimates place the total number of Dalits and members of similarly-affected communities at 260 million.

⁸ The prayers in the boxes at the end of each section of this document are based on worship materials used at the conference in Bangkok.

2. The Call

We present this Call in the name of justice for and solidarity with Dalits.

2.1 The churches of CACs

We call upon you to:

- (i) recognize and repent of your casteism, and eradicate it within the churches;
- (ii) identify yourselves as churches in full solidarity with the Dalit movements and to speak with a united voice in working towards Dalit liberation;
- (iii) identify casteism as an ecumenical issue and locate it in the existing ecumenical bodies, and widen and deepen ecumenical cooperation in addressing this issue;
- (iv) create affirmative action policies and programmes for Dalits within the churches and their institutions at all levels (governance, management and employment), with specific programmes for Dalit youth;
- (v) publicly condemn violence against Dalit women and set up programmes to combat this violence;
- (vi) continue or develop programmes of education and awareness-building in relation to CBD, inside the churches and outside;
- (vii) continue or develop programmes to monitor caste atrocities and to act immediately to support victims, human rights defenders and witnesses;
- (viii) encourage the expression of Dalit culture in worship, liturgy and theology;
- (ix) call upon theological colleges to take up the Dalit issue effectively in their curricula and other academic activities;
- (x) address and eliminate patriarchy for the sake of both women and men;
- (xi) challenge your governments for their inaction -- in national and international contexts -- on effectively addressing the practice of CBD; and
- (xii) support the national and international campaign for the elimination of 'manual scavenging'⁹ by the end of 2010.¹⁰

⁹ 'Manual scavenging' is the manual removal of excreta ('night soil') from 'dry latrines' (i.e. toilets without a flush system). This is a traditional occupation of Dalits, and is still performed almost exclusively by Dalits – especially Dalit women. Some states in India have passed laws to abolish manual scavenging, and the national Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993 prescribes penalties for the employment of manual scavengers or the construction of dry (non-flush) latrines of imprisonment for up to one year and/or a fine of Rs 2,000. However, manual scavenging persists throughout India (with an estimated 1.3 million Dalits still employed as manual scavengers), despite repeated government commitments to eradicate it.

¹⁰ The campaign for the abolition of manual scavenging has been led by Safai Karmachari Andolan, an organization working among manual scavengers, which has identified 2010 (when India will host the Commonwealth Games) as a target date for the final elimination of this degrading and dangerous occupation.

2.2 The churches of LACs

We call upon you to:

(i) develop urgently programmes of education and awareness-building in relation to caste and how it affects people of many countries;

(ii) join in the international campaign for the elimination of 'manual scavenging' by the end of 2010;

(iii) provide resources for solidarity work both in CACs and your own country, to support a sustained and long-term period of work, and to facilitate exchange and exposure visits in both directions, perhaps as 'Living Letters', urging all visitors from LACs to CACs to visit the Dalit communities and movements;

(iv) address your governments in relation to their trade and development policies, their role at the UN and related bodies, the European Union or other appropriate institutions, to contribute to international recognition of and cooperation to eradicate CBD; and

(v) urge private sector companies and banks investing in India and in other CACs to undertake the Dalit Discrimination Check¹¹ and to sign the Ambedkar Principles¹² for affirmative action and employment equality.

2.3 National and international ecumenical bodies

We call upon you to take up Dalit liberation and solidarity as a central mission objective, including circulating this statement to all member churches and seeking their response, and accompanying the Dalit movements:

(i) in CACs to initiate a process similar to that which led to the "Kairos Declaration"¹³ in South Africa, with Dalit Theology as the crucial element, to produce a major theological statement or declaration of a Christian position on caste, caste-based discrimination, and their relationship to the situation and struggles of Dalits by, say, 21 March 2010;

(ii) in LACs to create a structure whereby the proposals in section B above can be taken forward;

¹¹ The Dalit Discrimination Check (DDC) is a tool developed by the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) to help companies prevent discrimination and exploitation of Dalits in their Indian operations and suppliers. The DDC can be downloaded at <http://www.idsn.org/business-csr/dalit-discrimination-check/>

¹² The Ambedkar Principles are a set of principles developed by the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) concerning employment and other contexts in which Dalits suffer economic and social exclusion. They intend to acknowledge the degree of historic injustice against Dalits in South Asia and aim to compensate for this through affirmative action, in line with international human rights standards, although not to the detriment of other excluded groups. IDSN recommends that companies apply these principles in their business operations. The Ambedkar Principles can be downloaded at <http://www.idsn.org/business-csr/ambedkar-principles/>. The Ambedkar Principles are named after Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (14 April 1891-6 December 1956), also known as *Babasaheb*, who was an Indian nationalist, jurist, Dalit political leader and Buddhist revivalist. He was also the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Born into a poor 'untouchable' family, Ambedkar studied in New York and London, and spent his whole political life fighting against social discrimination and the Indian caste system.

¹³ The original 'Kairos' document was a Statement issued by a group of primarily black theologians in South Africa in 1985, at the height of the struggle against apartheid. It critiqued 'State theology', 'Church theology' and argued for a 'Prophetic theology'. It issued a 'Challenge to Action', caused considerable controversy and acted as a model for other Kairos documents, eg Central America, shortly afterwards.

(iii) in the international ecumenical bodies to develop further their on-going work on justice for Dalits and to collaborate in establishing a Global Watch on violence against Dalits, creating a communication system to all member churches and beyond; and

(iv) set up -- for the purpose of promoting follow-up to this conference -- an on-going task group (to be supported by the churches in the CACs and LACs) to consider the possibilities of (a) a review conference in five years' time, (b) a Decade to Overcome Caste and Exclusion to follow the Decade to Overcome Violence, (c) an International Dalit Sunday, and (d) all additional suggestions from this conference.

2.4 The Governments in CACs

While acknowledging efforts so far made to address CBD, we urge you to:

(i) protect your citizens and end the violence, acknowledge your failure to address CBD and the atrocities that accompany it effectively, and to refresh vigorously all programmes and resources (especially in the police and judiciary) aimed at dealing with this pernicious "blot on humanity"¹⁴;

(ii) engage with the UN human rights bodies and mechanisms to effectively address CBD;

(iii) guarantee the human rights of Dalits, and ensure that the independent voices of Dalits are heard in government and all national decision-making bodies;

(iv) expand and develop the education programmes already addressed to Dalit children and initiate new education programmes for children who are not Dalits to assist them in relinquishing their oppressive caste status;

(v) ensure justice for Christians and Muslims of "Scheduled Caste"¹⁵ origin in India by recognizing their "Scheduled Caste" status, which will provide them with better protection under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and access to affirmative action policies and programmes;

(vi) pay particular attention to the needs of Dalit women in education, employment, land distribution, and the effects of violence;

(vii) calculate the costs of the free labour provided by Dalits, at least since independence, and add this to the budgets allocated to "Scheduled Castes" but often never delivered, to ensure full budget justice and transparency, and to prohibit non-voluntary free labour in the future;

(viii) establish an action plan with a timetable to eliminate 'manual scavenging'; and

(ix) engage with the campaign for Electoral Reform towards proportional representation for all communities.

¹⁴ Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, 27 December 2006.

<http://www.hindu.com/2006/12/28/stories/2006122803521300.htm>

¹⁵ "Scheduled Caste" is official Indian government terminology for Dalits.

2.5 The International Community

(i) With feelings of dismay and outrage at the failure of the WCAR 2001 to address caste, we call upon you, even at this late stage, to offer a platform to those representing Dalit communities who will be attending and engaging with the Durban Review Conference in April 2009, and urge all participating governments to accept the inclusion of CBD in those discussions.¹⁶

(ii) While recognizing progress on CBD in bodies such as the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the International Labour Organization, we urge the UN Human Rights Council to ensure that the draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent, developed under the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, are adopted in order to provide a firm and appropriate basis for the whole international community to address CBD.¹⁷

(iii) We call on the international community to support the campaign for the elimination of 'manual scavenging' by 2010.

2.6 Dalit Communities

We call upon you to practice unity with steadfastness and courage, both inside and outside the churches, to avoid division by 'sub-caste' and leadership competition, and to present a broad-based and democratic front in the liberation struggle. We also call upon you to act in solidarity with other struggles for justice.

*Lord we intercede
For those who suffer the violence of caste
For those who stand in solidarity
For those who raise their voice in protest
For those who are forced into silence
For those who act as if everything is normal
For those who overtly inflict violence
For all those who feel the pain
For those who benefit from the system
For those who are ignorant of the sin that is caste
For us, who commit to overthrow the system*

3. Conclusion and Affirmation

Finally, we the participants in the Bangkok Conference of March 2009 reject any notion of hierarchies of oppression. We look for a caste-free world, in which the human dignity and rights of everyone is affirmed irrespective of their social origin and identity. This, we believe, is the living water for which the Dalit Samaritan woman asked. We reaffirm our commitment to Dalits and all other marginalized and

¹⁶ For more information on the World Conference Against Racism and the Durban Review Conference, see <http://www.un.org/WCAR/>, <http://www.un.org/durbanreview2009/> and <http://www.idsn.org/international-advocacy/un/durban-review-conf/>

¹⁷ For more information on the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, see <http://www.idsn.org/international-advocacy/un/un-principles-guidelines/>

exploited communities. This is the preferential option for the poor. We invite all those who receive this document to join with us in actions of solidarity to render human dignity and justice to all Dalits and to combat all injustice and inequality, in order to live up to our calling as “the beloved community”, the people of God.

*May the God in whose image we all are created,
guide us.*

*May the Jesus who ate with the impure, who touched the untouchable and who knew no
caste,*

encourage us.

*May the Holy Spirit whose power blew through the people of many nations so that they all
understood in their own language and others asked “Are they all Dalits?”,*

inspire us.

*May we all walk in the light, bound together in love and proclaiming those words written in
the soot –*

Jesus is alive!¹⁸

Issued for Passion Sunday 2009

‘When Jesus came in sight of the City he wept over it and said “If only you had known this
day the way that leads to peace!” Luke 19, 41-2.’

¹⁸ The phrase ‘Jesus is alive’ was found written in the soot of a burnt-out church building in Kandhamal in August 2008, where among other atrocities a Roman Catholic nun had been raped.

ADDENDUM - 6

Friday, February 25, 2005

Dalit Liberation Theology: Interview with James Massey

James Massey is a leading Dalit Christian theologian, one of the pioneers in the field. He has written several books on Dalit Christian theology. He has been the general secretary of the Indian Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and a member of the National Minorities Commission. In this interview with Yoginder Sikand he talks about the Dalit Christians, Dalit ways of understanding Christianity and the challenges posed before the Dalit movement by Hindutva fascism.

Q: How do you account for the emergence of what is called Dalit Christian theology?

A: Dalit Christian theology is a relatively new phenomenon, going back to the late 1970s. It is a reflection of the Dalit Christians, who form the vast majority of the Indian Christian population, becoming increasingly conscious of their Dalit roots, their Dalit condition and of being oppressed both within as well as outside the Church. As a result of the growing consciousness of the Dalit Christians, they are beginning to ask how much of what they had been taught Biblically and theologically is actually relevant to their own social conditions. They are increasingly realizing that the way the Christian faith has been explained does not include the experiences of the Dalits—the Dalit Christians as well as the larger Dalit community as a whole. They are now saying that the sort of theology that is taught in the seminaries and preached from the pulpits of the Churches is largely irrelevant for them because it does not take into account their oppressed condition, their experiences. So, I would say that the emergence of Dalit Christian theology is really only a part of a larger process of the emergence of Dalit consciousness.

Q: How would you define Dalit theology?

A: Briefly, I would say it is a systematic reflection on God and humankind from the perspective of the Dalit experience. It is our faith experience in a particular context put in a systematic form. Dalit Christian theology sees God as struggling alongside the Dalits in challenging the structures of caste and oppression, both within as well as outside the Church. But Dalit Christian theology, in order to be a complete, and not just a partial, theology, has to base itself on the experiences of the Dalits as a whole and not simply that of the Dalit Christians alone.

Q: How does Dalit Christian theology differ from non-Dalit Indian Christian theology?

A: Since Dalit Christian theology is based on the faith experiences of the Dalits, it presents a very different image of God and His role in human history from what it is depicted in the theology evolved by 'upper' caste Christians. Till now, Indian Christian theology has been based on either the experience of western colonialists or of 'upper' caste Christians, who are a small, but, at the same time, a very powerful, minority within the Indian Christian community. Now, the problem of the 'upper' caste Christians is not social oppression or poverty but of how to relate to their former Hindu faith and ethos. That is why they talk in terms of 'Christian Vedanta', 'Christian Bhakti', 'Christian Yoga', 'Christian Ashrams' and so on. This resulted in what some have called the Brahminisation of Christianity. But the problems of the Dalit Christians are very different. For us the principal question is that of sheer survival, of denial of our social, economic and political rights. So, while in their

theological formulations ‘upper’ caste Christians were principally concerned with explaining Christianity in Brahminical categories, our major concern has been how our faith experience can help us win our rights. This is really what Dalit theology is all about.

Q: Where does the question of the importance of human history come into this?

A: Our own history is central for us in the way we seek to understand our faith. As we see it, Dalit theology is essentially a product of reflecting on Divine action in the history of the Dalits. So, like any other liberation theology, Dalit theology takes the issue of history very seriously. On the other hand, Brahminic Christian and Western Christian theology do not attach much importance to history. Brahminic Christian theology is based on the philosophy of Vedanta, according to which the world is illusory, while western Christian theology is based on the classical Greek dualism between the this-world and the other-world, between matter and spirit. In contrast, Dalit theology is deeply rooted in this world, in the this-worldly experiences and sufferings of the Dalits, and, rather than promising the Dalits a place in heaven, it inspires them to struggle for transforming this world to bring justice for the Dalits.

Q: What role does Ambedkar play in the writings of Dalit Christian theologians?

A: It is very unfortunate that traditional Indian Christian theology has completely ignored Ambedkar while reflecting on the Christian faith in the Indian context. This is because most of these theologians have been of ‘upper’ caste origin. So, instead of taking inspiration from people of Dalit or Shudra background like Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule, they used the writings of ‘upper’ caste writers and reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy or Keshub Chandra Sen or Gandhi in order to develop a contextual Indian theology. This is so despite the fact that Ambedkar wrote extensively on the Christian faith and Church history and their relationship with the Dalits. Similar is the case with Mahatma Phule. In his *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) Phule develops a very interesting concept of Christology, the person of Christ. He refers to the story of the non Aryan king Bali, whose kingdom was snatched by the Brahmin Vamana. Vamana goes on to rigidly enforce the law of caste, converting the natives into Untouchables and Shudras. Phule tells us that in rural Maharashtra the ordinary village folk still long for the return of the righteous rule of Raja Bali, and he identifies Jesus as Bali. He says that Jesus and his disciples, the Christians, have come to India to rescue the Dalits and Shudras from Aryan or Brahmin hegemony. All this has been ignored by ‘upper’ caste Christian writers.

Q: Yes, but are Dalit Christian theologians now paying attention to and drawing inspiration from the works of people like Ambedkar and Phule?

A: It is still not happening on the scale it should. Their analysis is yet to become an integral part of Dalit Christian theology. But increasingly I find that Ambedkar is beginning to exercise a powerful influence on Dalit Christian writers and this is bound to grow in time to come. Many of the things that Ambedkar wrote and said about the Christian faith and the Indian Church in the 1930s are only now being said and written about by Dalit Christian theologians. In my own case. I am aware of Ambedkar’s writings and I use them directly or indirectly in all my writings.

Q: Are Dalit Christian writers also drawing on Dalit cultural motifs for developing their theologies?

A: Yes, this is happening, and we are trying to reclaim our Dalit heroes, most of whom were not Christians. So, we are using such radical figures as Kabir, Ravidas, Chokhamela and others. Now, these were revolutionaries in their own times, crusading against caste oppression. The Purushusa Sukta hymn of the Rig Veda, which describes the origin of Man, tells us that God created the Brahmins from the head of the Primal Man, the Kshatriyas from his hands, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from his feet. But the Dalits and Adivasis do not even figure here, not even being considered as human beings! But what people like Kabir, Ravidas and others were attempting to do was to re-establish a relationship between the Dalits and God. And this Dalit Christian theology must take into account.

Q: What has been the reaction of the Church leadership, which is still largely 'upper' caste, to the emergence of Dalit theology?

A: Some have accused us of 'dividing' the Church and of 'misinterpreting' Christianity. But, on the whole, I can say that the Church leadership is definitely under increasing pressure from the Dalits because of their growing awareness of their rights that have been denied to them. And then there is also what we call in Christian theological terms, pressure from the Holy Spirit. This is forcing the Church to respond. Even those sections within the Church hierarchy who do not wish to see the Dalits advance are forced to respond, because they know that if they do not do so, they will be left high and dry. They won't have any space, so in order to save themselves they will have to become part of this process.

Q: Do you see any danger of the Church leadership co-opting the Dalit Christian movement so as to blunt its radical thrust?

A: That danger has always been there. Some non-Dalit Church leaders would like to see compromise and accommodation in place of protest and struggle. But I don't think they can succeed in their aims. And we are also particular that the leadership of the movement must rest in Dalit hands. For this purpose some of us have set up a group called the Dalit Solidarity Programme. It was established in 1992, with the help of the Inter-Faith desk of the Geneva-based World Council of Churches. Its aim is to bring Dalits of all religious and ideological backgrounds – Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others-on a common platform. Non-Dalits cannot be leaders of this organization, they can only be enablers. Because of this we had to sacrifice many non-Dalits, Christian as well as others, who had been all along claiming to be messiahs of the Dalits. As Paulo Freire writes somewhere, movements of the oppressed struggling for liberation must not let people from dominant classes enter their ranks and sabotage their efforts by appointing themselves as guides and leaders.

In 1997 we had our second convention, which was attended by some 300 people. At this meeting we decided to shift from programmes to working with people's groups, so we renamed ourselves as Dalit Solidarity Peoples. As we began shifting towards closer collaboration with people's movements, many Christians fervently prayed that our movement would die out. Since we became more of a people's movement, we have had to lose the friendship of some senior bishops as well, who found our work too threatening to their own interests.

Q: Since your organization includes Dalits from all religious and ideological backgrounds, do you also address the question of inter-religious dialogue?

A: Yes, that is a very important question for us. We have six presidents, out of which only one is a Christian. And because we all come from such different religious backgrounds we have taken the question of inter-religious dialogue very seriously. But our way of dialoguing is very different from how 'upper' caste Christian theologians go about it. For them, by and large, dialogue has taken the form of entering into debates about theological niceties with Brahmin scholars, arguing from texts and scriptures. But for us, dialogue starts not from scriptures but from our common condition of oppression.

This is what we call the dialogue of life—working with Dalits of other faiths for a common goal, that of doing away with the structures of caste and class oppression. In our organisation, our dialogue does not entail religion at all. Religion is not our meeting point. Our concern and our meeting point is our common oppression and suffering as Dalits.

Frankly, the time for theological debates is over and now the time has come for inter-religious dialogue to be based on issues of common social concern. If at all dialogue has any meaning for us Dalits, you have to tell us how much your faith can contribute in improving the lives of the millions of our people who are living in conditions worse than slavery. If religion cannot do so, then of what use is it? So, for us religion has worth only if it helps us in our struggle for liberation. And, therefore, we are now thinking of a project to identify liberative elements in every religion which can be used in our struggle.

Q: How does your faith as a Christian inspire you in your work for the Dalit cause?

A: In my work I draw my strength and inspiration from my Christian faith experience. I see Christ not decked up in silken robes wearing a golden crown, as he is depicted in the cathedrals and Churches, but as the child of a poor village woman, the wife of a carpenter. Mary was so poor that the only place she could find to deliver her child was a manger, where cows and horses are tied up. It is a different matter that today people have tried to distort this image by constructing fancy mangers in palatial Churches to depict Jesus' birth during Christmas celebrations. When Jesus was born, the only thing that Mary could offer at the synagogue was a pair of doves, while the general practice was to offer a lamb.

Now, Jesus, who was born in a desperately poor family, spent the whole of his life working for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. That is why for me, as a Christian, it is a natural expression of my faith commitment to be involved in the movement for Dalit liberation, because Jesus, the person in whom I have put my faith, became for me what I am today—Dalit, oppressed and despised, in order that I and millions of others like me could be liberated. But if Jesus is my source of inspiration, people from other faiths may have their own sources from which they draw their strength, and that is fine by me.

In this connection it is very interesting to note that the word 'Dalit' is found in Sanskrit. Persian, Arabic as well as Hebrew, and in all these languages it means roughly the same thing: oppressed or weak. In the Bible the word 'Dalit' is used 52 times. In the Old Testament, the prophets are described as chiding traders and priests for their mistreatment of people whom they call 'Dalits'. Likewise, the prophet Isaiah foretells the arrival of a messiah who will come to deliver the 'Dalits' from oppression.

So, this theme of God and His prophets working for the cause of the Dalits is one that runs right through the Bible.

Q: Has Dalit theology had a major impact in changing the attitudes and policies of the Church leadership vis-a-vis the Dalits? Or is it the case that Dalit theology is still largely confined within the walls of seminaries?

A: I am afraid that Dalit theology has yet to pick up and reach out to the Dalit masses. People like me may get an occasional chance to preach our ideas from the pulpits, but in India today there are very few Dalit theologians who have access to Church structures to do so. If you measure the impact of Dalit theology in terms of concrete changes that the Church authorities have been forced to make in matters such as resource allocation or leadership structures, then its influence has not been much so far. Take the case of elitist Christian schools. How many Dalit children have been admitted to them so far? These schools cater almost entirely to the 'upper' caste elites, Hindus and others. So, in this sense the Churches we have are not the Church of Christ. Christ tells us to love our neighbours as ourselves. Who are the neighbours of the leaders of the Church? Are they the starving Dalits, who may share their Christian faith, or the rich industrialists who are sucking the blood of the poor and who send their children to elitist Christian schools in air-conditioned cars?

I have been trying, through my writings and speeches, to impress upon the Church to radically change its attitudes towards the Dalits, but the response, I must confess, has not been very enthusiastic. I have been the editor of the official organ of the Church of North India -The North Indian Church Review-for quite a while now. In my editorials I constantly question the Church leaders as to what they are doing for the Dalits. I have just written an editorial, in which I have discussed the various resolutions that the Church of North India has passed on the Dalit question in the last ten years. Every year for the last one decade the top-brass of the Church of North India have been meeting and issuing grand statements reiterating their commitment to the Dalit cause. But in one of their recent statements they have admitted that they have done almost nothing at all, so I am asking them: "What is the use of all this tall talk, of passing pious resolutions, when you are actually not serious about doing anything for the Dalits?" I have asked them: "If the mission statement of the Church of North India that the Dalit question has been missed by us at all levels is correct, then what are the reasons for the failures?"

Q: How do you see the phenomenon of Hindutva and what implications does it have for the Dalits?

A: Hindutva has no place at all for the Dalits, the Adivasis, the Shudras. It has no place for their identities and it robs them of the right to speak for themselves, to struggle for their rights. From the point of view of Dalit interests, I see Hindutva as a very dangerous development. At its very root is the fear of Dalit awakening, and this is why the Muslims and Christians are being targeted by Hindutva forces as scapegoats, so that the Dalits rally behind the 'upper' castes instead of against them. And this is what is happening in Gujarat and other places. Christians are being attacked because they are conscientising the Tribals and the Dalits. This has nothing to do with conversions, because very few conversions are actually taking place. In fact, as the figures provided by the government itself make clear, the proportion of Christians has been going down with every successive census.

ADDENDUM - 7

Interview with Monodeep Daniel
16-06-2009
Utrecht

The words that are *cursive* are the questions and remarks from myself.

What do you know about discrimination and inequality in the Churches?

In different parts of India the Churches behave differently. The north east of India is mainly tribal whereas a good part of central India is adivasi/aboriginal tribes. Those areas are largely Christian. But in the interland is the problem of Dalits. Again, in the Northern part of India, the majority of the Church, say 70% of the Church, is Dalit. And if you add tribals then nearly 95% of the Church would consist of tribals and Dalits. But there are parts of India where caste Hindus also became Christians. And where this phenomena occurred on a large scale, we find that even today there is difference, or differences are seen, between the caste Christians and the Dalit Christians. And these differences adversely affect the Dalit Christians. When exclusions are made, it is not the high castes that suffer from exclusion, it is the Dalits who suffer from exclusion. So exclusion of any rate affects Dalits adversely, that's the point and the problem. So in the Church also, the discrimination adversely affects the Dalit Christians. In my view that leaves the Dalit Christians less educated, it leaves them less economically prosperous, it leaves them to be less in intellectual calibre. So what is the result of this? The result of this is psychological: it breaks their confidence, self-esteem, self-worth. It discredits them, devalues them, discriminates them. So these are emotional impacts. And this emotional impact on the people is worse sometimes than other impacts, because it completely discourages and demotivates a person from studying, from competing from having self-worth, from the confidence of jumping in the pool to swim. Because the believes that I cannot swim doesn't help a person to want to learn how to swim, so to say. All these things happen just as much in the Church as outside the Church, in the society. And within the Church, what I have been saying is, people from the caste background who became Christians, even now discriminates against them who are Dalits. So there is inequality in the Church. But where does it actually happen? If you go to the Church both Christian Dalits and caste Dalits would be there, you may not see, at the face of it, any problems going on. But where do the problems occur? When people look for a spouse to marry. And then they have to work it out whether my daughter or my son is eligible to marry that person/daughter or son. And that is where you can see the discrimination. Or, whether I can invite that person for a meal in my house or should I accept an invitation for such and such place. *And the high positions in the Church, are that all high-castes?* In the protestant Church it's fairly mixed. In the North of India everybody is a Dalit, as I told you. South India is particularly mixed. In the Catholic Church domination is by the caste people. But remember the caste issue in the Catholic Church is also a little mixed up with the Portuguese background. The people who have descended from Portuguese are a little superior anyway. People who come from the Syrian background are traditionally superior. The Syrians are next to the Brahman caste, that is their privilege. Those kind of people dominate the Church.

In other interviews I got confronted with the idea of being a Christian in a way of liberating oneself, what's your idea about that; what does Christianity means for a Dalit?

Let me put it this way. Religion traditionally has to do with ideas of what is sacred and what is profane. The line that demarcates what is sacred and what is profane is so deep that even in the

things that are bad, the line of demarcation run through that. Even the things that are good the line of demarcation runs through that. Good and bad can meet. But what is sacred and what is profane, can never meet. That is the idea that controls the hearts and minds of people. Within the Christian Church also, when people come with this kind of mental setting, the problem comes up within the community. But, you see the Christian faith if we see very deep what hope it offers, the hope it offers, unlike the other systems where when the sacred comes in contact with the profane, it is the sacred that is adversely affected. So therefore, the sacred is to be kept apart from the profane so that the sacred doesn't lose its character, by becoming common and profane. The Christian gospel is this, that it's the other way around. The sacred is so powerful that when it comes in contact with the profane, it is the profane that becomes sacred. So when Jesus touched a leprosy patient, he doesn't become polluted, but the leprosy patient was healed. So when a menstruating woman touched Jesus, Jesus didn't get polluted but the woman was healed. When Jesus touched a dead body, he did not become polluted but the dead body was raised to life. So here it is the reverse. And the good news is that Jesus gives this power to his disciples, to go and heal and preach. So, what happens in our tradition? That my ancestors could never go to the temple with an offering, because their offering would pollute the sacredness of the temple. But when the Church was established the priest said in the Church, we could bring our offerings to God and whatever we are and whatever we bring, will become sacred, and it will not affect or pollute the holiness of the Church. So these are two counter systems. And when two meet, there is always a clash.

But for the regular Christian Dalit, what does his Christianity means for him? Maybe for you, what does it means for you?

Exactly the opposite of what we were as a Hindu. As a Dalit and as a Christian I can be a priest, I can do the ceremonies, I can preach the Word, I can be educated, so it's just the reverse. But despite of all those things, there are moments you are up fronted with this horrendous thing to be reminded that although you can do all those things, yet you are untouchable, a Dalit. There are moments that that reminder comes. For example, when I was in seminary, I remember one person. We were discussing something and suddenly during the course of the discussion he became very excited (agitated) and turned to me and said: you all have been low-castes and untouchables always. That was a bit of a shock, unexpected. There are moments when this up front comes up. And it's very difficult to root it out from the cultural matrix, that is there in the hearts and in the minds of the people. So as a Christian I escaped from the prison, but the escape is not 100%.

What I'm a bit missing in all this is, what I thought, is the overall message of the Christian faith: that we all are sinners and we all need Jesus. Do you agree that that's the overall message of the Christian faith? That we need Jesus for our salvation, and that this salvation is not in this life, but in the eternal life?

Yes, that is the overall picture, but that misses one point. Not everybody is a sinner. Yes, in one sense everybody is a sinner, but there are two types: one who sin and one who is sinned against. *But Jesus didn't make any difference.* He did make difference between who sinned and who was sinned against. *But they both need Jesus.* Yes, they both need Jesus, but in different ways. Let me tell you this story to assert this point. Jesus was having supper with a man called Simon, a house of a Pharisee. And a woman came and washed his feet with her tears. And the Pharisees said that if this man was a prophet he would have known what kind of woman this is who was *touching* him. And Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, that he said to the host of the house: do you see this woman who is crying and weeping and washing my feet? And I came to your house and you offered me no kiss of welcome, but she has kissed my feet. You did not offer to wash my feet, but she has washed them with her tears. Now this woman is also a sinner, but she is sinned against, and Jesus

supports her. That man, the Pharisee, is also a sinner, but he probably thinks he is not. So there are two types. *But in the very beginning, before we make the choice of victimizing another or not, do you share the conviction that when we were born, we were born in sin?* You are touching the concept of original sin. Whether we are born sinners. St. Augustin would say: we sin, we don't become sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. The problem with that is that for the Dalits we have been told for 4000 years that we were born sinners and you are polluted. You were born sinners because in the previous birth you were sinners. And if you suffer now, next birth is maybe better. This is a very convenient way to keep people enslaved. So to accept that framework is very difficult. Traditionally the Church have held that view and it is probably to tell the oppressor that he too is a sinner, it is a good thing.

But the Dalits also need to convert. For example the Dalit need to repent of the fact that he is to some extent also responsible for making the caste people the way they are. Because he has always accepted it instead of questioning it... By the virtue of birth nobody becomes better or worse. It is we who make people better or worse, our philosophies, our ideologies, our worldviews. The victims should also have the courage to fight against it. At the same time we should not blame the victims for everything, the blame is to the one who victimises. And by the original sin doctrine we should not use it to further victimise the victim. So, instead of focussing on original sin let us focus on the original righteousness which each person has. Before we fell into sin we were righteous people, Adam and Eve were righteous people, in relationship with God and to one another. Till this harmony in relationship was broken, and the earth was cursed. The human being had sinned and the relationship with God was broken. So in the triangle you see this three relationships broken. But before this the relationship of harmony did exist, so within all of us there is righteousness. Original righteousness, which is more original than the original sin. That is what I would say. In the contextual reality St. Augustin was speaking to a different audience, that is why he explained it like this. But we could also explain the same thing in a different way. We should be careful that none of our doctrines victimises our victims any further.

Do you think Christians all over the world share something in common? Is there a universal Christian message?

Yes, there is. One: there is the feeling of kinship. That somehow or the other, we belong one another, despite all the differences. Two: egalitarianism. That we are equal, in Gods sight. And in Christ, all are equal. The third thing is our freedom. We are free to act and to love justly. The bible would say, just and loving kindness. We are free to do that. We don't need a set of law to tell us what to do and what not to do. But the Christian message is that we are free to act in justice in our relationships, to be loving and kind. It is these three things that are cross-cultural, transnational.

What do you think of the efforts of the Church of India to do something about the discrimination?

The Church of north india was the first Church where they took the decisions that the Church do all they can do for the liberation and emancipation of the Dalits. And the Church recognized that there is a problem of discrimination, both within the Church as outside, in the larger society. After this decision the catholic Church also followed and it has accepted this reality and has given its support. Now, a lot of Churches all around the country own large educational institutions. The catholic Church, by and large, has agreed this institutions that they will not refuse admission to the catholic children. But the protestant Churches have yet to make that declaration. That when protestant children ask for admission, they get it. Education is the key to liberation, it is extremely important. But, the protestant educational institutions are, I would say, notoriously backwards in this issue. The only institution that has declared that they are not refusing Christian Dalit children, is the saint Steven college in Delhi. That is the only institution that I have heard of. Furthermore, a lot of

scholarships need to be generated. There is also a need for counselling, especially for the young people in the Church, to make them feel that they are capable: that they can become lawyers, they can become doctors etc. But they need somebody to tell this. So that is another thing that lack in the Churches. A lot of Churches need this kind of diaconia. Whereas the diaconia the local Churches are offering are constantly telling everybody that they are sinners, that they have to become religious to go to heaven. And heaven and hell are contrasted only by the degrees of temperature. You don't want to be in a hotter place so you go to a cooler place, which is heaven. This kind of presuppositions behind every kind of theological articulation at a popular level, is very difficult. *And this story is told in Churches?* Yes, if you ask a Christian youngster: why are you religious?, and he will see: because I want to go to heaven. The point is that this person is being equipped to go to heaven, but he is not being equipped to do well in the world. That's the tragedy with the kind of pietistic gospel that came from other parts of India, or other parts of the world to India. And instead of equipping our people to have the courage to fight and to do well in life, and to have a good economic position, and a social position in the world, they were resigned to live their life without fighting, waiting on God to do something and just go to heaven. So that is what I find very difficult in the kinds of theologies that are preached. For the prosperous Church this is ok, but they teach the same kind of gospel to the Dalits: that they are sinners and they need to be forgiven, without any encouragement that they are also good, that they are intelligent and they can do well. *Do you think that the message of we are sinners etc does not apply to the Christian Dalits?* I don't think that message applies to the Christian Dalits, that you are told that you are a sinner all the time. The emphasis should not be on the view that they are sinners. They are basically good people, Gods forgiveness is there. God overlooks the sins. You can't tell a person who is a victim of the sins of others that you are a sinner. You are an important person in the eyes of God. Therefore, you have to be told that you cannot be just a mediocre person. If you work in a institution you should not be satisfied being a typist, a clerk – you have to climb up the ladder, and you have the capacity to do that. That confidence and that faith has to be built in our people. The Church is emphasising in producing robots who would be faithful to their masters.

The IDSN created a Dalit discrimination check for companies. Do you think it's a good idea to introduce a same kind of check in the Churches?

That's maybe useful yes, they can pressurise the Churches that they have to see whether there is no discrimination in ordination of the priests, that there is no discrimination in giving scholarships to those who want to follow theological education, for those who hold responsible position in institutions, for the children who are seeking admission at the schools, for higher institutions, technical institutions, and that discrimination is not there when people are elected on the board of the Church.

What do you know about the treatment of women in Christian Households?

Bad, definitely. They are relatively better than other religious communities, perhaps. But definitely secondary, which is bad from Christian standards. There is turning women as slaves to men even to the extent of turning them to be the soul bread earners for the family and the man doesn't work. On top of it she has to come and see that the meal is there for everyone to eat, she has to nurture the children, she also has to take the responsibility for the children that they educate themselves or go to school. The man would also hold the woman responsible, he doesn't take any responsibility. Alcoholism is another problem, which affects the women. I have seen many families where the woman is unfulfilled emotionally because her husband is an drunkard, he is always under the influence of alcohol, where is the time to have a sensible conversation?

Do you see a difference between Dalits of various religions? For example between a Christian and a Muslim Dalit? Is one group worse off than another?

You could say there is a difference between urban Dalits and rural Dalits. The rural Dalits whichever religion they convert to, they continue to be the victim of social injustice. And the injustice becomes acute when the government does not extend the compensatory rules to the Dalit Christian and the Dalit muslim. Neither does the society treat them with dignity and equality after the convert, so they suffer quite more. In urban areas the Dalits are slightly more aware. There is better policing, there is more equality due to anonymity, so they may escape. And the city offers its own opportunities. Children can go to school in the cities, they can get more jobs, they can have slightly better housing. *But for example the difference between Muslim and Christian Dalits?* When people become Christians, there is one thing that they are getting to a better social mobility mode, that means the mood/mode changes. A person who is converted to Christianity will be very eager to send his children to school. He may not come out of poverty and backwardness but he send his children to school. Within a generation or two you will see the family standards improved. *And why is this different from a Muslim Dalit?* Because he will send his children to mosque to learn the Quran.

What do you think Christianity means for a Dalit? Do they see themselves as a Dalit or as a Christian?

Largely as Christians. *Why?* That's a very, very important question. To be untouchable, the word untouchable stinks, it has a bad smell about it, and nobody would like to have that name attached, they want to escape. When people become Christians, they will not acknowledge their Dalit roots, they will keep on saying that they are Christians. And they will tell you stories which are mythical. They will tell you that they were rajputs or other tribal or warrior castes and that they were migrated from some place and came here. *But Dalit is not a stinky name, it is something to be proud of. I interviewed the people from CARDS and they answered with: Dalit, I feel like a Dalit, because they were proud of it.* I'm talking about the majority, then you come to another set of Christians who are awakened to their Dalit reality, like us. We openly say that we are Dalit Christians and that we are proud to be Dalit Christians. To say I'm a Christian is to shy away from the battleground. *And for the people that would say: I'm a Dalit, is their Dalitness for them more important than their Christianess?* Yes, that's right. *That also counts for you?* Yes.

I read that 'Christian' a euphemism is for Dalit in India. Do you think this is true?

Yes, in North and Central India that is true. South is a little mixed.

What's more important for high-caste Christians: their high-caste or their religion?

I think their castes comes first. Definitely, that I have seen again and again. *Have you also met high caste Christians that really stood up for the Dalits?* Nobody can liberate the Dalits, they have to do it themselves. But the people who are not Dalits, they can be in solidarity with us. But I don't think they can bring liberation to us.

What do you think of Dalit-theology? What do you think it's all about?

Dalit theology is three words, change is possible. That is the hope. But Dalit theology is as you see now, to understand God and his dealings with the broken Dalit community, with special reference to Christ. If you remove 'with reference to Christ', it would be Islamic theology or Jewish theology. *But what does that mean? With special reference to Christ?* That means that how God through Christ is dealing with the brokenness of the Dalits. *And how is that?* That is where the Dalit Christology comes

into action. One example: through Christ God showed on whose side he was. Which is obvious, God was on the side of those who are broken. But in Christ the uniqueness is that the solidarity with the Dalits was in its fullness. That he allowed himself to be broken, his body to be broken, in suffering, even to the extent that Jesus felt alienated from God, from society, from his own people. We see the experience of rejection in Christ. So, the Dalit experience of alienation, of rejection, we see in Christ. For instance for us, to see the death of Christ and relate it to us as an idea of substitution is very difficult for us. I mean we don't need anybody to die for us. We all die every day. How does the death of Christ substitute our killings every day? It doesn't. It does not relate to us. But solidarity does. Solidarity is salvation for us. For privileged groups, God would be portrayed as a king, but for us God as Christ being a king has no appeal. But Christ suffering among us is very appealing: dying with us, suffering with us. *So he died with you and not for you?* Yes. There are two things here, the first thing is, what is unacceptable to us is that Jesus died because of us. That we are the cause of Jesus death. We are not the cause, the oppressors are the cause of his death.

Do you think it's possible for all the Christians in India to unite?

No, that's an ideal. Because of the very nature of diversity we have in our country. But what is possible is to create a greater sense of solidarity.

What do you think mission (in the sense of Christian mission) should involve in India?

Three things, in the wider sense: to educate, to organise and to resist. Acknowledgment should be given to dr. Ambedkar. These are his ideas. To educate in the wider sense means not only formal education but also educating them in their rights, duties, awareness. Educating them in the Christian faith for example. For example when we talk about equality, where do we find equality? Then you have to go back to genesis 1 – telling the story of creation, for example in education. Teaching about human rights. *But why is this mission – in the Christian sense of the word?* When we talk about education: it is a mission, to educate people in the widest sense.

What role do you think a mission organisation could play in this issue?

It should follow the line of Ambedkar with his organisation, education and resist principle, but then education in its widest sense. It is to make the Dalits aware, right from their roots, from how their story begins and where it can end. Dalits lack the ability to organise themselves. So, teaching them how to organise themselves right from the grassroots level is very helpful.

What do you want us, the people here in Holland, to do.

Continuously raise awareness in Holland, for what is happening in India. Which might also mean that in some sense, for example, the Hindu community might feel offended. But, try your best to do it without hurting anybody's feelings. Don't use the word Hindu, talk about castes without using the word Hindu.