

TRACI

Reflections

Theological Research and Communication Institute

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NEWSLETTER

An Interview

WITH BASIL SCOTT

by Matthew Varghese

Mathew Varghese, Director of TRACI, interviewing Basil and Shirley Scott in the Spring of 2017.

Mathew: Do you have a rough idea when you began to get associated with TRACI?

Basil: From the beginning... Bruce acquired this building. I can't remember the exact day. The idea was to have a community of writers... these people who would meet together... talking together... discussing together. And that's what happened actually. And Vishal (Mangalwadi) was doing his work on *The World of Gurus*. That book we discussed at great deal. But then there were other people (too) who were writing. Stone too was writing. Bruce (Nicholls) too was writing.

Shirley: Bruce wrote articles... for TRACI Journal.

M: So what was the motive in joining or forming TRACI? At the time of formation, many of you were there together, right?

B: I think, yes, we were there... Bruce, Catherine, Vishal, ourselves and Tony Stone. We were the core, yes. So it wasn't a committee; it was people who were actually writing and doing some research and thinking. So the object was to bring a Christian mind-set to examine the problem we face, and to discuss them and to encourage at the same time other people - other

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Christians - to think and write, and to apply biblical principles to the world around us. The idea was not writing about theology or about Bible, but about the application of the Gospel to the world around us... to the culture in India. So, *The World of Gurus* is a good example. It is extremely important that we are also training ourselves to write or improve our ability to write. And for Vishal, of course, that was hugely important because that was his first book and to have had to submit his chapters to a critical audience, to a critical group, who would discuss every para of it was very helpful to him. Any author needs that and very rarely do you get anybody who is willing to give you that amount of tension... why can't you do this? Why did you mean that? What about that? Why did you think of that? And all the rest of that.

M: So were you working both with UESI and TRACI simultaneously?

B: No. I left UESI because I was appointed at the Interserve as the India Superintendent, and that means looking after the 120-125 Interserve all the

way from Kashmir to Kanyakumari... and the North East to Southwest.

M: So after your UESI work, you got associated with TRACI?

B: Yes. In 1978 I left UESI because Interserve asked me.

M: What are some of the good memories you have? Anything specific?

B: Well, the good memory was (that) the library was set up and was in working condition and was very useful. But I think the good memories are in the meeting together and discussing... intense discussing...and it was so good having Vishal there. Otherwise, rest of us were foreigners there. Bruce, Kathy and ourselves. But Vishal was there. So that did give us an Indian viewpoint all the time.

M: Did any other Indian join after Vishal... during your time?

B: LT (Jeyachandran) could have been in the Board or something. I am sure he might be there. But you see he was a working person (with the Government of India).

M: What were some of the challenges you faced?

B: I think that main challenge for us was how to relate Christian mind and the Gospel to all the variety of Indian culture. There was a huge variety of Indian culture. Where do you begin? Because in a Seminary you tend to be simply discussing Christian Theology or Bible or whatever. But then here to actually put your mind to thinking "What should we believe... And how should we be thinking... How should we be engaging... With all the cultures around us? And with specially Hindu culture, I suppose, we were focussed on all aspects of, as you see them in *The World of Gurus*, and that was one example as we've said.

M: Till which year were you with TRACI?

B: We left in 1983. And Tony Stone left about the same time as us. Bruce Nicholl stayed on. I can't tell you how long Bruce was on, and then Bruce used to come back at times certainly.

S: What is your vision in coming to TRACI? What do you see it as capable of

being?

M: Of course, the same thing that you were saying: Christian thinking and writing. These were the two things for which I got attracted to TRACI... earlier I heard about TRACI... in John Stott's book *Issues Facing Christians Today*.

B: Oh, I see!

S: Have you got writers in mind?

M: Of course, earlier also we had a group here; not associated with any organisation though. When I was working with UESI, we called it as Delhi group or Reflection group. And as a result, we got few books published.

B: Ah, Shantanu is at the forefront in writing?

M: Yes, Shantanu was part of that. Then Cherian Thomas, Jamila Koshy... they were all part of it. So we all used to come together, and we used to gather in any of our homes. Even our home was used for that. So that is almost similar to TRACI's vision. So all those friends also told me that there is already an organisation with that vision, why can't you revive it? So that's the motivation I received to join TRACI.

B: So you see... there's Shantanu, Cherian...there is five, and they wrote book together. Isn't it?

M: *Should I Care?* is what they wrote. Two or three books are there.

B: You can see how much easier it could be if they actually met together... or stay together. Maybe not for long. They may have busy jobs or whatever! But if there's a place for them to stay together for a week, and there are some... or one or two who are there all the time, that helps a great deal, isn't it?

M: That's the challenge we are facing now. We don't have enough people to put things together. But gradually we are working towards that. To bring some young researchers who would like to write... and make a team so that the whole vision can be taken forward.

B: If you don't have money to bring in people for three months, you can bring people in for three hours... (laughs)...from time to time.

M: That is happening now. I'll handover to you one small book we have published. Of course, along with SALT Initiative and

UESI... we organised a Conference. We had papers presented on different topics, and that is being published. And the second meeting also happened one week back... on Nationalism. Here in our country, lot of discussion on Nationalism has been taking place these days.

B: Of course! That Wednesday meeting showed that there are... you've got quite a lot of resourceful people in Delhi who are engaging in different ways on these essential issues. So that's very, very good.

S: This is an excellent production. That's really, really good.

M: Thank you very much for this valuable time.



TRACI INTERNSHIP 2017 REPORT

This year's TRACI internship started from the 19th April 2017 to the 19th May 2017. The theme was 'Challenges of Indian Christian leaders'. This theme was chosen to include students from mainstream universities of Delhi as well in the internship program. However, due to the timing of the internship programme, we were unable to include students from these universities this year.

This year we had six students from six different seminaries attending the internship

	NAME	COLLEGE
1.	Shajan Thomas	Former student of IPC Theological Seminary Kottayam. Now working in Theny, TN.
2.	Robin G. K	Dharmajyothi Marthoma Seminary, Faridabad
3.	Phachulo Magh	Clark Theological College, Nagaland
4.	Jibu James	Marthoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam
5.	Alvin Abraham	Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam
6.	Ramheulungbe Riame	Serampore college, WB



Arrival & Orientation

On 18/4/17 the students arrived at TRACI. We had a time of orientation and introduction to the internship program on the 19/4/17 from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. In the orientation the students were informed about the requirements of the program. To successfully complete the internship program the students were required to

- Attend all lectures and Q& A sessions
- Go for all the field visits and for shadowing the leaders 2 days a week
- Do a reading report- 1500 words
- Write and present a comprehensive paper on the topic ' What church ought to be '- 2000 words (Group assignment)
- Present a paper on a specific challenge faced by Christian leaders in India.* - 2500 words (individual assignment)

The training sessions constituted of:

'Educational context of India.'

- Fr. John Chattannat (Former Principal of Vidyajyothi)

Socio-Political context of India'

- Dr. Bonnie Miriam Jacob (Director of Research and Engagement Foundation),

Health and gender issues of India.'

- Dr. Evangeline Dutta (A Public health Professional),

Economic context of India'

- Dr. Varaprasad Dolla (Prof in School of Social Sciences, JNU),

Calling of the Church/ Ideal Church - Mr. Mathew Varughese (Director,TRACI)

Church today/ activities of today's church. - Mr. Raaj Mondol (Salt Initiative),

'What the church ought to be.'- Group Presentations by Students

(Moderators - Mr. Mathew Varghese and Mr. Raaj Mondol),

There were also presentations by students on Selected Challenge of Indian Christian Leaders, which was then moderated by Mr. Mathew Varughese and Mr. Jeremiah Duomai. Topics the students presented included:

Caste as a Dividing Wall in the Churches in Tamil Nadu:

A Reflection of Ephesians 2:11-22 by Shajan P. S

Confronting Domestic violence against women in Northeast India from Christian perspective. By Phachulo Magh

Tortured women in India; exploring violence against women and the responsibility of the church. By: Robin G. K

Response of the church towards the plight of transgender community in India; legal and ecclesiastical approaches. By Alvin Abraham Simon

Monetary Corruption in the Church with Special Reference to Northeast India: A Pastoral Response. By Ramheulungbe Riame

Stress and Burnout as Challenges for a Pastor. By Jibu James

The students visited the four Christian leaders on the Tuesdays and Sundays of the four weeks during the internship. They also had Parliament visit, City Walk organized by the Salaam Baalak Trust, Satsang visit, Screening of the Movie 'It's a Girl', An Interaction with Mr. Josy Joseph- National Security editor, The Hindu.

In addition to the feedback forms given to the students we had a time of debriefing on 19/5/2017. Students shared on how the internship has benefitted them, the specific

changes they want to bring in their life and ministry in the light of the internship, personal prayer concerns and suggestions for the future internships. Here are some of their comments:-

Shajan: He shared, "TRACI opened my eyes to see the social needs around me and strengthened the weak Shajan who I was". He also shared that after the internship he feels empowered to 'Stand and voice the voice in him.' He shared that the internship has renewed his rational analyzing capacity and helped him to think and plan for future. He plans to start a newsletter and a career guidance program in Theny and will continue to write to bring about changes the society. Pachulo Magh: He appreciated the financial support given by TRACI and shared that without which he would not have been able to make it. He also shared that while doing the paper on domestic violence he could reflect on his own family and society and he wishes to bring about a change in the way women are treated in his society. Inspired from the devotional services he also shared that he wishes to see systematization in the order of services of his church. He said "Being a representative of TRACI I will share all that I learned here with my Church". He also expressed his wish to have regional chapters of TRACI so that many more will be benefited from TRACI internship.

UPCOMING EVENTS BY TRACI

- **Inter Church Sunday School Fest (ICSSF)** 2017 on October 14, 2017. Venue: St. Mary's School, Safdarjung. (More details at: www.icssf.org)
- **Conference on "Christianity and Culture"** on November 15-16, 2017. (More details on <http://traci.in/call-for-papers-2/>)
- **Lecture on "Christianity and Culture"** on November 17, 2017.

VOICES AT THE WATERING PLACES

Editor: Kathleen D Nicholls

Kathleen Nicholls book “Voices at the Watering Places” is a legacy that she and her team have left. This book which was compiled with tireless efforts of many artists from different parts of the world reflect their passion for God and His world through art. Though the pages now seem old, the stories written in them are still full of life and colour.

One of the articles by Esther K. Augsburgers perhaps gives a gist about their in-depth understanding of wholistic mission. The article talks about a Learning Centre which had an after school program for inner city children. Elmer and Pamela were two African American children who were part of this program. From backgrounds of broken families, confusion, feeling trapped and useless; the program brought transformation. They now had people around them to talk to, feed, clothe and laugh with. They got a family. They got pages and

brushes to paint their realities and over time it brought them healing from pain and anger.

Augsburger talks about her inner struggle when she feels whether the children could know the God who loved them through their love. She receives her answer through the words on Pamela's sculpture “the Lord loves me like I am”. It helped children to find their identity in a God who loved them.

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and laugh with. They got a family. They got pages and brushes to paint their realities and over time it brought them healing from pain and anger.

The realities around us are not quite different now. We still need a family of artists united in God's love reflecting His nature to His world.

“Voices at the Watering Places” is a book formed as a result of an artist's consultation in Bali in February 1989. Thirty nine artists from twelve countries representing a variety of denominations and national churches were present. The discussions led them to see the role of the church in helping artists and the prophetic role of artists to the world. This inspired them to have subsequent consultations in Nagpur, Ghana and Nigeria. These consultations were places for artists of various disciplines to exhibit their work, learn new techniques of art, network and dream big for God.

CASTE AND HUMAN EQUALITY

Writer Name not given

The Constitution of India prohibits discrimination based on caste. For example, Articles 14, 15 and 16 touch upon this matter. Yet who will deny that caste equation continues to play a major role in marriage, politics etc in the lives of the citizens! And it is not uncommon to hear stories of Dalits being deprived of access to village well. Even after 70 years of independence, casteist mindset infects millions of people - some people are still considered to be of inferior quality than some other just because these people happened to be born into certain societal structure.

One lesson this tells us that the Constitution is not adequate in addressing this predicament that has plagued India for several centuries. Moral ethos of a community is shaped at home, in classroom, in religious centres etc. And unless these institutions also provide training to accept the other as equal, another seventy more years may not be

sufficient to wipe out this mental block. Let alone inculcating such an idea of equality, if the lesson received at home, for example, is to treat the other as unequal because the religious culture across centuries has perpetuated such hierarchical division, then the Constitutional ethos will take more generations to get ingrained in the value system of the people.

In the midst of such predicament, it is worthwhile listening to the biblical narrative about human values once more. In the first book of the Bible, it is affirmed that all humans bear the image of God (Gen 1: 27). The biblical narrative underscores that there is no superior or inferior humans; all humans are equally precious and Jesus loves all equally.

"All humans" include those who are mentally or physically challenged, and also people who may be considered as inferior or scum of any given society.

It is not based on one's capability to exercise autonomy or the power to carry out abstract thinking as certain strand of philosophical thinking suggests.

Given the resources biblical narrative provides to its readers, it is vital that Christians share and practice this subversive yet Constitutional ethos today. The idea that we are one another's equal is a powerful biblical message that the excluded ones long to hear. It is an error to think that caste is no longer a factor determining our actions. The attraction towards godman like Ram Rahim Singh of Dera Sacha Sauda should open our eyes that caste continues to remain a significant social reality. And for those who have been at the margin for many generations, to hear that the God of the Bible affirms their personhood and considers them all as equal to the rest of the humans will be like a cup of water to a thirsting traveller.