



TRACI
Reflections

Theological Research And
Communication Institute

PUBLIC THEOLOGY

EXPLORING EXPRESSIONS OF THE
CHRISTIAN FAITH

THE MESSAGE OF MISSION: TWO MISSIONARY PRINCIPLES

Dr. Vinoth Ramachandra

I would like to share about the two missionary principles that the Lord entrusted his church, which sadly we have forgotten. They are both found in John's gospel. The first is in John 12: 24 "Truly, Truly I say to you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." This is the principle of dying and being buried and Jesus is applying this agricultural principle to his own life and to the life of those who want to be his followers. The context of this text is a Jewish Passover. There are some Greeks, God-fearing Greeks who come to the Passover and they are seeking an interview with Jesus. Jesus seems to snub them, he doesn't grant them an interview, but he sees their approach as a sign from his Father; that now the hour has come for the fulfilment of His mission on earth. He goes on to say in verse 32 that when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples, Greeks and Jews to myself. It's as if Jesus is saying, there is no point having an interview with these Greeks, who never understand who I am and my significance, because I cannot be fitted into Greek theology just as Jesus cannot be fitted into Buddhist philosophy or Confucius' philosophy or any of the dominant Hindu schools of thought. He breaks all those boundaries, He creates His own categories around himself, he says that beyond the cross I will bring about a new creation in which these barriers, these existing walls of division in humanity are broken down and a new humanity emerges. Then on the other side of the cross, people will understand my significance. He goes on to say, if anyone would follow me and serve me, he must be where I am, but where is Jesus?

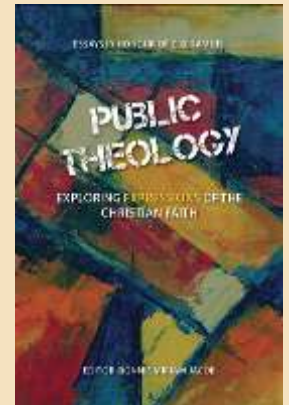
Jesus is about to be dragged outside the walls of Jerusalem, and to be hung on Roman gallows, to die in solidarity with the victims of empire. There he identifies himself with the ungodly and the God-forsaken and he's saying- this is where those who follow me should be; in solidarity with the ungodly and the God forsaken in their societies. The resurrection of Jesus is not the reversal of his crucifixion, but is rather the vindication of the way of the cross. It is saying to those who are prepared to follow in Jesus' footsteps and do what Jesus did in embracing suffering and to be with people who are in situations of helplessness and hopelessness, it is only then that they will receive theological insights into who truly Jesus is and what his mission is about.

What Jesus is challenging us, is to go against our natural instincts of self-preservation - there are times we have to resist the pressure to preserve ourselves. We have to resist those socially homed desires of self-fulfilment and self-advancement and status and security to turn our back from there in order that we may surrender ourselves completely and utterly to God to become his agents and instruments to do his purposes in the world. Now, this kind of teaching has been sadly lacking in many of our so-called evangelical Bible-believing churches. And that's why over the years we've seen so many professional middle-class well-educated Christians who run away from situations of poverty and violence, the moment there is an economic downturn, they are on their next flight to the USA or Canada, Britain, Australia, I'm not talking of people who go to the West for studies or for professional training or to work for a few years to save some money or those who go as refugees during war or persecution. No, I'm speaking of those people who settle down, I mean that's the expression they use- to settle down, in places of comfort and security and prosperity. Now I wonder what gospel is being communicated in our societies by that exodus of Christians; certainly not the message of incarnation. I contrast this with for example pastors in northern Sri Lanka who during the closing months of the war in 2009, simply accompanied poor people in their congregations in to the internal displacement camps and were there with them in those camps, sharing their pain. They could have run away but they didn't.

We have often been tempted to run away, because we live in societies where there is endemic poverty and violence and conflict and corruption. Our countries are quickly descending into political despotism and even tyranny with all our liberal political institutions being eroded. The temptation has been great, for us to run away but Jesus challenges us not to run away but to stay and seek to be

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AS TRACI, we are pleased to publish this Festschrift for Rev.C.B Samuel on his 70th birthday (23rd Aug). Written by 27 authors from India and abroad, it is edited by Dr. Bonnie Miriam Jacob.



The essays in this volume attempt to take the conversations on Public theology out of the confines of the academic and theological institutions and explore it as it is lived out in the public sphere. We would be glad to hear your feedback on this book. In case you would like to buy the hard copy from our Delhi office, we can ship it to you. The cost of this 432 pages book is Rs. 600/- (postage charges will be extra). Please make the requisition in the link provided herewith: <https://forms.gle/Ch5cFDSCu62CsUh68> or through Amazon in India or abroad.

Dr. Christopher Wright shares on the Book:

"...We sorely need robust public theology that is biblically rooted and faithful, while practically and contextually engaged. I rejoice to see in this book such a generous contribution towards addressing that need."

Rev. Dr. Christopher J. H. Wright
Langham Partnership,
Author of The Mission of God.

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TRACI MISSION : "Facilitating integrated response and transformative engagements through theological reflections on contemporary and relevant issues, by communities of followers of Jesus Christ".

salt and light in our communities. Often we don't know what to do. We have no answer to these huge problems of poverty and corruption and violence, but simply by being there with people who cannot run away, who have nowhere else to go, we actually bear witness to the incarnate God..

The second principle that Jesus left is found in the very next chapter John where he takes a basin of water and a towel, he washes the feet of his disciples and says –“I have given you an example that just as I have loved you, you must love one another and by this, the world will know that you are my disciples, by your love for one another.” It is a principle of loving. Then in his high priestly prayer for his church in chapter 17 he says, “the world will believe that the Father has sent the Son into the world by your visible unity, by your love for one another.” The unity of the church is central to the gospel. The gospel announces the dawn of a new creation and the church is a sign, an anticipation, the first fruit of that new redeemed humanity in which risen Christ is breaking down walls of division, those barriers of hostility, and creating a new people. And sadly that is not the reality that we see when we look at the church in India or Sri Lanka or Europe or the United States, because we have some way inherited or followed an individualistic or privatized gospel and perhaps our Hindu and Buddhist religious environment also pushes us towards our individualism because salvation in these religions is not relational but individualistic. We have been shaped so much not by the words of Jesus but by our culture whether it is western individualism or the individualism of Hindu and Buddhist religion.

When I first came to India in the 1990's I was shocked in the way that so many personality cults were developing in the Indian church, I guess reflecting the whole guru cults in wider Indian society. So many Indian Christian organizations have been destroyed by infighting between say Malayalis and Tamils. You look at all the ethnic and tribal churches that form. I can see people forming separate churches if there's only one language that they speak, but truly there must be ways of coming together because the gospel has to be seen by the world and not just heard. And if this new society in which Christ is breaking down divisions and giving us a new identity that transcends our gender identities or our ethnic identities or our tribal identities, if the world does not see this, then the gospel is not going out.

I heard from Singaporean friends and even Indian IT professionals who go to Singapore, form their own churches, they don't identify with the Singaporean Chinese church, they don't even identify with the Singaporean Tamil Indian churches, because those Indians in Singapore belong to a different caste. So, what gospel do we have if we are simply reflecting the fragmentation and divisions of the wider society, not the gospel of reconciliation and reconciliation I said is the very essence, the very heart of the good news that Jesus and the apostles proclaimed.,

So I often think that God is more concerned about what we are as individuals and what we are as a church than what we do in terms of social activism or what we say in terms of preaching and evangelism. Of course what we say and what we do reflects what kind of people we are, but God cares more about our integrity as individuals and our integrity as a church and maybe for the sake of integrity we should close down some of our churches and our para-church organizations and our bible colleges because these represent not just a waste of resources, duplicating resources but maybe they also represent a betrayal of the gospel itself. And so, its paradoxical that the two principles that our Lord has left us- the principle of dying and the principle of loving are just ignored by many bible-believing, so-called evangelical Christians today. And the two principles are intimately connected because what prevents us from loving others across these differences that we have, is our desire for status, our desire for security, our desire to have a reputation.

Dr. Vinoth Ramachandra, IFES Secretary for Dialogue and Social Engagement.
(This is an excerpt of the talk he gave during the release of the book Public Theology: Exploring Expressions of the Christian Faith.)

TRACI NEEDS

- TRACI income has been dependent to a large extent from those who use TRACI facilities and donate to the monthly needs of the Institute. With Covid-19 lockdown, this source has almost been negligible. Yet with growing needs, we have continued our commitment to the plans we have set for the year. We do solicit your support in prayer. Our monthly needs is Rs. 5lakh as per the yearly budget. In case you are led to share, bank details are given below.
- TRACI House, in Delhi, is in urgent need of renovation. Engineers Ministry International estimates it to Rs. 50 lakhs. To start with, the renovation design & planning will cost us Rs. Two lakhs. We will then have to do the renovation in a phased manner. Please do keep this need also your prayers and do participate in this need.

TRACI REFLECTIONS

TRACI brought out six issues of the Christian Mind Series (CMS), three being from June to September 2020.

I. Biblical Reflections at the Time of Covid 19.

“In the context where COVID-19 would continue to play havoc with the poorest and most vulnerable in our land, how would the Indian church and each of us, continuously and systematically respond to the urgent pressing needs in its wake, over the next few months? History tells us that it was at such times that groups of Christians stayed behind to take care of victims of epidemics after their own families had abandoned them and fled from their homes. Many such caregivers, themselves fell prey to the disease. But it was such selfless loving actions of Christians that touched the hearts and minds of those watching these events, resulting in rapid growth of the church as a consequence. Will COVID-19 pass by, with us merely spectating and commenting, or would we actively engage in providing succor and relief to those who need it the most?” **Cherian Thomas, Leader- World Vision International,**

II. Contemporary International Relations: Changing Dynamics, Challenges & Responses

“The global community must focus on the importance of principles and their pivotal role in international relations. It is imperative for us to factor into international relations the view that principles without power are weak and power without principles is dangerous. Post-pandemic international relations will be different to the extent that the global community is willing to shape it based on the principles of transparency, equality, dignity and justice for all not just the powerful and rich- that includes countries, companies, institutions and individuals... being wary of authoritarian tendencies both at the international and national levels, let us hope that the international system will tread towards being more inclusive, just and equitable”. **Prof Varaprasad Dolla, JNU.**

III. A Critical Analysis of the NEP 2020

“We do agree that we need to plan for excellence and advancement of society in all its domains, but only by balancing excellence with equity. If education is to be an institution to fulfill constitutional guarantees, we need to look at policy and practice from the lens of social justice. This then makes it imperative for all stakeholders and educationist to primarily ask; what are we investing into the system of education in terms of, our vision, resources and processes that will guarantee men and women alike an equal chance to be free from want, fear and ignorance”. **Dr.Ashish Alexander, Prof Sybil Thomas & Prof Sonajharia Minz.**

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