

The Church, the Beacon of Hope for India

Dr K M Francis

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The religious nationalists and cultural nationalists gaining majority in Indian parliament and in various state assemblies has created anxiety among minorities in India. Reports regarding mob lynching by cow-vigilantes and culture vigilantes in various parts of the country have deepened the above stated anxiety. In this context when the Church leaders come together today it is with a specific purpose of discovering new ways to become the harbinger of hope for Indian people. Our crisis is that except the countenance of charity, the Church has no other way to encounter the challenges raised by religious nationalists. The present paper attempts to explore the different dimensions of the challenges faced by the church in contemporary India and the yet unexplored dimensions of charity, the only identity of Christ and her bride.

The analysis proceeds by attempting answers to following questions. Is not nationalism a positive reality for each country? But are there any dangerous variants for nationalism? By merely continuing of traditional mode of charitable activities can we be successful in encountering religious nationalism? Do the beneficiaries of charity include all types of marginalized in India? Are the faithful in India empowered enough to encounter the challenges posed by religious nationalists? Why do the Christians in India move away from social life as and when they grow in spirituality? Are there adequate historical and theological explanations for the above strange phenomena? Does Indian constitution act as a savior of the minorities and marginalized? Can we use the educational institutions

run by the Church as the platform for proclaiming social dimensions of evangelization? Can we formulate any plans for encounter religious nationalism?

Natural Nationalism and Religious of Nationalism

Natural nationalism is the emotional attachment of a citizen, as a part of his collective consciousness towards a people with sovereignty, within a historically and culturally formed geographical territory, due to a sense of perfect security experienced, because of being protected from internal and external offenses against his fundamental rights. Only natural nationalists can co-ordinate and lead a nation in which people can maintain different ideologies and religions.

However, there are many other variants of nationalisms like ‘national socialism’ ‘religious nationalism’ ‘cultural nationalism’ etc. These types of nationalisms try to relate nationalism with a particular exclusive ideology, culture or religion. According to religious nationalism, only those who follow exclusive interpretations of a particular religion, within a state are patriots. Others who do not follow such interpretations of these groups are branded as anti-nationals. The danger in this is that such nationalist movements create minorities. When the ‘religious nationalists’ attain majority in a country, they endeavor to eliminate and try to deny the fundamental rights of those who are not following ‘their’ interpretation of their ideology or religion. Minorities are the group of people whose fundamental rights are under threat of being violated by such groups.

The conflict between natural nationalists (described in the first paragraph above) and the religious nationalists are real in India. In this conflict religious nationalists are gaining majority and dominion in our country. This is the most important challenge faced by the minorities in India.

In the guise of cow vigilantism and culture vigilantism, certain religious groups in India declare that all those who are against their interpretation of religion

are anti-nationals and incite their followers to execute extra judicial judgments on the minorities. In the context of above scenario, while minorities are under the cloud of threat raised by religious nationalists, if Indian church can be a beacon of hope for people of India is the most pressing question.

Agonies of the Indians Today

The threat of religious nationalism which the Indian citizen now confronts was in fact the challenge of the whole world during the last century though experienced in another guise. In the name of **National Socialism** or nationalism under the guise of socialism, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini exterminated millions. Everyone opposed to their interpretation of socialism was declared as enemies of their respective nations. It could be said that they first 'created' enemies by their interpretation and then it was easy for them to annihilate them thus interpreted and created. Ultimately, it paved the way for the Second World War. In the year 1979, the leaders of **Religious nationalism** in Iran, inaugurated the rule of Islamic state. Then onwards till this day, peace disappeared from the Middle East and West Asia. Anyone who opposes the specific interpretation (given by only a particular section of the Muslims) of the holy text of the Muslims is defined as antinational. In this manner, even Muslims are under threat in Islamic State. In Yemen and Syria, the leaders of IS exterminate Christians and those Muslims who oppose the specific interpretation of the holy book by the leaders of the IS.

India now follows suit. Certain Hindu organizations try to interpret the holy books in India in a specific way. All those who oppose their interpretation are stamped as enemies of nation. Cow is declared by them as 'mother'. All the economic activities related to cow are now controlled by cow-vigilantes. Needless to say cow vigilantism derailed the livelihood of many dalits and poor farmers.

We may ask what the science and technology have been doing. While the above narrated political crises happening during the twentieth and as well as the first and second decades of twenty first century, science and technology alone seem emerged as savior for humanity. Science and technology appear to create new opportunities and hopes for humanity. National income of many countries skyrocketed. Living standards of billions have increased. Many epidemics disappeared from the face of earth. Colonialism ended and a large number of nations became independent. However, this savior itself created new types of slaveries. The plight of those persons who so far earned their livelihood using traditional technology became marginalized. Traditional farmers, weavers, fishermen, tribes, and dalits became marginalized. Neo liberal policies now became a major hindrance for technology transfer in agricultural and fisheries sector. Many are finding a way out in suicide. Can the corporate's like Ambani, Adani, Mittal, Pathanjali, Tata and others solve the problems in India arising due to the conflict between indigenous technology and new technology? Only one panacea is echoed throughout India. AchhaDin(Good Day) will come! This is when 'Religious Nationalists' attain total power in the country and deny all the fundamental rights of all those who are in opposition!

These are the agonies and harsh realities faced by the contemporary Indian citizen. Can we in this context define charity which includes the concerns of the whole marginalized -religiously, culturally, socially, politically and economically- in India? Only then can our Church become the beacon of hope for 'all peoples in India'!

Charity as the Identity of the Church

Charity is expressed primarily by one's disposition to cry with those who cry and laugh along with those who laugh. Without auditing what the church hitherto

has done as part of charism of charity for the nation building, it is difficult to propose a new plan. So our discussion should begin with three fundamental questions. What are the existing programs of the church that have been contributing to the nation building? Are there limitations in these programmes? How can we improve the present course of action? Plainly speaking, charity is the feature which differentiates the Church from every other religion in India. Church expresses its face of charity through the following areas:

1. Helping those who cannot survive within the boundaries of the established socio political institutions of the country. The Church seeks to provide them with food and shelter (**orphanages**).
2. Establishing **hospitals** for providing health care facilities
3. Establishing **educational institutions** for enhancing human resource

In terms of economics, these activities are the real, concrete and undeniable contribution of the Church to the social infrastructure of the country. However through these above mentioned charitable actions, one may say that Church institutionalized charity. Now the question is, has the church confronted any challenges while institutionalizing charity? Three main areas should be analyzed in detail in this context:

Firstly, charity in Christian experience is the natural result of personal spirituality and charity is practiced in order to reinforce the spirituality of each individual. But during the process of institutionalization of charity, charity is found to be deplorably detached from personal spirituality. The result is, the faithful believe that their duty to perform charity is fulfilled just by providing donation to the church whenever the priests announce them in the church.

Secondly, the directors (the church leaders) of the charitable institutions also believe that they have performed their charitable acts by collecting and distributing the funds donated by the laymen. Such course action followed by the Church

leaders, needless to say, is not experienced as a part of clergy's personal spirituality. They are becoming fund managers rather than promoters of spirituality.

Thirdly, the fund and the capital of these institutions are derived primarily from the faithful. Can 2.5% of Christians in India mobilize the funds for catering to the health and educational needs of the remaining 97.5% of needy Indians? Is not there a limit for the enhancement of the volume of hospitals and educational institutions that can be constructed and run with a charitable face? If there is a limit for receiving fund for organizing capital for hospitals and educational institutions due to the limited capacity of the faithful to donate (2.5 %against the 97.5%) then there is a limit for further enhancement of the number of educational and health care institutions shining with a charitable face.

It is in this context we should dare to ask ourselves a fourth pertaining question: Is there any truth in the accusations of the faithful and the public that our charitable institutions are slowly converging as mere business enterprises?

It is appropriate, therefore, to go through a self-audit of our institutions to judge if they are business establishments or charitable institutions at all. Economic theory provides certain norms for making such judgments rather scientifically. By observing the nature of the structure of the fees collected for the services of the institutions, it is easy to identify whether an institution is a business firm or a charitable institution. The fee or price for service in a business firm has three parts:

- (a) Contribution to the fixed capital
- (b) Contribution to the variable capital or the amount earmarked for day to day expenses.
- (c) Profit

That part of fee/price for service which is earmarked for capital is called capitation fee. A firm is charitable in proper sense only if the fee for the services of the institution (fee collected from students or consultation fee from patients) includes only the cost for maintaining the day to day expenses. Due to the limit of donating capacity of the 'people of God' our institutions are in lack of fixed capital for establishing educational and charitable institution. To outlive this crisis our institutions are slowly changing from charitable mode to the mode business firms. In other words we are also slowly succumbing to neo liberal economic rationality. Now, we are finding capital for the institutions not from the faithful; instead, we are finding capital by including its share in the price of the service provided by our institutions or even reducing the wage of those who are working in our institutions. This shift from collecting capital from the beneficiaries or from the laborers of our institution is necessitated by the limit of the donating capacity of the faithful.

In this context let us listen to what St. John Paul II says about our capacity to meet the material needs of the people. "In the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, I stated that, the Church does not have technical solutions to offer for the problem of underdevelopment as such, but offers her first contribution to the solution of the urgent problem of development when she proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation. The Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla stated that, **the best service we can offer to our brother is evangelization**, which helps him to live and act as a son of God, sets him free from injustices and assists his overall development. **It is not the Church's mission to work directly on the economic, technical or political levels, or to contribute materially to development.** Rather, her mission consists

essentially in offering people an opportunity not to "have more" but to "be more."
(Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*,58)

We have already invested huge amount of capital in higher education and health care. We should of course maintain the status quo in the above two fields but unwaveringly declare moratorium for further investment in those fields. Only those areas in the country where primary education, primary health, and care for destitute are urgently warranted are to be taken care of. We need restrict our services to the poorest of the poor. Does this mean that the areas of the activities of the Church should be restricted to the poorest of the poor alone? No. We only mean that it is time to rethink whether we have until now delimited to the meaning of charity as merely establishing health care and educational institutions.

Charity Redefined

Many attempts to redefine charity have been tried during the last century by the Church. However, a breakthrough was made in this area by Pope Benedict XVI through two documents *Deus caritas est* and *Caritas in Veritate*. In these writings he begins his defense of the Church by redefining charity by way of accepting the criticisms raised against the church during nineteenth century.

As we know all the organisms in this world grow through certain definite sequence. This sequence is natural, that is established by the Creator. Basically every organism composed of different elements. Different elements join together as by a rule and form a relationship, different relationships join together by a rule and form a structure and different structures join together by a rule and form systems and different systems join together by a rule and form organism and different systems join together by a rule and form cosmos.

A close scrutiny of the growth of knowledge also will reveal that knowledge too grows in the same sequence as that of natural organisms. Social scientists

discovered that the sequence in the formation of living organisms and knowledge growth is replicated in man-made organizations. All societies and nations in the world also follow the similar sequence. In this way the marginalized are defined as those who are outside the man-made societal systems. The errors in the constructions of the man made systems due to various reasons create the marginalized. With these theoretical foundations, Marxists argued that the charity of Christians for helping the marginalized without any effort to correct the existing systems indirectly supports the very systems that create the marginalized. Pope Benedict XVI observes certain elements of truth in their argument. In his own words, “Since the nineteenth century, an objection has been raised to the Church's charitable activity, subsequently developed with particular insistence by Marxism: the poor, it is claimed, do not need charity but justice. Works of charity—almsgiving—are in effect a way for the rich to shirk their obligation to work for justice and a means of soothing their consciences, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of their rights. Instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the *status quo*, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world's goods and no longer have to depend on charity. There is admittedly some truth to this argument(of the marxists), but also much that is mistaken.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*,26)

The above observation of Pope Benedict reveals that the meaning of charity has so far being interpreted as alms giving. This created an element of complacency among all Christians at the cost of neglecting their role in participating the socio-political and cultural fields. So we the Indian Church urgently have to redefine the meaning of charity in order to include an active

participation in the field of correcting the existing unjust socio-political structures in favor of a true and inclusive charity. Quoting the words of Benedict XVI:

“Another important consideration is the common good. To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of ‘all of us’, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the *common good* and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity. To take a stand for the common good is on the one hand to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally, making it the *pólis*, or “city”. The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them. **Every Christian is called to practise this charity**, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the *pólis*. **This is the institutional path — we might also call it the political path — of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly, outside the institutional mediation of the *pólis*.** When animated by charity, commitment to the common good has greater worth than a merely secular and political stand would have. Like all commitment to justice, it has a place within the testimony of divine charity that paves the way for eternity through temporal action. Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal *city of God*, which is the goal of the history of the human family. In an increasingly globalized society, the common good and the effort to obtain it

cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations, in such a way as to shape the *earthly city* in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided *city of God*.”(Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*7)

Do the faithful accept the exhortation of the Pope Benedict that each Christian has a duty to participate in the process of restructuring the unjust social system? Is it not possible for a Christian to accept the statement that political path of charity is equally good and effective as the true kind of charity which encounters the marginalized? Due to certain historical and theological reasons the attempt of the Magisterium to redefine charity has not been internalized in the day today activities of the Church. Historically the Church did not include the need for participating in the nation building as an integral part of Christian life. The separation of the temporal and the divine and the privileging of divine above the temporal are present in almost all actions of the Church. In the words of St. John Paul II:

“In this way, Pope Leo XIII, in the footsteps of his Predecessors, created a lasting paradigm for the Church. The Church, in fact, has something to say about specific human situations, both individual and communal, national and international. She formulates a genuine doctrine for these situations, a *corpus* which enables her to analyze social realities, to make judgments about them and to indicate directions to be taken for the just resolution of the problems involved.

In Pope Leo XIII's time such a concept of the Church's right and duty was far from being commonly admitted. Indeed, a two-fold approach prevailed: one directed to this world and this life, to which faith ought to remain extraneous; the other directed towards a purely other-worldly salvation, which neither enlightens nor

directs existence on earth. The Pope's approach in publishing *Rerum novarum* gave the Church "citizenship status" as it were, amid the changing realities of public life, and this standing would be more fully confirmed later on. **In effect, to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour.** This doctrine is likewise a source of unity and peace in dealing with the conflicts which inevitably arise in social and economic life. Thus it is possible to meet these new situations without degrading the human person's transcendent dignity, either in oneself or in one's adversaries, and to direct those situations towards just solutions"(Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Anus*,5).

Without correcting the mental frame of the Christians formed through centuries of false practice if not of false teaching, all the attempts of the Church of India to give new directions will be futile.

Grace and Nature

The privileging of the divine against the temporal through centuries is to be attributed to certain theological positions and those positions also should be critically evaluated for correcting the divine/temporal divide. Divine/temporal divide is the after effect of nature/ grace divide. Which is primary- nature or grace? St. Thomas Aquinas himself stated that grace never substitutes nature instead grace completes nature. This reveals that Nature, the primary creation of God is the universal set and salvific grace is only a subset. Through centuries proclamations of the church gave undue importance to salvific grace and to the instruments of salvific of grace by rejecting nature and natural growth of human beings and the

human institutions. In other words Church held that salvific grace and the instruments of grace are primary and nature is only an appendage of grace. The division of nature and grace and privileging of grace over nature is seen also in the documentation of Second Vatican Council proceedings. Council provides two constitutions for church namely, Dogmatic constitution and Pastoral constitution. Dogmatic constitution explains the structure of the Church and the pastoral constitution delineates the role of church in world. Existence of two constitutions itself is an evidence to the effect that the preferring of the divine against temporal is still persisting. The document Pastoral constitution represents, what the natural is. However, due to the divine/temporal divide no due importance is given to the exhortations of the document Pastoral constitution that each individual, especially each Christian, has a duty bound by charity to participate in socio-political and cultural fields. So the theologians of the church have an urgent responsibility to do everything possible to correct the favouring of salvific grace and the divine in the nature/grace divide and divine/temporal divide in our theological and spiritual deliberations. Then only the exhortation of the Magisterium that political activity is the indispensable extension of charity, will enter into the epistemological structure and day today activities of the people of God.

Constitution: Saviour of Minorities

While searching for new ways and means to confront the current and immediate challenges raised by religious nationalists and neo-liberal economic policies many find their consolation in the constitution. They think and teach that the constitution will protect the fundamental rights. This belief itself is arising out of the ignorance of political philosophy. It is true that fundamental rights or natural rights are given by God, actualized right is freedom. Only freedom provides an ambience for development or freedom itself is development (A K Sen, *Freedom as*

Development). The natural right is actualized and freedom is actualized only if every other individual in a society recognizes the right as right (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*). It is written in the constitution that every citizen has a right to accept, follow, practice and preach his own religion as a fundamental right. If the majority in India is not recognizing this right as right, then that right is not actualized. Religious nationalists are now partially successful in framing the mental makeup of a large number of Indians that religious freedom is not a fundamental right!!

How did they succeed in converting the mental makeup of a large number of Indians including the youth, the educated and the professionals against the fundamental rights of human being? They actualized it through continuous propaganda. While religious nationalists ‘convert’ the people into their cause, where are natural nationalists? What is our position? Do we know that the real weapon against the propaganda is philosophy? It is said that there is an idea behind action; human beings cannot act (politically) without an idea. Higher education institutes and the intelligentsia were the real champions in organizing many social transformations in the society and were leaders in many revolutions. Our Independence struggle was led by the intelligentsia trained in different educational institutions in India administered by Christians.

Nascent Church also had faced similar situations which we Indian Church encounters today. Persecutions of the early Church were from state religion of Roman Empire. St. Augustine wrote the book *City of God* with purpose of encountering the propaganda of religious leaders of Roman paganism (Religious Nationalism). He used philosophy to encounter this propaganda.

In the nineteenth century Catholic Church initiated the discussion of the concept **Welfare State** to encounter individualism and liberal capitalism (of capitalists) and collectivism proposed by the communists. German Catholic

Church created an ambience for developing the economic system which was **socially oriented market economy**. Konrad Hermann Joseph Adenauer, a devout catholic on the basis of social doctrines of the church developed the above system).

What lesson should we learn from this? We should realize that only Catholics can guide other communities to develop a socio political and economic system which includes all the marginalized in the country. Our higher education institutions are the real instruments for using the weapon of philosophy against the false propaganda made by religious nationalists. Unfortunately our institutions gave up the disciplines related to social subjects like philosophy, politics, ethics, history, education, law, economics, literature etc for the sake of computer and engineering in almost irreversible lucrative motive. As a result we do not have any experts among us who can write and speak authentically about the humanities mentioned here. We cannot even convince our faithful about the challenges raised by the religious nationalism and neo liberal economic approaches. It is high time that we should realize that our higher education institutions are not only the instruments to teach the people 'how to fish the fish' but also the most effective instruments to use the weapon of philosophy to generate a generation who are the defenders of fundamental human rights (how to fish men).

Power, Violence and Fear

Violence is the byproduct of the apprehension and anxiety of loss of power. Violence gives birth to fear and vice versa (the first human myth of Cain). In fact, power (assertion of self against the other), violence and fear are simultaneous and any one of these follows any other. But at the helm of all these are power. First of all we have to identify why religious nationalists exhort for violence. The expansions of dominions of other religions and rationalists have created fear for certain Hindu groups. If we are succumbed to fear due to the violence of religious

nationalists, we also begin to resort to violence. Violence breeds violence. For a community organized on *kenosis*, there is nothing to lose. We are powerless and do not have any territory. A people who have nothing to lose have nothing to fear. They find the glimmering of love in the heart of the enemy. As our Lord says, if we feel that others are hating us let us go to them and reconcile with them. This is the weapon used by Ghandhiji in India and Martin Luther King Jr. in the USA. So don't get away from religious nationalists who are in power; instead always maintain good relationship with them through fearlessness and ahimsa(total abnegation of violence even in thought).

Let us have a short term strategy which helps us to maintain a good relationship with religious nationalists in power. And we should also have a long term strategy which uses the weapon of Philosophy through the instrument of higher education through humanities to convince the people who are ready to speak, write and sacrifice for protecting and nourishing the fundamental rights of a human person. This can be possible only for a Church which believes that actions for correcting socio political systems are part of charity and part of evangelization.