

Call for a New Theological Awakening in India

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The Analysis of the Situation

1. India is and always has been a country of contrasts, confluence of cultures and a strange combination of continuity and modernity. One can find in this land the affluence of the rich as well as the afflictions of the dehumanized masses, the most modern India-made jets and space crafts in the air along with the age-old bullock-cart struggling to survive on the uneven streets of the villages. Though rich in culture in several ways this country is a land of massive poverty where millions still live below poverty line. Though high ideals of universal love and human solidarity are often sung aloud in traditional creeds such as Vedic hymns, Gita verses and so on, our country is still a mess of divisive and communalistic forces which time and again flare up into hottest disputes leading to blood-shed and war-fare. In spite of its national motto which says, *satyameva Jayate* (Truth alone shall win) extensive system of corruption enshrouds the whole machinery of private and public enterprises so much so an honest and straight forward man/woman finds it too hard to survive. Millions are crushed in this system of organized oppression which is ultimately maintained for the advantage of a few.

On the other hand India is still "a spiritual fascination for many." The people of the affluent west flow to India in search of supra-mundane values or a deeper awareness of the self which they seek through yoga, vipasana, transcendental meditation and so on. In spite of its growing crazes after modernization and Europeanised life-styles, in continuation of its own age-old tradition, India still produces

world renowned Gurus, and people from all over the world come to sit at their feet as would-be disciples reminding us of the ancient Indian tradition of the *Upa-ni-shad* (sit-nearby).

2 Due to centuries old colonialism, values and lifestyles originally foreign to this country were superimposed over it and willingly or unwillingly a great bulk of these values has been internalized. Hence in spite of all revival of nationalism, western ways of affluence, amenities of life are aspired by many. Consequently, many work hard to establish a part of that "foreign mountain" in this land instead of looking to the development of "local hills" which they think is below to their standard of dignity and ambitions.

3. Our Indian culture, ancient and modern as it is, has now entered into a new face with the dawn of the technological era. Today technology has become an effective means of power control both in arms and wealth. Of all the means so far used for self growth and ambitious achievement of one's own end and enlargement of one's own kingdom, technology can be said to be the most potent weapon, most aggressive instrument. It was the German Philosopher Earnest Junger who said that technology is the most anti-christian force that the world has ever produced. Why should technology be anti-christian? It is certainly not because science and scientific discoveries are anti-christian by nature but because man can use the discoveries of science for an exclusive growth of himself, forgetting, discarding and even denying the right of others to exist. The technologically advanced countries make the maximum use of it, elevating them to super power-position in whose protective umbrellas others are destined to stand. The same dynamics of operation can be found in the national advancement of science and technology. The few with power and might have the advantage of technology at their disposal to enlarge the empire of their own ego, while millions starve and offer their man-power just for the maintenance of the infra structure on which the very advantages of technology are ultimately based.

4. Politically seen, India is a battle field of various ideologies which have effectively deteriorated to empty labels. Hero-worship and group-politics reign in political

parties as is obviously manifested in their official names such as Cong. I, Cong. S and so on. In this situation of deteriorated politics, communalistic religious tensions, and unjust social structures the ordinary man and woman who struggle to survive look for liberators who could deliver them, help them out to find the meaning of their life and give them courage and conviction to go ahead, overcoming all forces of division and depression in their mind as well as in society. It is in this context of bizarre socio-political situation of contrasts and continued tensions that the Indian theologians are called to reflect, reformulate their faith convictions as something relevant and reliable to the struggles of the people of our time.

The task of a Theologian

A theologian is called upon to reflect over the given situation in the light of truth that is being continuously unveiled to him through the process of history, events of his time and the awakening of the consciousness of his people. Of course every socio-cultural analyst will try to make a sensible analysis of situation, each one from his own perspective. Thus we find Marxian, Gandhian and Capitalist analysis and programmes proposed for the betterment of the society. A Christian theologian, though radically committed to his faith in Christ, is no slave to any established or envisaged system, however long it is maintained by his Christian community or Christian countries. His criteria of truth must be the word and vision of Jesus, who living among us as one of us witnessed to the dignity of each one of us, irrespective of creed, colour, caste and status in the society. Can an Indian/Christian theologian be a source of meaning, hope and courage to the struggling masses of his time? Will his vision and words have the power to challenge, destroy and rebuild this situation in the light of revelation and truth in Jesus Christ and the authentic Christian experience flowing from it? As we know all the ideas and experiences that have been handed down to us and are being preserved by us in the name of Christianity are not authentically Christian. The nucleus of Christian experience which is basically an experience of the other – the other encountered and embraced in Jesus Christ, as part or member of an

undivided body - is being enshrouded every day by man-made ego-centered superstructures, because the humans are constantly prone to build systems in favour of themselves and at the expense of the other. A Christian theologian must be one who has realized the value of the other as Jesus had and become leaven in the mass, a seed planted in the fertile soil.

This Christian call becomes all the more imperative when he sees a section of his society degraded, de-humanized and deprived of all human rights. Naturally his consciousness of human solidarity as members of one body in Christ, mutually sustained and supported, cannot tolerate such a situation and should be called to save his people as Moses was for Israelites and Amos for the oppressed of his time. He does this by awakening the divine dimension of man both in the oppressor and the oppressed which alone would ultimately lead to the creation of a just and happy society. In this confrontation with his people for justice and truth, for the awakening of true consciousness over against the stabilized false systems, he may be silenced, suppressed and even assassinated. Jesus Christ the Lord of justice and truth, his ideal and inspiration has not promised a better reward for him. But it is through his untiring struggles and unconquerable readiness to suffer he awakens the authentic truth consciousness, the divine in man. Since desire to have is at the root-cause of all unjust structures in this world, the Christian theologian is first called to be a man of being than of having, a person interested in and dedicated to truth and to the fullness of truth in all its dimensions. As Jesus was a man of being, he too must be a man of being, free from all kinds of entanglements and attachments, clutches of possessiveness and aggressiveness which sometimes simply deny the use of other ideologies as potent weapons for restoring truth and justice in this world. But this does not mean that he is passive listener, a pious devotee willing to offer his suffering for the conversion of his world. He can be as vociferous as Prophet Amos who yelled at his people, saying, "They have sinned, they hunted down their brothers and therefore the Lord will send fire upon them and burn down their fortress." (*Amos 1:11*). He can be an involved activist as Moses who faced the mighty Pharaoh and cried

out in the name of the Lord, "Let my people go." But above all, he must be a divinely characterized person like Jesus, always seeking the will of His Heavenly Father with no stain of selfishness and aggressiveness. He must be a visionary who deeply sees, analyses and understands the hidden structures on which the present state of oppression of his people is based and should envisage ways and means to mobilize their spirit and energy for the creation of a more human, more just, more true and thus more divine society on earth.

The need of spiritual awakening in Theologians

A theologian must be an awakened person. People can be awakened in different levels and different ways. Certainly Karl Marx was an awakened person, awoken to the value conscious of human dignity. In so far as human dignity ultimately carries the spirit, Marxian awakening has a spiritual core which may still be disputed when it comes to the means and measures by which this dignity strives for its realization. Mahatma Gandhi was an awakened person in a different way. From the depth of his awakened consciousness he gathered strength to fight against the greatest empire of the world of his time and his unvanguished strength carried decisive results in course of time. What kind of an awakening do we expect in a Christian theologian? Certainly it is not enough to repeat a Marx or even a Gandhi. His ideal and ever living exemplar is Jesus himself, the liberator of mankind, a real revolutionary in Israel, a man of ongoing involvement with his people along with a life-style of repeated withdrawal characterized by his spirit of perfect transcendence. As lotus flower, always remaining in and above water, is a symbol of involvement and transcendence at the same time, so must a Christian theologian be a person of unending involvement and unselfish transcendence. That this be a reality the spirit in him must be awakened, giving him a vision and mission, strength and stability, concern for and commitment to his people. His theological vision emerging from his experience of total Christ is the fountain-head of his life-stream flowing without reserve to his people. For him Christ is not an isolated reality of ancient past, but a living fact of his own time endeavouring to express

and establish through the struggles of his people. The whole Christ means the whole of humanity. As St. Paul puts it in his epistle to Colossians, we were all conceived in Jesus Christ: "He is the image ... hold together". (*Colo.* 1:15-17)

So from the theologian's point of view, Christ is the corner stone of human solidarity. Not only humanity but also the world of humanity is designed in and for Christ and Christ contains all. Naturally the things created, though unevenly distributed and enjoyed, have an inner claim to be for the welfare of all because "all things were created through him and for him" and he, as we have already seen, means all humanity. "He is the head of the body, the Church" (*Colo* 1:18a). A Christian theologian sees the struggling Christ in the struggling masses of his time and consequently his vision of Christ becomes a mission of liberation, a mission that is destined to confront and confound, destroy and rebuild, until the originally envisaged Kingdom of peace and justice, love and concord is ultimately established on earth in Christ Jesus, the Lord of the Universe. That this become a living movement in him, he must first be charged with Christ consciousness by the awakening of the abiding Word which breaks forth from his own interior centre, because of his constant communication with the Word-made-flesh and the struggling limbs of that very same flesh, the body of Christ. In his being and doing he is expected to be another Christ, the Christ of courage and commitment, action and silence and cross and crucifixion. What he personally is and what he still wants to become, he also presents as an ideal to his fellowmen and thus becomes a living call, an undying challenge and inspiration.

Though man was originally designed in Christ and the world was meant for all, the actual world of the theologian is far away from this divine design and has become a battle field of selfishness where the stronger and the wealthier can only survive. While analysing the socio-cultural factors of this distortion, the Christian theologian looks at this through the reality of Christ who suffers, struggles and is being suppressed. He understands that the ultimate reason for this socio-cultural distortion lies deep in the ego-centered mentality of man which refuses to acknowledge the divine dignity of man in himself as well as in his

fellowmen. In the human we have two dimensions: The Word, the spirit, the divine, the transcendent on the one hand, and the flesh, the ego, the world, the temporal on the other. Any assertion of the one without the other is inauthentic as far as man is concerned and therefore is to be denounced and ultimately rejected. What often happens in the socio-cultural development of our society is the assertion of the flesh at the expense of the spirit. Spirit which is ultimately the reflection of God, the abiding Word, is the source of man's uniqueness and dignity. When this dimension is forgotten, discarded or denied, what remains is the ego, the accumulated awareness of his outer layers attached to his body, life and the world. Such a man strives and builds up structures for the preservation and perpetuation of his ego and ego-centered empire. Because in his materialistic pattern of thinking, the other is devoid of dignity, he literally, uses the other as a slave, as a bonded labourer to be spent and sacrificed for his wealth and welfare. The assertion of ego, devoid of dignity has this morbid tendency of making the other as an object. This is what a theologian calls *sin*, sin against fundamental charity and justice.

But this tendency of objectivising his fellowmen for the sake of subjective satisfaction is seen in all faces of human history and cultural developments. Thus in the vedic period, in spite of its assertion of the *Atman* and *antaryānin* everywhere, there was a steady stream of the marginalised who were on the lowest strata of the society and were destined to be so on the grounds of religious sanctions, customs and traditions. In the same way the Jewish Pharisees, who constantly claimed to be the children of Abraham, the receivers of revelation, religiously despised their own fellow samaritans and juridically kept them as the unwanted untouchables. We see that Jesus, the Prophet, the Messiah and the revolutionary, raising his voice in favour of samaritans and condemning the self justified Pharisaic religion of his own people. In the wake of colonial advance of the Christian West into the Eastern regions, the so-called Christian nation made other nations the object to be used for their own growth and wealth, power and prosperity. In our own contemporary era, where various forms

of neo-colonialism, have replaced century - long colonialism it is science and technology that are most effectively used to make other people or nation the object of one's own growth. In short, man builds structures, social and religious, for his own benefit and well-being. Unawakened from within, lead by the aggressive possessiveness of his own ego, he shatters and suppresses the being of the other for the sake of his having. Thus oppressive structures and repressive mechanisms evolved in the society, dividing mankind into sections of masters and slaves, dominants and dependants and haves and have-nots. In this ego-centred vision of the world the other is no more a human thou but an it, an object, whose worth is determined just in terms of manpower he can render. Man becomes a brute force in the hands of the aggressive accumulator of wealth, weapon and power. The dimension of transcendence in him is entirely forgotten because the divine in the master-dominant person or class remains totally unawakened. Both the dominant and dominate need liberation and should be brought to the saving mystery of Christ who, though master and "in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of man" (*Phili 2:6-7*). The mystery of Christ is the ultimate source of awakening in the theologian, in the dominant and the dominated. The theologian has to become charged with this Christ consciousness as Paul reminds us to be, saying: "Have this mind among yourself which was in Christ Jesus" (*Phili 2:5*) and his unwavering commitment to realize the world of Christ, the Kingdom of God should awaken the divine both in the oppressed and oppressor, the dominant and the dominated, the dominant loosing his grip of aggressive possessiveness and the dominated seeking and realizing his own human dignity in freedom and transcendence. The theologian who personalizes the Christ event becomes a force, a challenge and a catalist of change and transformation of his society. As a man of God on earth, an awakened divine consciousness in human flesh, he is completely committed to the creation of God's Kingdom here and now among his people. It is to this great task that we, theologians, are called to.

The Actual situation of Theological Awakening in India

In general we see in the Church the same dynamics operating as in the world. Only when a real and radical awakening takes place it washes away all inauthentic and ill-founded systems of society. This awakening of Christian consciousness was clearly visible in the first Christian communities. They challenged by their being than by their having, by their strength of living than by the force of power, the then existing inauthentic systems of injustice and inequalities, even relinquishing the difference between Jews and gentiles, slave and masters, the poor and the prosperous. All were one in Jesus Christ who filled their consciousness and in his Church embracing the whole humanity. But when the lustre of awakening grew dim and layers of darkness covered the originally awakened Christian consciousness, the fallen flesh re-emerged in the Christian and he created values and ways of life for the fulfilment of his own ego. The Church of Christ though divine, is also human and many Christians, remaining in the Church, can be led by value-systems which are not essentially Christian and even opposed to the authentic Christian spirit. Thus for example, slavery continued in the Church for a long period of time without being questioned. So also at the initial era of colonialism, we don't see the Church condemning the aggressive expansionism of the nations. In fact, it was Christian nations who came out with the jubilant idea of conquering other people. It is at such juncture of events that the Lord sends a prophet to reawaken the true Christian consciousness in the people. Without a real and radical awakening of the Christ consciousness of the Christian we are not going to achieve anything in the field of *Christian* theology of liberation, whatever be the depth and width of our socio-cultural analysis. I think such an awakening is not generally considered today as the central goal of our theological training. Most of our theologians are groomed in seminaries. Seminaries teach theology, objectifying the word of God analysing and understanding it. Excessive stress on the scientific rigour and research has practically made our theology an art of intellectual argumentation and a rational science of God. This has become now the method of theology largely influenced by the theological faculties in western universities where

faculties of religious studies emerge along with other faculties of secular sciences.

Theology has become a matter of reflective research rather than an experience of intense search, an intellectual play of words rather than a lived experience of the WORD communicated to us through Jesus of history and is being continuously communicated to us through the historical process that takes place today. An authentic theology stems from this encounter with Christ, who was the Word eternal, the source of all inspiration and was made flesh in the fullness of time and thus laid the foundation stone for all humanity and is struggling to express himself through the trials and struggles of our people today. This theology demands a very personal encounter with the Christ of history as well as the history of our people. Eventually due to this continued encounter the Word of God abiding in the theologian should break forth from his own depth and become an enormous, unending source of vision, conviction and action. Thus theology, far from being an objective analysis of God, the so-called *Theo-logia*, will necessarily become a real *theōpraxis*, a way of life, a *sanāadhanadharmā* relevant to the life of the people.

But what happens today in India and in many parts of the world is exactly the opposite. We have become part and parcel of the consumer society even in our theologizing. It is said about the industrial achievements that they are capital-intensive and labour-dispensive in contrast to the agrarian way of life which is less expensive but demands more labour. As enormous labs are built in the West to split atom, so do we build huge seminaries and other training centres to split and analyse the Word of God which is subtler than the subtlest atom. This method of doing theology is once again capital-intensive and labour-dispensive. It is capital-intensive because seminaries and theological centres are built with large amount of donations from abroad, which make the budding theologians standard of life far above that of his own people. It is labour-dispensive because what is actually done in these centres is not evolving reflective hermeneutics of the Word of God in the given situation but mere labourless repetition and rearticulation of the thinking of a bygone century, and that

too of the western world. This unnecessary and primitive dependance on western wealth and vision make our students of Christian learning uncreative artisans of theology deprived of originality and relevance. This is not theology at all, but technique of theology. What we need is a genuine theology emerging from the consciousness of the theologian in response to his encounter and experience of Christ and His bleeding body which contains all his people.

The New Way of Theologising In India

In spite of this morbid tendency of imitationism and lack of originality in the Indian Church, genuine, signs of hope and awakening are also visible in contemporary Indian ways of theologising. The Indian Church today is partly in the making of a new theology. Awakening of consciousness with regard to different sources and forces is at the root of this new theologising. A group of theologians have already tried to delve deep into the age-old resources of Indian vision and spirituality and evolve an Indo-Christian world vision out of that. While this tendency is still on, we find another group of activist theologians, originally inspired by the liberation theology of Latin American countries, coming forward with an Indian theology of liberation. A third and still very young theological movement is trying to articulate Christian theology in signs and symbols, rhythm and language of the marginalized people of our country. All these tendencies are quite salutary and mutually complementary. Whatever be the theology we evolve, it must be the result of a direct encounter with reality which includes God, world and people. It is true that these three terms constantly recur in the theological manuals and classes of our seminaries. But very often they pass through the mind of a theologian as empty ideas with no assimilation into life and expression in action. In ancient days, both in the east and the west, education was not acquiring information, but was really the awakening of authentic consciousness in the educated. That is why the inventors of original education coined the word education from the Latin words *ex-ducere* which meant "to lead out". Education was the leading out of the embedded personality of the student. Theological education must do the same. In constant contact

with the world and people the divine in man must be awakened which will make him capable of seeing the divine in the other. Once the divine is awakened from within, his consciousness changes, his view of the world and people transforms. In short, a new heaven and a new earth will dawn before him.

In this search for authentic world-vision and consequent action programme, Christ among his people becomes an everlasting inspiration, a challenge and a powerful invitation to him. There he sees the mode of action and the life-style of the awakened one. He identifies himself with Jesus who was one among his people in utter simplicity and availability and yet different from them in his being from whom power went forth. Such a life of the awakened consciousness will lead the theologian to a culture of the spirit. His words and deeds, projects and programmes, designed in sharp awareness of the unjust or inhuman situation of the people, will always be filled with the spirit of the Divine which alone makes him the prophet of the Most High and not the mere fighter of one's lost rights. He would rightly and boldly reject the comfortable accommodation of theology to the selfish life-style of the ego and opt for the dreadful yet dear awakening of the spirit and a life that flows from it. For this the theologian must constantly be in touch with his own self, with his people and the sources of revelation which he believes in. Discovering of his authentic self takes him to his interior depth and the Divine in him as the discovery of his people struggling to be human takes him to the divine dignity of mankind and its relatedness to the fact of Christ. The recourse to the sources of revelation takes him to the critical reflection of the situation in the light of faith. Now he speaks a theology relevant to himself and his people and preaches a Christ he has experienced in himself and in the struggles of his people.

Such an awakened consciousness of the theologian must be attested by an appropriate life-style. Christ rejected the life-style of the Pharasies. The first Christian rejected the life-style of the Roman Empire, Francis Assisi, when awakened, rejected the life-style of the Italian noble class. The theologian must do the same. (He must witness the

awakening of consciousness and the consequent Jesus-experience he has by rejecting the worldly values of his time showing them as irrelevant in his vision and system of operation. His *theo-logia* is in fact a *theo-paxis* where faith and action blend to become a guiding light for his people and shines forth in a world of darkness.