



TRACI
Reflections
Theological Research And
Communication Institute

Being The Hands of Jesus

By Being The Salt Of The Earth

Matthew 5:13

FAITH AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Integrating Christian Faith and Political Engagement

'Faith and Active Citizenship' can conjure many images in one's mind. Active Citizenship is a conceptual framework developed by Hoskins and Mascherini (2009). This concept is linked to the operational model, which had four 'measurable and distinct dimensions' namely, Representative Democracy, Protest and Social Change, Democratic Values and Community Life. These dimensions are further captured by a comprehensive set of parameters that define all that includes citizenship. This model of Active Citizenship advocates for the complete engagement of every individual considering the extent to which these dimensions cover. In a nutshell 'Active Citizenship' in popular parlance points to political engagement.

Most Christians consider politics and faith as being mutually exclusive and a direct outcome of such an understanding is that very few Christians have ventured into politics at least in the Indian context. The limited scope of the ongoing conversations around politics and political engagement among Christians also does not encourage an earnest consideration to involve actively in various political processes. The trajectory of the current day politics is far from appealing for any individual who would rather consider other means of engaging and contributing to the society than through the political process. The term politics itself in a certain sense has become synonymous to divisive, shrewd and vicious parleys by individuals and groups. Political engagement however, cannot be discarded for such reasons. There is a need to recover a wholistic understanding of politics. From its original Greek word '*politika*' meaning 'affairs of the state', politics covers the whole gamut of activities that navigate groups, decisions, policies and programmes of the state in ways that will contribute to the common good and equity. So the scope of political engagement could include being political representatives or being part of political parties or the government at different levels. It could also include being part of social movements or interest groups that constantly hold those in authority to be responsible for creating an equitable world and working towards common good by ensuring access to public resources and entitlements.

The predominant tendency among the politically engaged Christians in India is that there is a disconnect between their faith and political engagement. Among the politically unengaged Christians, who are interested in integrating their faith and life's engagement in every sphere, there is a slight change in this trend in recent times with a more positive outlook about politics and a desire to engage more meaningfully. As God's image bearers our engagement and integrated response in the political space should flow out of an understanding of who God is, what He hopes for the world, how He views the affairs of the nations and deals with them when they conduct the matters of the state. **Constantly grappling with the idea and a lifestyle of integrating spirituality and political engagement then becomes critically important for every believer in Christ.** This is a compelling concern considering the changing political scenario in India and the world today making it imperative for the church and Christians to evaluate themselves as to where they stand with regard to perspectives on politics, what shapes those perspectives and what is the extent of engagement that is necessary. **The bedrock of Christian political engagement amidst decaying political culture is to usher in a counter cultural model and a narrative that Christians and the church can infuse into the political engagement and discourse.** Furthermore, there is a need to expand the scope of how politics and political engagement are understood and to free them from the narrow and partisan confines of being engaged only with the government

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Faith and Active Citizenship Reflections from participants

At a time of great political, social and cultural unrest, how should Christians engage with politics? TRACI's course on "Faith and Active Citizenship" sought to help answer that question. Pastors, lawyers, students and others from various walks of life and across South Asia participated in the training course between March and May. The course provided a biblical foundation for political engagement, studied the roles of political institutions and introduced various strategies and models for Christians to take inspiration from as they charted their own commitment and strategies of engagement.

Participants learned that "political engagement" encompasses much more than just government work. In fact, it refers to a holistic and broad understanding of working for the benefit of all areas of society and culture. Most importantly, the course sought to impress upon Christians the importance of political engagement not linked to a political party, but that instead flows from a love for God and neighbour and a commitment to Kingdom justice and peace for all.

Participants spent time learning from distinguished faculty and explored the application of these ideas in discussion groups.

Teaching faculty included Dr. Varaprasad Dolla of JNU, *Caravan* editor Vinod Jose, Dr. Vinoth Ramachandra and TRACI's own Dr. Bonnie Jacob to name a few.

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Raising awareness and equipping the Christians and the church on how we think about politics is an initial step towards encouraging participation. It is not merely to replicate political parties but our political engagement should flow from a commitment to Christ and Kingdom values in the world, of ushering justice, peace, equality, dignity and a life of freedom and abundance for all. In short, Christian political engagement is the overflow of our belief and passion in fulfilling the vision of Kingdom of God and Shalom in our world.

Dr Bonnie Miriam Jacob (Director of Research, TRACI)

...Reflections from the Participants

Members of the course were also able to see real-life applications of Kingdom-based political engagement in various special sessions and discussion groups. Not content with just "hearing the word," the course also encouraged practical action with all participants ending the course with a presentation on their path forward for political engagement.

Lisa Pauline Mattackal (Journalist, REUTERS)

Here's what some participants had to say about their experience:

This course has helped me understand the different mind sets in the Kingdom of God and the need to talk about and address these issues in order to create opportunities to reflect and fulfil God's agenda through creative ideas in politics. The understanding that the church has a role to play alongside believers in participating in world politics encourages and highlights how Christians can work along with politicians to instil Christian values in the work that they do. I have benefited greatly from experiencing how it has connected Christian values and different nationalities.

~ Robin

The course benefited my understanding of the biblical underpinnings of politics. It helped deepen my sense of responsibility, shed inhibitions regarding politics and understand the challenges. The training also facilitated me to build connections with experts and other like-minded people.

~ Manish

The Course convicted my conscience deeply. I am processing every class, which was so well presented by the experts in the field. I have challenged my church youth and together we are working on an agenda, to connect and engage with our locality's needs.

~ Priya

TRACI ONLINE COURSE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

TRACI will be initiating a 9-week course module (13th July to 9th Sep 2022) on "Research Methodology." The course will be facilitated through the Zoom platform and will involve an interactive and guided learning to encourage an in-depth understanding of research methods and tools.

At TRACI, our aim is to engage with issues pertinent to society and one cannot overemphasize the critical place that research occupies in our societies and communities. This course has been initiated with the aim to help participants understand research and its multifaceted role in bringing well-informed and evidence-based information and ideas to the society and the church thereby contributing to development, review, analysis and perspectives that are sound and rigorous. This course aims, in a short span of time, to help participants understand the basic concepts of research and how to carry it out and is targeted towards people who are inclined to conduct research. Christians from all walks of life who have a keen interest for research are encouraged to apply. Willing participants should submit a short synopsis on a proposed topic of Interest along with their application to admin@traci.in

DO LOOK FORWARD TO THE UPCOMING PROGRAMMES

1. 02 October – 27th November 2022: Course on Gender and Biblical Equality
 2. 22 January – 01 April 2023: Course on Integral Mission
- Do look forward to Our Monthly Reflections as well.

TRACI MONTHLY REFLECTIONS

(May-June 2022)

Salt of the Earth; A Bible Study led by Mr. Raaj Mondol

TRACI conducted a Bible Study on the topic "Salt of the Earth" as part of the Monthly Reflection. Mr. Raaj Mondol, Training Facilitator at EFI and TRACI Board Member, led the Bible Study on the evening of the 27th of May, 2022.

Mr. Mondol read from Matthew 5 and elucidated on the theme by looking at the qualities of salt and the characteristics of what it means to be "salt of the earth." Contextualizing the essence of being "salt", Mr. Mondol encouraged the Church and community to absorb and exhibit "salt" qualities, emulate Christ-like qualities as they engage with communities while being mindful to uphold a Christ-centered approach to these engagements.

Criminalization of Adivasis and the Indian Legal System

TRACI's Monthly Reflection on 24th June had the author of the book "Criminalization of Adivasis and the Indian Legal System" Ms. Shomona Khanna discussing the findings of their research which has been published as a book. Shomona Khanna is a lawyer practicing in the Supreme Court of India and Delhi High Court, and has been associated with numerous civil and democratic rights issues since 1991 both as a lawyer and as a writer. She handles several human rights cases in the courts, including on rights of manual scavengers, protection of women from sexual harassment at the workplace, and indigenous peoples rights.

Ms. Shomona's presentation detailed the stark realities of the exploitation faced by the Adivasis. Protection for these communities although enshrined in the Constitution are rarely accessible to them and they have to constantly battle layers of oppression, prejudice and discrimination. The session outlined not just existing strategies of engagement but also possible means of future engagement. The session was followed by an enriching interactive discussion with the participants.

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FOREIGN CONTRIBUTION ACCOUNT

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