

**BOARD OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
OF THE SENATE OF SERAMPORE COLLEGE**

BOARD OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION OF THE SENATE OF SERAMPORE COLLEGE
3rd Floor, 73 Miller's Road, Benson Town P.O., Bangalore – 560 046.

SECRETARY'S REPORT – 2014-2015

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NARRATIVE REPORT FOR THE PERIOD MARCH 2014 TO FEB 2015

Honorable Master, President and Respected Colleagues,

Good Morning to you all. Greetings from the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College to all of you in the name of God the Creator and Liberator.

I am experiencing God's miracle in the life of BTESSC in the last few years. It also proves that money need not be the criteria for the growth of any organization. BTESSC has achieved a permanent place in the world of ecumenical theological education by its life and witness. Some of our key activities last year created a very good impact on the life of theological education. The programme led by the Rev. Winnie Varghese on 'Human Sexuality,' the national level inter-faith round table discussion on 'Homophobia,' and the National Theologians Conference on 'Hermeneutics from a Palestinian's Perspective,' created a very good impact both at the national and international levels.

We also entered the North Eastern parts of India for the first time by organizing a workshop on Human Sexuality at Aizawl. How is it possible for one person without out much money to achieve it? This is the question one of our mission partners raised. It is possible because of the mercy of our Divine Creator and the solidarity of all of you.

It is possible because we have the Rt. Rev. Dr. John Sadananda, our Master and my personal counsellor like my elder brother, who guides me and advices me whenever possible. Recently he completed 65 years, and was relieved from

his fulltime ecclesial responsibilities. Now, he is dedicating his time to strengthen theological education through the Senate of Serampore College. His contribution to SSC is remarkable, and I would like to thank him and welcome him on behalf of all of us and also on my behalf.

An organization can be successful only if it enjoys freedom, and BTESSC enjoys that freedom under the leadership of our Chairperson the Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos. He is very quiet, unassuming and very humble - an example of Christian leadership which I have learnt from him. I wonder how he is able to manage his travel. Most of the time he spends in the international air ports but he is able to give sufficient time to all the national and international ecumenical initiatives he is associated with. He gives me freedom, and smilingly advices and politely corrects me whenever there is a need. I cordially welcome you dear Chairperson Bishop.

I am fortunate to have good colleagues as full time officers, a very understanding Registrar who likes to work as a team, and is open for learning. Any time of the day one can contact him and he is readily available with a smile. He is building a good working relationship between SSC and BTESSC. I welcome you Dr. Patro. Of course my long standing friend, Dr. Wati Longchar who helps me a lot in all our programmes with his international experience. He is an asset to us. Our new SATHRI Dean, the Rev. Dr. P.G. George is a very understanding personality and relates with me very pastorally whenever there is some confusion because of the historical link between SATHRI and BTESSC. Welcome to both of you. Some of you may wonder about this long introduction and welcome. I strongly believe in recognizing persons for their leadership and their contribution is very much needed. I need it always and expect the same from all of you.

A special word of welcome to the Rev. Dr. Deenabandhu Manchala, the speaker for our Board seminar who has taken the responsibility as Area Executive, Southern Asia, Common Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ recently, after serving the World Council of Churches for a long period. Thanks to him, for accepting our invitation and I welcome him on all our behalf. I cannot name each one of you for your openness to support whenever I approached you. I would like to mention your name and express my feeling. But due to time constraint I cannot do it. Welcome to all the Church Leaders, Principals, Representatives of the Faculty and Students, all the guests, Faculty of OTS and other friends.

Exposure to two new Perspectives

China Visit:

What one hears and what we witness personally is entirely different. This is true of my visits to two different places. I used to hear a lot about the Peoples Republic of China and Palestine/Israel. But I was challenged by the two situations there. A team of five members from NCCI and BTESSC visited the Churches and Theological Institutions in China. Unfortunately our President and the Vice President of NCCI were not able to join us due to VISA problem.

The Churches there are very much active and Christianity is growing day by day. The Church and State relationship too is very much encouraging. The State helps Churches with lands, buildings and also provides money for theological colleges. At the same time, there is an invisible monitoring of all its activities. At present, the Churches are not concentrating on building contextual theology relevant to their situation, but mainly concentrating on building the congregation, and are involved in pastoral care and concern. We have to learn a lot from them. The following recommendations emerged towards the end of our visit, which need to be taken seriously.



1. Information sharing, sharing documents, news letters and other publications.
2. Inviting persons for important programmes like Board and Senate meetings, assembly and conferences.
3. Exposure to faculty and students
4. Short term exchange programme for faculty and students
5. Translation of books and journals in both the languages

6. Dialogue between the two contextual theologies
7. Exposure for Ph.D. scholars
8. Church leaders' visits on both sides

International Kairos Conference:

I was invited to participate in the Kairos Conference in Bethlehem and I used this opportunity to learn more from the context. I returned to India with a number of challenges, but with frustration. This is so because of a clear example of how the Bible is misused and used for exploitation. Most of us also are misguided by Western theologians on the theological concept of the Promised land, selection/election, Chosen community, Zionism and anti semitism. In turn we also impart the same to our students and the churches in India. We have mixed the biblical Israel with the political Israel. We also do not realize that there are Christians in Palestine. The challenge before us now is to re-look into our curriculum and make a radical change to understand the Bible from the justice perspective.

We also have to discourage commercial tourism and promote alternative tours to understand the life and sufferings of the people. BTESSC has published an Indian version of the book *Listening to the Living Stones*, which gives full details of the need for the alternative tour.

Activities of the Year:

In the past three years, BTESSC has tried to plan the programmes in line with the theme of the year. With that, BTESSC was able to reach theological institutions, Christian organisations, ecumenical institutions irrespective of theological affiliations, churches and NGOs. The programmes conducted in the last year directly or indirectly related to the theme of the year, "Re-location of Mission and Ecumenism in the Context of the Margins."

Public Lecture:

The Public Lecture on the book review *The Bible and Asia*, written by R.S. Sugirtharajah was organized jointly by the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC) and the Department of Biblical Studies of

the United Theological College, Bangalore on 3rd March, 2014. Dr. John Samuel Raj, the Principal of the United Theological College, Bangalore moderated the session.

In his lecture, Mr. Narasiah briefly summarized the content of the seven chapters of the book and explained the various stages of the reception of the Bible in Asia. He



informed the audience about the several links between the biblical narratives and the native culture of India. He also emphasized the transformation of the Bible – from a book of inspiration to a book of religion and later to a book of aggression by

colonial powers. He highlighted the fact that the Book was about the reception of the Bible in Asia. Narasiah, however, emphasized that the Bible could be a meeting point of two societies. He congratulated the author for his convictions and courage for initiating a conversation between the two cultures without taking sides. Dr. Sugirtharajah was part of the deliberations through video conferencing. In his response, Dr. David Joy the New Testament Professor of UTC said, post-colonial methodology is appropriate as long as neo-colonial forces are at work in this world

Conversation with the Rev. Winnie Varghese on “Church and Homophobia”:

SCM India and the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College held a conversation with the Rev. Winnie Varghese, a priest, theologian, and an activist for gay rights, at SCM House on 11th March 2014. The talk was centered on “Church and Homophobia.” Dr. Sarasu Esther Thomas, Assistant Professor, National Law School of Indian University moderated the discussion.

The speaker the Rev. Winnie Varghese is an Indian-American Priest of the Episcopal Church, currently serving as Rector of St. Mark’s Church in the Bowery, New York City. The Rev. Winnie who has been open about her gay identity spoke of her struggle for acceptance in her family and community, and how she found release for herself in her new identity through the living word of God. During



the discussion, the audience also expressed how Art. 377 of the IPC has demeaned humanity and is actually anti-love which discriminates people in their right to choose to love. In conclusion, she appealed to the participants to be sensitive to the background of the people around in our attitude, speech and approach.

Public Lecture:

BTESSC in cooperation with Aneka Bangalore organized a public lecture by the Rev. Winnie Varghese at ISI Bangalore on 11th March 2014 on the topic “Religion and Homophobia.” She regretted how people especially the priests avoid talking about gays, instead of bringing these people into the fold of the Church. For her, people of sexual minority are the ones who face rejection from their family, friends, society, and workplace. At such times, would God reject them too? In her talk she brought out the nature of God as love, peace and justice and emphasized the imbibing of these values in our own selves and in our churches. Dr. P. Mohan Larbeer welcomed the gathering and introduced the theme and the speaker.

National Theological Students Conference 2014:

The National Theological Students Conference – 2014 was jointly organized by the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC) and Indian School of Ecumenical Theology (ISET) – Ecumenical Christian Center (ECC) between 1st and 4th May, 2014 at ECC, Bangalore on the theme, “Ecumenism in the 21st century: A Perspective from the Margins.” 85 participants, both students and resource persons from all over India representing 31 theological seminaries attended.

The inaugural function was chaired by the Very Rev. Dr. Cherian Thomas, Director, ECC, and the Rev. Dr. Reji Samuel, Dean of ISET-ECC welcomed the

gathering. The theme 'Ecumenism in the 21st century: A Perspective from the Margins,' was introduced by the Rev. Dr. P. Mohan Larbeer, Secretary, BTESSC and the conference was inaugurated by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, President of Senate of Serampore College.

The key note address was delivered by Dr. Ninan Koshy. In his speech he



critiqued the ecumenism of domination and suggested an ecumenism of the margins as one of freedom and empowerment. According to him, ecumenism from the perspective of the marginalized demands

the ecumenical movement to be prophetic. There were also lectures by resource persons reflecting on the theme from different perspectives. The participants also had the opportunity to interact in an informal session with the Rev. Dr. Santanu K. Patro, Registrar, Senate of Serampore College. At the end of the conference, a statement was released (Appendix No. 1).

A Round Table Discussion:

An Interfaith Round Table Discussion on Religion and Sexuality was held at Bangalore from 30th to 31st May 2014 under the auspices of the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC), and the Commission for



Justice, Peace and Creation of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and Aneka Bangalore. At the end of the discussion, the Bangalore Interfaith Declaration was adopted.

It says, "We dedicate ourselves to safeguard the

rights of all sexual minorities and to join hands with all civil society initiatives to decriminalize homosexuality and to eradicate homophobia. We call upon religious leaders to condemn homophobia and to practice non-discriminatory hiring policies in their institutions, and also to follow affirmative action to end the discrimination that transgendered people face in admissions and appointments. We resolve to work tirelessly to create a new world of compassion, justice, inclusivity and acceptance where the divine gift of sexuality will be celebrated in all diverse manifestations of affirmative love.” The declaration was widely circulated (Appendix No. 2).

Public Meeting:

On 31st May, 2014 Sri Sri Ravishankar, the founder of Art of Living said, ‘Affirm Diversity - Defend the Rights of the Sexual minorities,’ in a public meeting on ‘Faiths Against Homophobia,’ jointly organised by the BTESSC, ‘Aneka-Trust,’ and Centre for Peace and Justice Concerns of the NCCI at the Institute of Agricultural Technologists Hall, in Bangalore. The Bangalore declaration was released on that occasion.

The renowned representative leaders from different faith communities such as Sri Sri Ravisankar (Art of Living), Swami Agnivesh (President, Global Arya Samaj), Dr. A.K. Merchant (National Trustee of the Baha’i Community), Dr. Irfan Engineer (Institute for Peace Studies, Mumbai), Dr. Saleem Kidwai (Writer on ‘Gender Right Defender’), and Dr. Vincent Rajkumar (Christian Institute for Study of Religion and Society) spoke about Homophobia from their faith perspectives. This initiative was very much welcomed by the public.

National Conference on “Hermeneutics from a Palestinian’s Perspective”:

A national conference on ‘Hermeneutics from a Palestinian’s Perspective’ was organized by BTESSC from 14th – 16th August, 2014, at Bangalore to understand and analyse critically the Palestinian-Israel conflict and to engage in prophetic responses. More than 80 participants attended the conference from different parts of the world. The conference took note of the existing theological perceptions and asserted that the dominant paradigms have been pro-Israel grounded on Zionist readings of the situations. It was recognised, that the growing influence of Christian Zionists were in support of Israel and were working to counter the progressive and

radical church responses in support of Palestine. Therefore the conference was an initiative in enabling the Indian Christian theological communities and churches to effect paradigm changes, which is but to read and re-read the Bible from the perspective of Palestinians undergirded by notions of justice and justice alone.

The presence of Dr. Munther Isaac, Vice Academic Dean at Bethlehem Bible College, Dr. Daniel Ayuch, Professor of New Testament at the St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology at the University of Balamand, Lebanon and Dr. Michel Nseir, Head of the Middle East Desk in the World Council of Churches helped the participants to have a very close look into the reality the Palestinian situation.

Towards the end of the conference, the participants released a statement to the churches and the society at large and also proposed a recommendation to the Senate on curriculum revision (Appendix Nos. 3 and 4). They recommended that the Senate of Serampore should explore avenues by integrating Palestinian perspectives



into the existing courses and also to introduce new courses as required and optional, emphasising hermeneutics on the plight of the Palestinians in the areas of the New and Old Testaments, Christian Theology, Christian Ethics, Homiletics and others.

Dalit/Tribal/Adivasi dialogue with Minjung:

Dalit and Minjung Theologians have met so far ten times for theological dialogue, focusing on different issues and themes during the past 22 years. The meetings are held biennially, to help the participants to recoup, revive and rejuvenate themselves as to the cause of the dialogue. The groups have dedicated themselves to the construction and development of liberative Asian contextual theologies through dialogues and exchanges of experiences, activities, ideas and methods. Tribal/Adivasi theologians have also joined the present dialogue. This exchange of contextual theologies has not only contributed to the development of theological movements

but also to Asian contextual and liberation theologies. The 26 participants of the 10th Dialogue programme held in Bangalore, India, met under the theme, “Mission in the Context of Margin,” from 19th to 21st August, 2014. The dialogue was represented by younger theologians, people with different sexual orientation and activists. The mutual theological exchange enriched all the participants.

Dalits, Minjung and Tribals/Adivasis continue to experience various forms of oppression, exploitation, marginalization and suffering across a vast number of peoples and nations. Due to lop-sided developmental activities with political manipulation favouring the ruling elite who largely represent dominant castes in India, the voiceless have been displaced, uprooted, evicted and even annihilated rather on a genocidal scale. Today, they constitute the poorest section of the society. Many of them are reduced to be powerless, impoverished, hungry, landless, and homeless.

The contemporary mission paradigm that renders the margin as the ‘missiological other’ to exercise its program of mission demands a step towards retrospection, and the margin is to be located in its agency and alterity. It is here our contemporary mission in the context of margin is methodologically reconfigured and reconstructed. God’s mission thus involves resisting the ongoing oppression in the history of Dalit, Minjung, Tribal, Adivasi people, and mobilizing solidarity among them to collectively address the issues that surround unjust forces, institutions and systems for their transformation. Therefore, the participants affirmed to engage together in God’s liberative mission in the context of continuing marginalization and suffering and strengthen our solidarity network for justice and peace. At the end, a Solidarity Faith Affirmation Statement was released (Appendix No. 5).



Writers’ Workshop for Theologically Trained Women:

ISPCK, Delhi and BTESSC organized a Writers’ Workshop for Women Theologians with the support of Henry Martyn Institute from 1st to 4th September



2014 at HMI, Hyderabad in view of the increasing writing skills of theologically trained women. 35 theologically trained women from different parts of the country, from various churches and theological colleges attended this workshop. The workshop was conducted by Ms. Praveena Balasundaram from the United Methodist Women, United States and Ms. Ella Sonawane, Asst. General Secretary, ISPCCK, Delhi.

The Rev. Dr. Packiam Samuel started the workshop with his key note address. The four-day workshop included enabling writing skills, editing, proof reading, writing editorials and devotions. It was very helpful to all the women participants. They were able to write short devotions on their own at the end of the workshop.

Workshop on ‘Conflict Resolution and Peace’:

A workshop on ‘Conflict Resolution and Peace,’ was jointly organised by the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies of the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College from September 25th to 27th 2014 in Shamshabad. 30 faculty members from different theological colleges took part. Dr. Dalton Reimer, the Rev. I. Christina Asheervadam, Dr. Prasunna, the Rev. Dr. Tanati James Elisha, Dr. James H. Doug, Dr. David Israel, Mr. K. Vijaya Kumar were the resource persons.

The participants realized that conflicts arise when hegemonization of power, dominance or authority is sought to be established over others on the basis of ideology, gender, politics, caste, sub group, ethnic, community, and religion. Conflicts cause polarization of not only the parties concerned, but also those who are aligned with them; and affect all stake holders personally, relationally, structurally and culturally.

The participants were deeply concerned that vested interests at the international, national and local levels are perpetuating ethnic, racial, sectarian, communal, gender, caste, religious, cultural and class conflicts in order to gain power,

prosperity, and control over human and natural resources. Religious scriptures are being increasingly interpreted and misinterpreted as divine approval to fuel armed and ideological conflicts.



Towards the end, they pledged to become Peace Makers and Channels of Peace utilizing the theological perspectives; concepts; skills; and strategies learnt and acquired through this workshop on Peace and Conflict Resolution to address the causal factors of conflict, and negotiate conflict resolution, so that to promote reconciliation and transformation in a fair and transparent manner, taking into consideration the various interests and fears of the parties in conflict, so that new and lasting relationships can be built (Appendix No. 6).

Theological Consultation on ‘Human Sexuality’:

A Theological Consultation on ‘Human Sexuality’ was jointly organized by BTESSC and AICS at Academy of Integrated Christian Studies, Aizawl from 28th to 30th January 2015. This is the first time BTESSC is organizing a programme in North East area. The focus was very much on the theological perspective of human sexuality, and also to highlight the churches’ responsibility. The inaugural session was chaired by the Principal of AICS the Rev. Dr. R. Zolawma, and Dr. H. Vanlalauva gave the opening speech. Dr. Wati Longchar started the consultation with his key note address. Dr. David Selvaraj, Dr. Vincent Rajkumar, Dr. George Zachariah, Fr. Philip Kuruvilla and Mr. R.C. Jongte were the other resource persons. Students and faculty members from different colleges participated.

Facilitation Circulars:

Other than organizing programmes, BTESSC also circulates materials to all our members on different issues for their information and also for action. A few of them are listed below:

1. BTESSC Conference/Seminar Statements
2. PIEF Post on Israel and the Palestine issue

3. War on Christians
4. IB Report and Responses
5. News from Indian Currents Today – Church work for the marginalized may suffer as government cracks down on NGO activities on empowering people
6. Open letter from Gaza by a Norwegian Doctor – Mr. Obama – do you have a heart?
7. Gaza Update
8. Church should ‘weep and make reparation’: Pope meets victims of clerics’ sexual abuse
9. NGOs of the mind
10. The Oxford Handbook on Christianity in Asia

Books published by BTESSC:

1. *A History of Ecumenical Movement: An Introduction* by O.L. Snaitang (re-print)
2. *Asia Journal of Theology* Vol. 28 No. 1 & 2 (April & October)
3. *Law for Christians in Contemporary India* by Sarasu Esther Thomas
4. *Re-location of Mission and Ecumenism in the Context of the Margins*, edited by P. Mohan Larbeer
5. *One Christ-Many Religions* by S.J. Samartha (re-print)
6. *A Journey of Faith: Church and Homophobia* by Winnie Varghese
7. *Mission in the Context of Margins*, edited by Kwon Jin - Kwan and P. Mohan Larbeer
8. *Hermeneutics from a Palestinian’s Perspective* edited by Ranjan Solomon and P. Mohan Larbeer
9. *Listening to the Living Stones: Towards Theological Explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice* (Indian Edition)
10. *Communion on the Move: Towards a Relevant Theological Education – Essays in Honour of Bishop John Sadananda* edited by Wati Longchar and P. Mohan Larbeer

Board of Theological Text Book Programme of South Asia :

This is an autonomous programme but very much linked to our theological education. Structurally the officers are part of the committee and the secretary of the Board is the secretary of the committee. Its main concern is to promote theological text books in regional languages. For that, it supports different regions by contributing financial resources. Last year it distributed the following grants:

1. Theological Literature Council (Malayalam)	Rs.75,000/-
2. Kannada Theological Literature Committee	Rs.75,000/-
3. Tamil Theological Book Club	Rs.75,000/-
4. Mizo Theological Literature Committee	Rs.25,000/-
5. Hindi Theological Literature Committee	Rs.75,000/-
6. Bengali Theological Literature Committee	Rs.50,000/-

Solidarity Fund

Even with limited funds, we are able to fulfill the demands of needy students for their studies and help support programmes : 4 D.Th Scholarships were given through SATHRI/Research department, 10 M.Th scholarships through Senate and 8 scholarships to women students doing B.D studies directly by BTESSC. 6 colleges and 2 institutions received financial support for their programmes.

D.Th Scholarship	Rs. 1,20,000.00 (SATHRI/Research Department)
M.Th Scholarship	Rs. 1,50,000.00 (Registrar, Senate)
BTESSC Programmes	Rs. 2,00,000.00
B.D. Scholarships for women	Rs. 1,20,000.00 (8 Women Students)
Programme Grant	Rs. 2,80,000.00 (6 Colleges, 2 Institutional members)

I like to thank our Master who is the Chairperson of the Solidarity Committee for his experiential guidance which makes the Solidarity Fund Trust Committee to work effectively, and the Treasurer, Dr. Moses Manohar who deals with the funds efficiently and meticulously.

Issues that need to be given importance:

1. I am happy to inform you that the Senate has taken very seriously and adopted sexual harassment policy in the institutions. Now it is the responsibility of the colleges to implement them if they have not done it so far.
2. The curriculum recommendation of the “Hermeneutics from a Palestinian’s Perspective” needs to be further studied by the academic council for implementation.
3. Women, Student and Faculty representatives need to be increased in the decision making structure wherever it is possible.
4. Still the financial situation is not stable but efforts are taken to make it sustainable.
5. In the last Board meeting, we fixed the last date for the remittance of the Board fees as 30th August in every year but still we have to send reminders again and again for that.
6. The follow-up of the recommendations of China visit need to be given importance. Already the recommendation of the ATEM Myanmar is pending. The Board has to look into the two recommendations.

The Executive Committee of the Senate of Serampore College decided to have the theme **Relocating Theological Education in the Marginalised Context** for the year long reflection and also for the programme focus of BTESSC and all the members.

Relocating Theological Education in the Marginalised Context:

Who are the people in the margin in today’s society? People who are unable to participate in political, religious and economic systems through imposition of unjust ideologies, hierarchical structures, cultural practices, economic, social, and political structures which hinder their experience of abundant life are people in the margin. The Bible affirms that they are the agency for receiving God’s revelation and so “the site of God’s revelation,” “the space of God’s visitation.” Therefore, the subject matter of theology is people who are in margin and thus the task of theology is reflection on the Divine through the eyes of those who are made as non-beings, the women, the Dalits, and the indigenous communities. This challenges us that

we need to reject the dominant categories in doing theology, especially classical construct of theology. Theological education in India/Asian will be able to claim its distinctiveness by locating in the context of the margins.

By and large, theological education in India/Asia is like a duplicate copy of the Western model of education in terms of curriculum and teaching which is based on a hierarchy or compartmentalize courses. We have not liberated from the Enlightenment rational paradigm of education system. The basic methodology in seminary training is generally for cognitive or intellectual development often to the neglect of other aspects of human development. The context of the margin calls us a paradigm shift in theological education.

Calling to re-locate theological education in the context of the margin challenge us to repent from our Western, colonized theological mindset. Along with our contemporary historical experiences and realities, we are called to be open to let God speak to us through our religious stories, our rich cultural traditions and value systems of people. It also demands a methodology “from below.” It means the insights gained from our commitment to the struggle of the marginalized – Dalit, Minjung, Tribal/Adivasi, Women and the rural people for their justice and human dignity. Before we talk about historical criticism, form criticism, higher criticism, lower criticism, cross textual readings of the Bible, etc., it reminds us that we talk about how the poor people – Workers, Tribals, Dalits, the poor and powerless – would read a given passage in the Bible. We are called to study the bible, our contemporary stories, our religious stories together to discover spiritual resources for peace, justice, community life and wholeness of life.

Theological education in India/Asia requires integration of sub-altern perspectives into the academic discourse. K.C. Abraham argues that the sub-altern perspectives will necessarily bring a critique of the traditional perspectives which we unconsciously adopted in our theological education. It also demands reading history of Christianity from the receivers’ perspective, but not from the senders’ perspective. Instead of reading history from early Western church history to Roman churches, middle ages, reformation, the Enlightenment period, and to the 19th century, we can read history of Christianity from the Indian/Asian perspective: how we have received the Bible, how we read the Bible, how we have created Christian communities, how we have challenged our own cultures and societies, and how

we have transformed ourselves as a person and as a society as a whole. Reading history from the receiver's perspectives involves deconstruction and reconstruction of history from the experience of marginalized people. Their hopes and visions of the fullness of life become crucial in doing theology.

When we integrate our interpretation of the Bible and our histories together, our direction and goal of how to teach Christian theology (Systematic theology) becomes clear. The goal is to bring about transformation in our churches, in our immediate communities, in our politics, economic relations and also with all God's creation. This is to envision the reign of God and realize it here and now.

Conclusion

It is my responsibility to thank all the board members for your continued support which I expect continuously in this year also. Thanks to all the churches and organizations who joined with us in organizing programmes such as Inter-Faith Coalition for Peace, Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College, ISPCK, UTC, ANEKA, NCCI, ISET-ECC, SCMI, VISTHAR, HMI, AICS. Thanks also to our Overseas Partners especially the Methodist Church in UK, EMW Germany, Church of Scotland, Common Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ, Karibu Foundation - Norway, Korea Association of Minjung Theologians, Alternative Tourism Group, Bethlehem.

My sincere thanks to our Master and to our President/Chairperson for their help and guidance, they made me feel that I am not alone. Thanks to our Registrar, Deans of SATHRI and SCEPTRE for their support. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to my colleagues Ms. Esthaleena Margaret, Ms. Nethra and Mr. Vasanth in our office for their tireless work especially to Leena in her commitment to her responsibility. A word of thanks to Rev. Arun Kumar Wesley who helps us by editing all our publications.

Once again I thank you all for your active participation in this Board Meeting and look for your continuous support in the coming years. Kindly pray for us.

P. Mohan Larbeer
Secretary

04.02.2015

Appendix No. 1
National Theological Students Conference 2014
on the theme
‘Ecumenism in the 21st century:
A Perspective from the Margins’

The National Theological Students Conference – 2014 was jointly organized by the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC) and Indian School of Ecumenical Theology (ISET) – Ecumenical Christian Center (ECC) between 1st and 4th May, 2014 at ECC, Bangalore on the theme, “Ecumenism in the 21st century: a Perspective from the Margins.” 85 participants both students and resource persons from all over India representing 31 theological seminaries attended.

The inaugural function was chaired by the Very Rev. Dr. Cherian Thomas, Director, ECC and Rev. Dr. Reji Samuel, Dean of ISET-ECC welcomed the gathering. The theme ‘Ecumenism in the 21st century: A Perspective from the Margins,’ was introduced by Rev. Dr. P. Mohan Larbeer, Secretary, BTESSC and the conference was inaugurated by Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, President of Senate of Serampore College. Rev. Dr. Santanu K. Patro, Registrar, Serampore College and Prof. Dr. Ninan Koshy, former staff of WCC greeted the gathering.

The key note address was delivered by Dr. Ninan Koshy. In his speech he critiqued the ecumenism of domination and suggested the ecumenism of the margins as one of freedom and empowerment. According to him, ecumenism from the perspective of the marginalized demands the ecumenical movement to be prophetic. As a conclusion to the first day, the participants also had the opportunity to interact in an informal session with Rev. Dr. Santanu K. Patro, Registrar, Senate of Serampore College.

On the second day morning, the Bible study was led by Dr. Jayachitra. She reflected on the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, contrasting the binary parallels of Jewish particularity and universalism. By portraying the different realities in the

gospel of Matthew, she challenged the participants to locate themselves accordingly in the contemporary world. In the second session on ***Communalism as a Threat to Unity***, Rev. Chandra Mohan traced the historical background of the communal ideology of Hindutva. The resource person of the next session was Dr. Ninan Koshy who spoke on the theme, ***Secularism – Some theological considerations***. He began his presentation by analyzing the evolution and the different understandings of the word ‘secularism’ in the West and in India. He compared Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s secular theology and the Marxian ideology suggesting the importance of presenting the biblical ideologies in a secular language.

The afternoon session commenced with a presentation on the topic ***‘Ecumenism in the 21st century: A secular perspective,’*** by Rev. Christopher Rajkumar. He divided the participants into groups challenging them to reflect on the definition of ecumenism, the difference between globalization and ecumenism and the future of ecumenism. He emphasized the need to shift ecumenism from the hands of churches or Christian organizations to the people themselves. The next session was on the topic ***‘Understanding Caste as a Threat to Ecumenism,’*** by Rev. Dr. Vincent Manoharan. He described the practice of caste system in India pointing out the day to day realities of Dalits. He also described the exclusion of Dalits both inside and outside the Church. The session concluded with the words of Babasaheb Ambedkar which state that caste is a monster which encounters people from all sides and therefore needs to be annihilated for ensuring justice and peace to all. The last session of the day was a short presentation on ***Healing Ministry***, by Rev. Sharath David from CMAI who highlighted its significance in Christian ministry. He outlined the theological framework for healing and inspired the participants to emphasize not only on preaching and teaching but also on healing ministries.

The third day began with a Bible study led by Dr. Jaya Chitra who challenged the participants to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, who as the empowered man, freely gave of his own power and authority. The next session was led by Dr. Thomas Manoj Samuel on the topic, ***‘Role of Media as a challenge to unity.’*** Dr. Samuel critiqued the media’s version of Truth-claiming, that it is deceptive and that it is sensationalized according to the preference of the audience. This misrepresentation of facts is one of the root causes for many of the world’s injustices. A dialogue session on ***‘Understanding views of different faiths,’*** brought together three

individuals namely Ms. Reshma Pervez, representing Islam, Professor H.S. Bhatia to speak on Sikhism and Ms. Saraswathi, a Dalit activist. The problems faced and the positive and negative facets of the different religious traditions were presented. The participants were motivated towards wider ecumenism which includes people of all faiths. Ms. Mercy Kappen spoke on the topic *'Perspective from Gender.'* She described the current status of women in India with pictorial examples of every day injustices. She inspired the participants to consider how they would respond to gender inequality as advocates of ecumenism. The final session of the day was led by Mr. Binu Varghese who gave lecture on the topic *'Perspective from Children.'* He pointed out the significance of addressing issues pertaining to children and described the government policies and preventive measures for helping children at risk. The day ended with a creative cultural program which united many cultures on one stage.

The final day began with an *Eco-friendly worship* led by Mr. Temsuyanger. The participants enjoyed the worship in the midst of nature. Mr. Temsuyanger reflected on responsible stewardship and the need to respect and care for the world around us. The final session of the conference was led by Ms. Akkai Padmashali who spoke on the *Perspective from Transgender.* She clarified the difference between sex, gender and sexuality motivating the participants to respect, include and acknowledge their social responsibility towards sexual minorities.

Statement

- We, the participants of the National Theological Students Conference – 2014 jointly organized by the BTESSC and ISET-ECC reflected on the theme, *'Ecumenism in the 21st century: A perspective from the margins'* from 1st to 4th May 2014. The conference emphasized on the need to relocate and identify Ecumenism among the people and with those at the margins.
- We, as theological students, are increasingly aware of the human constructed boundaries that have become more rigid in the 21st century. We are divided, based on Caste, Class, Culture, Language, Gender, Religious traditions and other forms of exclusion. Brahmanism, Communalism, Patriarchy, Capitalism and Globalization have all resulted in the sidelining of various communities. The urgency of these realities, call for a passionate and broadened view of Ecumenism.

- We are especially challenged to hear the voices of the silenced third gender. We reject the exclusion of our brothers and sisters and commit ourselves to develop theological articulations that would enable a liberative re-reading of Scripture. We take a stand to take concrete action by conscientizing congregations and incorporating the third gender in our families, churches and societies.
- We believe that Ecumenism today must embark on a journey with the people at the margins, identifying with their struggles, affirming their identities, celebrating our liberative differences, and respecting one another.

Pledge

- We reject the human constructed divisions of Caste, Class, Culture, Language, Gender, Religious traditions, Sexuality and other forms of exclusion. We reject the oppressive ideologies of Brahmanism, Communalism, Patriarchy, and Capitalism which have resulted in the sidelining of various communities.
- We are especially challenged to hear the voices of the silenced third gender. We reject the exclusion of our brothers and sisters and commit ourselves to develop theological articulations that would enable a liberative re-reading of Scripture. We take a stand to take concrete action by conscientizing congregations and incorporating the third gender in our families, churches and societies.
- We, the participants of the National Theological Students Conference 2014, commit ourselves to the mutual empowerment of communities and to fight against the unjust structures that corrupt the integrity of creation. We, as the Church, reclaim our call to prophetic ministry in restoring life in its fullness. Praxis is our priority and we believe in Ecumenism which finds itself at the grass roots.

Appendix No. 2

Bangalore Inter-faith Declaration

“We, the participants of the Interfaith Roundtable on Religion and Sexuality, held at Bangalore from 30th to 31st May 2014 under the auspices of Aneka, the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC), and the Commission for Justice, Peace and Creation of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), believe that hatred has no place in any religion. We issue the following declaration on Religion and Sexuality in the context of homophobia that attempt to criminalize sexual minorities in India.

We observe that religions play significant roles in the Indian society in the ethical discernment of their adherents. Scriptures, traditions, moral codes, and practices form and formulate religious teachings and ethics on personal and social life. However, religious traditions tend to interpret these rich sources and resources to legitimize dominant notions of truth and morality. Such attempts unfortunately legitimize moral codes that are unjust and condemn and demonize people who transgress the dominant norms because of their convictions. Homophobia is one such reality where sexual minorities are constructed as immoral, based on heteronormativity. As a result, homosexuals and transgenders are often rejected and shunned by religions and faith-based organizations. This situation calls for deeper introspection and transformation so that religions will abstain from sowing the seeds of bigotry and homophobia, and instead we need to promote dignity, inclusivity, and equality, while accepting, respecting and celebrating differences.

We affirm that human sexuality is a divine gift which we are expected to celebrate in just and responsible relationships. Such celebrations of sexuality contribute to human flourishing and the realization of the Divine in our lives. However, in the name of tradition and culture, we tend to demonize our bodies and our desires, yet indulge in sexual abuse. Our body-denying spiritualities not only prevent us from becoming truly human, they also perpetrate unjust social relations. Patriarchal domestication of religious traditions distort the beauty of sexuality to mere procreation and deprive women of personal and sexual autonomy. When religious

beliefs and practices become fanatic and patriarchal, instead of propagating the values of love, care, justice, dignity and freedom, they indulge in moral policing, bigotry and homophobia, exposing their ugly and violent faces. The divine purpose of enabling the human community to experience and celebrate sexuality and eros without abuse and misuse is thus thwarted.

We recognize that different sexual orientations are a part of the created order. We see this diversity in the community of creation. Religious traditions and scriptures testify the co-existence of people with different sexual orientations from time immemorial. We realize that different epics, puranas, mythologies, folktales and other cultural works recognize the presence of homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgender communities in India. They were never criminalized till the imposition of the Sodomy laws in India, 1861 (Section 377 of Indian Penal Code), thanks to colonialism and Victorian morality. It is in this context that we appreciate the 2009 Delhi High Court verdict to decriminalize “consensual sexual acts of adults in private,” as it upholds the fundamental human rights to a life of dignity and non-discrimination to all citizens as enshrined in the Constitution. The December 2013 Supreme Court verdict reversing the earlier one, however, is a matter of concern for us and we hope and pray that the Hon’ble Court would remedy it. We appeal to the new government at the Centre to uphold the constitutional rights of all citizens.

We, the followers of different religious and faith traditions, therefore solemnly declare that:

1. *We affirm* our faith in the potential of our respective religious and faith beliefs, and practices to enable all in their search and struggle to become loving human beings celebrating the divine blessing of sexuality gifted to all of us.
2. *We commit* ourselves to critically engage with our belief systems and practices to review and re-read teachings and moral codes that stigmatize and demonize people who are different from us.
3. *We condemn* homophobia and bigotry as morally unacceptable, and commit ourselves to strive together to eradicate this sin from our religious communities, as an expression of our religious faith and ethics.

4. ***We pledge*** to accompany friends who are stigmatized and criminalized due to their sexual orientations and to provide them fellowship and solidarity in their struggles to love and live with dignity.
5. ***We recognize*** the need to create awareness within our religious communities on issues related to Religion and Sexuality and also transform our communities into communities of mutuality and inclusivity.
6. ***We commit*** ourselves to transform all our places of collective worship to welcome and provide safe spaces for sexual minorities.
7. ***We discern*** the need to reclaim and reinterpret our traditions and rituals, festivals and feasts, scriptures and practices, to liberate our religions from the shackles of ideologies of exclusion such as patriarchy, casteism and homophobia.
8. ***We dedicate*** ourselves to safeguard the rights of all sexual minorities and to join hands with all civil society initiatives to decriminalize homosexuality and to eradicate homophobia.
9. ***We call upon*** religious leaders to condemn homophobia and to practice non-discriminatory hiring policies in their institutions, and also to follow affirmative action to end the discrimination that transgendered people face in admissions and appointments.
10. ***We affirm*** to work tirelessly to create a new world of compassion, justice, inclusivity and acceptance where the divine gift of sexuality will be celebrated in all diverse manifestations of affirmative love.

Appendix No. 3

JUSTICE & JUSTICE ALONE: Voicing Out In Support of Palestine

A CALL FROM THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL FRATERNITY

In the context of the ongoing occupation in Palestine, and at a time after the aftermath of the inhuman and barbaric onslaught of Gaza due to the genocide done by the state of Israel, the Indian Theological fraternity under the aegis of the Board of Theological Education Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC) came together along with Church leaders, Pastors, activists and friends from ecumenical movements, in anguish to express their support and solidarity with the people of Palestine to claim that justice and justice alone is the non-negotiable precondition for dignity and equity. A national conference on 'Hermeneutics from the perspective of Palestine' was held from 14-16 August, 2014, at Bangalore to understand and analyse critically the Palestinian-Israel conflict and engage in prophetic responses. More than 80 participants attended the conference from different parts of the world.

The conference took note of the existing theological perceptions and asserted that the dominant paradigms have been pro-Israel grounded on Zionist readings of the situations. It was recognised that the growing influence of Christian Zionists in support of Israel and working to counter progressive and radical church responses in support of Palestine. Therefore the consultation was an initiative in enabling the Indian Christian theological communities and Churches to effect paradigm changes, which is but to read and re-read the Bible from the perspective of Palestinians undergirded by notions of justice and justice alone.

Affirmations

- We are deeply concerned by the popular and growing support from various strands of Indian Christian thinking for Israel, which contradicts life-affirming theologies and promotes racist and colonial readings of the Bible. Therefore we have affirmed Palestinian Christian narratives of their marginalisation and oppression and their claim for liberation and freedom based on justice.

- We are angered at the hand-in-glove relationship between the projects of Hindutva and Zionism, whose proponents compliment each other in advancing oppression and suppression in the name of caste, race, territory, and all other such forms. Therefore we have affirmed to uphold and stand for the rights of those on the margins, particularly the Palestinians, Dalits, Tribals, Adivasis and all other sub-altern communities.
- We have recognised commonalities of perspectives between the Palestinian Liberation Theology and the Dalit, Tribal and Adivasi Liberation theologies. Therefore we have affirmed to explore new partnerships in promoting solidarity theologies mutually supporting one another in our common quest for liberation.

Recommendations

Having had sufficient discussion and exposure to the realities of Palestinian readings of their existential political realities, we as concerned members of the Indian Theological communities in partnership with the theologians from Palestine and Lebanon urge the Indian academic communities, ecumenical movements, civil society, and Churches, to pursue the following lines of action and thinking.

- We demand that Israel bring an end to the sin of occupation on Palestinian lands, beginning with the immediate lifting of the Israeli siege and blockade on Gaza.
- We appeal that Israel should be asked to restrain from aggressive moves and comply with the International Human Rights and Humanitarian Laws and Conventions, UN Resolutions and the Geneva Convention.
- We demand that the International communities support Palestinians to reclaim their basic rights and freedom, hopes and aspirations so that dignity and humanity is restored.
- We demand retribution and reparation to be implemented under International independent supervision.
- We urge that the churches in India be informed about the realities of Palestinians and become locations and rallying points for changing public perception and garnering public support.

- We urge churches to work collectively with wider alliances to engage in intensive lobbying and advocacy to change the policy in relation to the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- We call on churches, theological communities and ecumenical movements to actively listen to the experiences of Palestinian Christians and affirm from Kairos experiences and express solidarity with Palestinians by joining in the Boycott Divestment Sanction (BDS) movement with a special focus on cultural and academic boycott.
- We encourage all churches and ecumenical movements to join the World Week for Peace in Palestine-Israel to be observed during September 21-27, 2014, by praying, educating, and advocating justice to Palestinian prisoners, who have been illegally detained, especially under administrative detention. The theme for this year's observance is "let my people go."
- We recommend that the Senate of Serampore should explore avenues by integrating Palestinian perspectives into the existing courses and also to introduce new courses as required and optional, emphasising hermeneutics on the plight of the Palestinians in the areas of the New and Old Testaments, Christian Theology, Christian Ethics, Homiletics and others.

Justice, peace, freedom, and human dignity are the core principles that the Palestinians long for. The occupation of the Palestinian lands by Israel is a violation of human rights and therefore it should come to an end. Israel should abandon its military might and accede the legitimate demands of the Palestinians. It should recognise that its occupation is illegal, unjust, unethical, immoral and unbiblical.

"...What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6: 8

Appendix No. 4

A Report of the Curriculum Recommendation Committee

The Senate of Serampore curriculum cannot live in the past but must continue to be in a process of making itself relevant to the present. It has concentrated on the history and literature of a called-out community and the growth of an historical institution, namely the Christian church.

It is recommended that the educational system in India will sensitise the theological teachers and administrators to link the themes of election, covenant, holy land etc. to the question of Palestine and interpret them in the light of the pains and struggles of the Palestinians.

We avoid pro-Israeli/ Zionist reading of the Bible and at the same time we resist anti-semitic/anti-Jewish/Islamophobic interpretations of the biblical texts by reading the texts contextually by taking into consideration the contemporary issues and problems.

The Judeo-Christian perspective imported from the western exegesis is generally anti-Palestinian leading to the denial of Palestinian rights and it has supported wars against the Arabs living in Palestine. Israel and its allies equate terrorism with the Palestinians.

Our theological programme must be geared to providing solidarity to the Palestinians and urge the Jews and the Arabs to work together for Justice and Peaceful living in Israel/Palestine through dialogue and good will without the intervention of outside forces.

All these concerns should be reflecting in the objectives of our theological education under the Senate of Serampore system and it should bring perceptible changes in our pedagogy, our curriculum mapping and our research programmes:

- a) Biblical subjects should be incorporated with Palestinian views and aspirations in the study and interpretation of history, theology and literature of the Bible;

- b) Courses on Religion ought to give special importance to the Arabs and Islam. Almost all colleges (except probably one or two) do not have experts/teachers in Islamic studies and research on dialogical theology between Islam, Hinduism and Christianity are rare in Senate affiliated colleges.
- c) Dalit courses ought to focus on the plight of the Palestinians along with that of the Tribals/adivasis and indigenous peoples particularly in the issue of land rights and preservation of indigenous cultures and histories.
- d) We must allow inter-disciplinary focus in all levels and need to test the course offerings in each seminary/college whether they address the exigencies of issues around the world relating to religious bigotry, ethnic nationalism, war, terrorism in all religions, xenophobia, racism, apartheid, prisoners and refugees and land dispossession by introducing relevant optional courses.
- e) We must learn to read Bible critically to address the questions of violence, conquest of Canaan, land possession, and illegal expropriation of properties.
- f) We need to revise the Liberation theology framework used for the analysis of world society and must develop new forms of liberation theology and praxis that can work within and from the life-situations of Dalits/ Adivasis/ Tribals/ Palestinians.
- g) We need to strengthen the inter-faith dialogue courses and programmes to include not only Hindu-Christian but also Jew-Christian-Islamic conversations.

We also further recommend all concerned to consider our South-to-South cooperation and solidarity should be extended to include the Palestinians as they are part of Asia.

The colleges under the Senate of Serampore system can develop exchange programmes between the Palestinians and the Indians that there are students and faculty exchanges among the churches and theological institutions in India and Palestine.

Appendix No. 5

SOLIDARTY FAITH AFFIRMATION

Dalit and Minjung Theologians have met so far ten times for theological dialogue, focusing on different issues and themes during the past 22 years. The meetings are held biennially, to help the participants to recoup, revive and rejuvenate themselves as to the cause of the dialogue. The two theological groups have dedicated themselves to the construction and development of liberative Asian contextual theologies through dialogues and exchanges of experiences, activities, ideas and methods. We are also happy that Tribal/Adivasi theologians have also joined the dialogue recently. The exchange of the contextual theologies has not only contributed to the development of theological movements but also to Asian contextual and liberation theologies.

The 26 participants of the 10th Dialogue programme held in Visthar Academy of Justice and Peace based at Dodda Gubbi in Bangalore, India, met under the theme, “Mission in the Context of Margin” from 19-21 August, 2014. The dialogue was represented by younger theologians, people with different sexual orientation and activists. The mutual theological exchange enriched all the participants. We would like to offer our deep thanks and praise to our Lord, the God of Compassionate Justice, for having led us 22 years-long journey of theological dialogue. We remember many friends and colleagues who have participated and made great contributions to our collective efforts in constructing and reconstructing contextual theologies relevant to the experiences of the marginalised people in Asia. Without their participation, this long journey would not have been possible. We would like to express our thanks to the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC) and its partners, Korea Association of Minjung Theologians for initiating and providing the platform for this theological dialogue conference.

Dalit, Minjung and Tribal/Adivasi continue to experience various forms of oppression, exploitation, marginalization and suffering of a vast number of peoples and nations. Due to lop-sided developmental activities with political manipulation favouring the ruling elite who largely represent dominant castes in India, the

voiceless have been displaced, uprooted, evicted and even annihilated rather in genocidal scale. Today, they constitute the poorest section of the society. Many of them are reduced to be powerless, impoverished, hungry, landless, and homeless.

We recognize that women and youth are the most vulnerable people's group while doing mission in the context of margins. Their arguments have been unheard, unaddressed and ignored. The patronizing mind-set towards the young people and the patriarchy towards the Dalit/Minjung/Tribal/Adivasi women have perpetuated oppression, discrimination, denial and violence both to youth and women in various forms in the church and society. Though they are progressing towards transformation, in the neo-liberal context, youth are struggling to continue in traditional jobs as well as to cope up with the newer opportunities. Reimagining and reimagining of the mission in the context of margins allows us to celebrate the strategies implied by the Dalit, Minjung, Tribal/ Adivasi women and youth which proves that wounded bodies have the inherent potentiality to sustain the lives in the changing context, to strengthen the solidarity of wounded communities and to subvert the oppressive exploitative structures.

In these multipolar conflict-ridden situations, the victims are simply crushed down by the imposed culture of silence. However, they come out with creative ways of asserting themselves using arsenals ranging from mild forms of weapons through intermediary ways of negotiations to the forceful ways of resistance. What matters for them is the ultimate ethical agenda of liberating themselves from the clutches of dehumanizing oppression. This is how they vibrate with the heart-beat of the divine compassion in varied culture-specific ways even amidst chaotic situations of on-going violence. However, the contemporary mission paradigm that renders the margin as the 'missiological other' to exercise its program of mission demands a step towards retrospection, and the margin is to be located in its agency and alterity. It is here our contemporary mission in the context of margin is methodologically reconfigured and reconstructed.

The divine for the victim is not a ready-made construct as reflected in the elite theological discourses. Their God is neither hanging in the distant transcendent realms of heavens nor buried in the inaccessible depths of the immanence of the earth. Their motherly God with fatherly embrace accompanies them intimately through the ups and the downs of their day-to-day struggles. This down-to-earth

God accompanies them unto death without ever permitting their fertile dreams of building a caste-free, patriarchy-free, and egalitarian society to die. In other words, their God of Compassionate Justice is eating with them, walking with them, crying with them, and dying with them for awakening them with new hopes and creative alternatives.

The present oppressed context also gives us an epistemic privilege of knowing what it means to protect and promote life in solidarity and justice in peace. Therefore, the oppressive context can be paradoxically the site of divine revelation engendering the hope for the human. God's mission thus involves resisting the ongoing oppression in the history of Dalit, Minjung, Tribal, Adivasi people, and mobilizing solidarity among them to collectively address the issues that surround unjust forces, institutions and systems for their transformation.

Therefore, we affirm to engage together in God's liberative mission in the context of continuing marginalization and suffering and strengthen our solidarity network for justice and peace.

Appendix No. 6

STATEMENT OF THE WORKSHOP ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE

We the Participants of the Workshop on Conflict Resolution and Peace jointly organised by the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies of the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College from September 25 to 27, 2014 in Shamshabad:

Understand that conflicts are part of human existence, and they occur whenever there are differing socio-economic, political and cultural based view points and corresponding practices. Conflicts arise when hegemonization of power, dominance or authority is sought to be established over others on the basis of ideology, gender, politics, caste, sub group, ethnic, community, and religion. Some such conflicts met with resistance could become open, and also turn violent. Some others could remain simmering as undercurrents; while some others are meekly accepted as inevitable by those who are oppressed and discriminated against. Conflicts cause polarization of not only the parties concerned, but also those who are aligned with them; and affect all stake holders personally, relationally, structurally and culturally.

Are deeply concerned that vested interests at the international, national and local levels are perpetuating ethnic, racial, sectarian, communal, gender, caste, religious, cultural and class conflicts in order to gain power, prosperity, and control over human and natural resources. Religious scriptures are being increasingly interpreted and misinterpreted as divine approval to fuel armed and ideological conflicts.

Are pained by the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Ukraine, Georgia, India – Pakistan – China Borders, Afghanistan, Kenya, Nigeria, and other parts of the world; and within almost all countries throughout the world which have become gruesome, inhuman and violent, in which Indigenous people, Women and Children are the worst victims and sufferers. We condemn violence in all its forms; and those involved in perpetuating violence for their selfish interests.

Are aghast at the violence perpetuated in armed conflicts through bombings, shellings, beheadings, rocket launching, chemical warfare, missile propelling, and other sophisticated weapons of destruction which have resulted in deaths of thousands of people, including innocent Women and Children; atrocities being committed against Women such as rape, and compelling them to become Sex Slaves; inhuman torture; incapacitation of thousands; loss of land, property, and livelihood; uprooting of people from their original and rightful habitats; wide spread destruction of the environment and community assets including schools, hospitals, and places of worship; trauma; despair; and a bleak and uncertain future.

Are angry with the religious fundamentalism being aggressively propagated; the one Nation theory and the attempts to destroy diversity; the inhuman practice of caste and its systemic perpetuation of untouchability practices; honour killings, gender-based atrocities, and destruction of property and assets of Dalits, Adivasis; Tribals, and minorities; domestic violence against and the increasing objectification of Women; Child abuse, violation of the rights of Youth; destruction of dissent and transparency; and other discriminatory practices within and among religious institutions, political parties, and governance structures in India which are the manifestations of patriarchy, caste, communal hatred, class and power-based conflicts within families, and between communities, religions, and political parties.

Yearn for the biblical vision and promise of peace to become a reality “.... when swords will be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, when nation will not take up sword against nation, and will not train for war anymore (Isa.2:4).....when the wolf will live with the lamb, when the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and when a little child will lead them; when the cow will feed with the bear, and their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox (Isa.11: 6&7).... A new heaven and a new earth in which there will be no more tears, no more death, no more mourning, crying or pain; where the river of the water of life will flow, and the leaves of the tree of life will heal nations (Rev.21 & 22).”

Commit ourselves to following in the footsteps of Jesus who came into this world to tear asunder walls of separation; so that all may have life, and have it to the full (Jn.10:10); and that all may be one (Jn.17:21)....a reign on earth in which Women, Men, Children, and oppressed communities will attain fullness

of life without land alienation, forced migration; class, caste, gender and cultural discrimination, domination and dehumanization....a harmonious society in which there will be peace with justice, gender sensitivity, dignity and equality; and celebration of diversity and plurality.

Pledge to become Peace Makers and Channels of Peace utilizing the theological perspectives; concepts; skills; and strategies learnt and acquired through this Workshop on Peace and Conflict Resolution to address the causal factors of conflict, negotiate conflict resolution, reconciliation and transformation in a fair and transparent manner, taking into consideration the various interests and fears of the parties in conflict, so that new and lasting relationships can be built.

September 27, 2014