



TRACI

Reflections

Theological Research And
Communication Institute

GENDER EXPRESSIONS OF A REDEEMED COMMUNITY

What is the redeemed expression that is presented to the world by the church with regard to gender issues is a critical question that must engage all Christians interested in its mission. Our perspectives and practices in all matters are meant to be indicative of the very God we worship and nothing in all of our life and living is exempt from its purview. Thus the image of God for the society is definitely pitched at the level at which gender is approached among the people of God. Gender has been a cause of raging controversies and deep division right through history and continues to be even today. Sadly, God is not at the core of most of these discordant overtones. It is thus deeply painful when we wilfully reduce the image of the Almighty God and allow Him to be represented by narrow partisan interests and for gendered gains. How can we allow cultural norms and parameters of discriminatory gender practices to shape our understanding of God in dealing with men and women? In a world of gender-related inequalities and injustices, the church can effectively bring the message of healing only by acknowledging and correcting those inequalities and injustices within its fold. To be the salt and the light also requires that we are constantly listening to, and acting on, gender disparities in the church. If we ignore the unhealthy gendered practices in the community of God's people, the precious calling of representing God in a fallen world will continue to be marred by inconsistency in belief and behaviour.

Gender is one of the core areas of TRACI's outreach. We have been using different opportunities to push the limits of our engagement. In celebrating International Women's Day on 8 March 2021, TRACI hosted a team of eight young women to initiate a conversation on gender concerns in the church. By choosing to dialogue with young voices, TRACI was reversing the tables in amplifying voices that are usually not heard within the church circles and providing a safe space for them to speak with courage and conviction. It was a candid moment as each of them unpacked the gender concerns left unaddressed in the church. Their articulations resonated with a large majority in the audience and the unexpressed feelings and impressions of women in the church. They questioned gendered expressions that were not scrutinized because they were silently internalized and normalized in the community. The young friends represented a generation who were constantly thinking through issues, totally unwilling to accept unreasonable and illogical gender positions and expressions and willing to engage with the Scriptures to know and practice the truth. The need was for reclaiming the space where women can thrive and flourish to the fullness of the abundant life that God has called us to. This entire initiative was an effort to open up the discussion with young people with the hope to journey further alongside to develop perspectives and responses, which are shaped by the Scripture. The online platform of public conversation provided an opportunity for highlighting issues, publicly discussing about them, creating awareness and motivating a critical mass of people to push for change in their respective places.

At the heart of TRACI's gender initiatives is the deep desire to see a church that is fully alive to God's concerns. The willingness to critically look at unpleasant realities and matters whose origins are not from God is important as we move forward. These steps will aid to confront and deal with issues as children of God. It is our call to consider, as the church of God, where we want to place ourselves in responding to the plea for space, dignity, respect and inclusion. A redeemed community of God's people, modelling the Kingdom values on gender, will emerge only when we allow these processes to shape and transform us. We welcome you to join TRACI in the ongoing effort to grapple with issues that are of great importance to the church of God. Let us journey together in taking small steps of confronting gender issues towards the day when our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will present the Church as blameless and faultless in the presence of the Father with exceeding joy. Towards that end we say Amen.

-Bonnie Miriam Jacob

STAND WITH USTO PRAISE & PRAY

- God has faithfully provided our primary resource in people who are always available for TRACI initiatives. Let's thank the Lord for each and every person who not only participated, but also were able to minister through TRACI platform.
- As TRACI, we were able to minister in diverse ways fulfilling the mandate the Lord has for us.
- Praise God for the selfless service of Working Group and Board members.
- We ended the last financial year without a deficit. In spite of the lock down that stopped any revenue generation from TRACI House, we thank God for the fact that he opened the hearts of many to share in TRACI's needs.
- TRACI team is being built up by the Lord. We thank the Lord that Dr. Bonnie Miriam Jacob could join as Director for Research and Training and Lozaanba Khumbah as Research Intern.
- TRACI Chapter was formed in Kerala. Thank God for all initiatives they have taken.
- For the Conferences, Reflections & Publication. Three books that we published this year are: Climate Change, Public Theology and CMS Series.
- For renewing the FCRA account under the new rules.

Shall we earnestly **pray** for the following:

- TRACI staff and working team as we need God's wisdom and discernment for our times and for a Research Associate to join us full time.
- For the new initiatives TRACI intends to take up in partnership.
- For publications that are planned for the year.
- Finance needs of around Rs. 4 lakhs per month.

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VISION AND FOCUS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

As Theological Research and Communication Institute (TRACI) our mission is: "Facilitating integrated response and transformative engagements through theological reflections on contemporary and relevant issues, by communities of followers of Jesus Christ".

Biblical **Theology** is **integral** and wholistic as Triune God is actively involved in the whole creation and in its sustenance, and human beings created in God's image are to be co-workers and agents of God. The reconciliation and transformation of everything through **Christ, the image of the invisible**, and the participation of human beings in this ministry of reconciliation of all things are central in Biblical Theology. Therefore, our theological reflections and understanding also need to be integral, wholistic and transformative. It cannot be just the study of words or dogmas or reflections of the past, but must definitely include reflections on **transformative engagement** in the present keeping in view the future reality of new heaven and new earth. It is a journey with God as we constantly reflect on the issues around and engage in the ministry of reconciliation and thus transformation.

In this pursuit, the reflections and research we envision may help us to have an interface with all academic disciplines especially with the 'Theological' and other academics subjects, and study issues with a redemptive perspective. Though we may not be able to accomplish it in its fullness, we initiate various reflections, interactions and **communications** and make every effort to model it in our limited space of engagement and influence.

Three areas of focus for training and research that we have identified for the coming year are **Integral Mission, Gender and 'Society and Polity'**. These themes will continue to enable our reflection and engagement with several issues that constantly confront us. TRACI plans to have further interactions particularly with Churches and organizations, Theological students and college network, and University networks. Engagement with these three groups are significant where formation of TRACI Chapters are also planned to enable continued reflections in their respective places.

Monthly Reflections, Research, Trainings, Conferences and Lectures, Presentation of Papers, Youth Interactions, Pandita Ramabai group where research scholars share their works, University Students Study Circles, Internship for young scholars at different levels are some of the activities planned for this year. Research reports, Conference papers and Christian Mind Series (Once in six months) are few publications we plan as the year unfolds.

God has blessed us with a staff team to carry forward the mission that TRACI has envisaged. Mr. Sathish Joseph Simon as Director of Operations leads the University Networks. Dr. Bonnie Miriam Jacob functions as Director of Research and Training. Mr. Raaj Mondol and Rev. Dr. Ram Surat support us as working team members. Mr. Lozaanba Khumbah from JNU joined us as Research Intern for a period of three months and is currently supporting the Director of Research and Training. A growing community of earnest and committed well wishers and supporters continue to journey with us in all our endeavors. We welcome you to partner with us in reaching out to fulfill God's purposes for our times.

-Mathew Varughese, Director, TRACI

FIND A DISCUSSION ONLINE

Conversations with young women on gender concerns in the Church

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_VBBPY9DnY

Remembering Bonhoeffer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqgYvvVDJlc>

REMEMBERING BONHOEFFER

A TRACI Christian Study Circle Initiative

University students need to meet together not only to discuss academic pursuit from a Kingdom Perspective, but also dialogue on theologies and existing ideologies in the campuses. Such discussions not only help them evaluate their own foundations but lead them to critical enquiry and conduct. TRACI encourages this effort by the formation of Christian Study Circles in campuses and through online platforms. And as members of the church who are in university, this approach is not only an attempt to engage the university, but also the university engaging the church.

The first such event was to commemorate Dietrich Bonhoeffer's death anniversary. The online panel discussion, on 17 April 2021, was led by Bendangrenla Longkumer a doctoral candidate from Jawaharlal Nehru University whose thesis is on Bonhoeffer and Apilang Apum, Assistant Professor in JTCMDC Roing, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh. It was moderated by Lozaanba Khumbah, a doctoral candidate from Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The interaction revolved around questions like: What does Bonhoeffer have to say about the community of Christ and its role here on Earth, especially in the face of tyrannical rulers? And what does 'costly discipleship' mean for individual members, particularly those in the university?

The panellists highlighted that at the core of Bonhoeffer's theology lies the truth of the Gospel and the community centered on Christ. For Bonhoeffer, the community makes sense only in the presence of the other, or in a Christian vocabulary - the neighbour. In his book 'The Cost of Discipleship', he writes, "Through fellowship and communion with the incarnate Lord, we recover our true humanity, and at the same time we are delivered from that individualism which is the consequence of sin, and retrieve our solidarity with the whole human race." This radical demand of renunciation of earthly ties, yet the call to live for the sake of the 'neighbour' and to bear the 'cost of discipleship' is counter-intuitive to contemporary individualistic and consumerist impulses, which therefore opens up the question of how one is to live in the modern world in the face of modern powers.

The interactions challenged churches in India to speak up instead of being silent just because our doors have not been knocked at as yet. The gradual step by step process of complicity, of wanting to preserve careers and staying out of trouble was all it took for the Nazification of the German church. Are the ideologies prevalent in our societies compatible with the truth of the Gospel? Are Christian pastors, theologians and academicians willing to respond to the radical call that have been thrust upon us?

ACCOUNT DETAILS

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A/c No. : 072501000006876

IFSC: IOBA0000725

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WORK WITH US

TRACI invites applications for the position of **Research Associate**. We also invite students to join TRACI for a **Summer Internship**. Please visit our website for more details: <https://traci.in/work-with-us/>