

Working Group: Theological Education
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A PAPER

Theological Education: A Postcolonial Vision of “Revival & Reformation”

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SYNOPSIS

This paper is presenting visions and possibilities of a transformative theological education. It is a story of transformation of a theological system though started with colonial baggage but how it emerged out of it, overtly or cohantly, by the visions of Wesley & others to join in collaboration and cooperation of the people, even, of other faiths for nation building. The paper has three sections, it begins by describing the colonial origin of theological education (Senate of Serampore College, University) in India in CE 1818 highlighting its features. Secondly, the Wesleyan vision formulated in the quadrilateral and other visions of revival and reformation are looked at. Thirdly, the theological and ideological underpinnings of Indian theological scenario is gleaned in its postcolonial environment where the liberative efforts of cooperation and collaboration with the people of different faiths for building the nation have found space in its curriculum and programmes.

Introduction:

Wesleyan theme of “Revival and Reformation” has an inherent denial of self-sufficiency, self-assurance of the present order and a rejection of the culture of affluence. It is in all humility an acceptance of the brokenness of our lives that urgently need revival and our World that needs reformation. The Wesleyan call for revival in our lives and reformation of our World aims at shaking us from our slumber of “All is Well” and waking us into a reality of pain, panic and problems. This call is even more crucial in the realm of theological education that shapes the future of our churches, and influences its clergy-leaders and ultimately its laity. So we have set for ourselves an agenda that is going to read us, critique us and ultimately demand from us to ‘revive’ and be prepared to initiate ‘reformation’ in our world.

Can we search for model(s) of theological education that has potential to be a catalyst or an agent of revival within the churches and transformation outside in the society? Will it be a

worthwhile effort to conceptualize a theological education on the lines of Wesleyan theological concepts as our vision for theological education that would lead to personal and social holiness? Is it possible to envision a ‘ministerial formation based theological education’? What it would look like, in its curriculum and pedagogy?

This paper seeks to present a study on such lines of remolding theological education into an ‘experience’ of life-changing, life-transforming, and life-enhancing experience for the candidates who join theological education for ministry. This attempt of setting an agenda for ‘Theological Education: A Postcolonial Vision of Revival & Reformation’ would involve a process of deconstruction of earlier models, methods and means of theological education, and dare to envision a revival in the lives of individuals that will lead to reformation of our society and nation at large. There are cluster of theological systems that already existing and very much operational in different degree around us which, first of all, need to be confronted, even deconstructed if need be. So let us begin by having a look at the theological systems around us in general and in India in particular.

The emergence of Theological educational systems across the globe can be placed in few generalized categories as one of these projects.

Firstly, Theological Education can be seen as the Projects of Overseas Empire, where the Theological education has been started and established as a project of overseas mission board in another country, such as theological education in the former colonies of the British Empire. In India, most prominent and widely accepted theological education system (Senate of Serampore) is still being governed by the Danish Charter issued by the King of Denmark in 1880 to issue degrees on his behalf in India.

Secondly, Theological Education as Projects of Church Denominations: Where the theological education system is geared towards churning out the priests to perform the rituals and carry out the doctrines and dogmas of one particular denomination, like *pujaris*. This denominational theological education is essentially controlled by not only the doctrines and dogmas, interpretations and rituals, but also governed by the administrative structure of that particular denomination. It’s a kind of a denominationally colored theological education.

Thirdly, Theological Education as University Based Academic-Pursuit Projects: Where the theological education isolated in the University campuses along with other departments and faculties in a secular, social environment. Such theological education system in order to match up to the other departments take a high academic posturing, without much success, in terms of the academic caliber of the candidates who join it, and also the acceptance of its academic credentials by the other departments and faculties in the University.

Each of the above projects has their own aim and purposes to serve and accordingly a curriculum with a suitable pedagogy has been evolved by each of the above. So, these projects have strengths and weaknesses in terms of providing a theological education, although with limited, stunted or morphed growth of a candidate for ministry. Perhaps a combination of all and much more is needed to envision a theological education for transformation?

I. Colonial Baggage of Theological Education:

A. Origin of Theological Education in India:

One of the premier theological education systems in India is known as Senate of Serampore College (University), it has its origin in Royal Charter of Denmark because Serampore (Kolkata) was a Danish colony and that enabled it to grant theological degrees in India since CE1818, and later Indian Government by its Act approved it.

India history informs us that during CE18th and 19th century Serampore and its adjoining areas were suffering under severe famine, so much so that the roads along with side-walks were filled with dead bodies of human and cattle dying of hunger. But to our utter surprise in the Senate of Serampore College (University) there has never been course offerings on such subjects that were related with poverty, hunger, famine and how Indian church could rise up to answer the needs of hunger and death arising from its context. There has never been a course-offering related with the freedom struggle of India against the British Empire that began in CE1857 till 1947, when finally India got independence from the British colonial rule. The present theological systems in India was originated and developed in the West and was brought to our country during the colonial period as these are “Western” in their method, content, orientation and formulations. Theological educational institutions are remnants and reminders of our colonial past, and consequently it has made our seminaries so remote and un-connected with the present realities of life that theological seminaries are often been termed as theological ‘cemeteries’, though unfairly.

Theological education in India does not seem to evolve itself out of the soil of India, out of the struggles within the life of India. The significant events in the life of a nation be it political, economic, social, religious, and cultural are in a way communicating something what God would like the Church to listen and rise up to the occasion to be a sign of God’s intervention. These events in the history and nature are part of God’s ongoing self-revelation to us in our time and space, and so, a reckoning of these events needs to be a part of our biblical interpretation and theological education.

B. Frame & Structure:

The frame and structures within which the theological education is organized and presented, to a large extent, controls its content and relevance. Firstly, the frame or structure of theological education in India is generally dependent on funds from overseas church boards and global mission agencies for finances, for theological resource material like commentaries, books and journals, and this ‘foreign hand’ shapes the atmosphere within theological institutions. In such a scenario, the emphasis is laid on stability, conformity and submission with the policies of the foreign funding agencies. As a result, it is less likely that both students and faculty would be open and free to follow their own personal convictions, and there would be hardly any chance to discuss the burning issues of present day India. There would be an atmosphere of fear and suspicion when the needs of the communities and the programme of the theological education

governed by the agenda of foreign funding agencies would not match. Thus the theological enterprise becomes merely a training of priests who are answerable only to the institution during their training and then to the community when they graduate and go out into the communities to serve. Such trends encouraged nurturing a deep dishonesty among those involved in theological education that demanded even sacrifice of one's own personal conviction, commitment and apprehensions of truth. Such structures and frames that over shadow the theological expressions of individuals or communities by the agenda of theological institutions promoted by a set of religious elite both in India and abroad give rise to an unreal theological education. The dichotomy between the training grounds framed and structured within a 'programmed theological education' and the real needs of the community is too wide a gap to bridge.

C. Pedagogy & Result:

Another area of challenge to the traditional programmes of the theological colleges centers on educational methods. There is a growing dissatisfaction with the pedagogical procedures. Among theological students and churches a discontent and dissatisfaction are also related with their helplessness for not being able to address the real questions, detachment with the issues of the life-struggle of the people. Instead of addressing such questions and issues, the theological education system with its curriculum of the entire course and syllabus of a subject tends to become a "banking system" of Western thought patterns, formulations, theories and models of study and interpretation of the Biblical Texts. There is over dependence on the lecture method, there is an isolation of the student from 'the life issues', always a race is on to cover the syllabus- too much to be covered in too little time. Even though there is a self-proclaimed emphasis on being critical and freedom of formulating one's own theology but in reality these ventures are tolerated within a broader bracket. Only thus far a student is allowed to be critical or independent till it becomes uncomfortable and challenging to the intellectual level of the teacher, where the administrative structures of the institutions are not violated and the zealously guarded denominational lines of dogma, doctrines and practices the holy cows are not rubbed the wrong way. Seldom there has been a genuine breakthrough in creating a pedagogical approach which overcomes the gap between the academic and the practical, despite widespread sensitivity to the problem. In fact we are caught by two conflicting demands, to maintain the advantages of a disciplined, systematic and critical learning of theology which can be in itself liberating and creative effort, and at the same time try and find methods to 'relate theology to life'. Let us take the example of Biblical exegesis which has turned out to be an increasingly specialized and complex discipline. How to teach exegesis in the theological college so that when the same student becomes a pastor and prepares a sermon or the Bible study can deal adequately with the tools and fruits of Biblical research which s/he has learnt with diligent and at times with difficulty. When the student wants to be nourished by the Biblical scholarship the specialist teacher performs so many academic gymnastics around the text, in the text, behind the text that by the end of the performance student stands in utter numbness and transfixed to decide what is essential for passing that course and what to retain for the ministry. A theological teacher is a

person of above average ability with six to ten years of specialized study behind her or him in one particular field only, and with continued efforts and persuasion keeps him/herself updated with all the latest research and developments in that field. A group of such highly specialized persons teach and contribute in the making of a graduate of a theological college who becomes a pastor. Now look at the demands on a newly graduated pastor: a biblical exegete (preacher), a social critic (a prophet), defender of God in this post-modern age (an apologetic), a trouble-shooter for everything that is wrong with the church, a counselor, an able administrator and finally who is dismissed as a poor and distant cousin by his/her more scholarly relatives. In all of this the student is an object who is stuffed and exposed to as many as 40 or more courses in a period of 4 to 5 years.

D. High Academic Posturing:

It is significant to note that theological education in India (BTESSC) has a highly accented academic posturing. Theological education under the Senate of Serampore sets for itself a model of high academic set-up. The Senate is pursuing to be academic in its methods of admission, examination, semester or term system, curriculum, etc. It is setting for itself high academic standards. It is showing a craving and a longing to be *at par* with Indian Higher education system. These tendencies can be very well noted from the fact that Senate has made considerable efforts and negotiations in terms of restructuring its administrative as well as academic structures, many reshuffling of the designations and nomenclatures have been done. There have been overt or covert attempts to put its name once again in the list of the Universities in India. Once it was there but now sadly it is omitted by some oversight or omission. At present Senate of Serampore enjoys a high repute and acceptance among the Churches within India as well as in the several overseas churches and universities. In India also there are several Universities- RDVV, Jabalpur is one, recognize it's BD for admission in MA (Philosophy).

E. Church Based Theological Education (Confessional Education) :

The theological education is closely linked with the Church membership and the students are better understood as candidates for ministry who are duly sponsored by the Ministerial boards of their Churches. In fact the church membership and sponsorship are essential pre-requisite for admission in any of the programmes of theological education in India.

While we point this out, in fact what we are also saying that theological education is not open for all. The people of other faith and of no-faith are not welcomed; they are discouraged and politely dismissed from seeking admission. The advertisements for admission to any of its courses, undergraduate or graduate are never published in public and national News papers. It is in a way a highly sectarian, religious and almost “training” for preparing ministers for the church and for other church related ministries within the wider spectrum of Christianity.

With all its confessional bearings and demands, the focus of the theological education is very inclusive, wider and secular in nature. The issues of justice and righteousness in the arena of Political, economical, religious, social, gender-related, ecological and World-governance are

embedded in its curriculum. The students are required to be sensitive to the needs of the context, threats and challenges in all the spheres of life including whole humanity and not limited only to the Christian community. There are definite courses on Gender-equality issues, on multi religious dialogue and harmony, on siding with the marginal groups such as Tribals, Adivasi and Dalits, on ecological crises and protection of the environment, on the issues of HIV-AIDS, differently-abled persons, trans-genders, on human sexuality and so on.

F. Theological Education as a *Via Media* and Not a Goal:

In some cases, the Theological education is just a *via media* and not a goal in itself; it is only a necessary step in the journey towards priesthood. In such cases theological education is somehow tolerated and passed through with minimum of intake or effect in any way on the person and least of all as a technical know-how of the task at hand after becoming priest. For someone aspiring to become an engineer, or a medical doctor, the technical knowledge imparted in engineering or medical college becomes essential part of learning, not so with the theological education for those who are aspiring to become a priest. The subject matter of theological curriculum and the syllabus of different subjects do not matter so much for the students as well as for the Churches where these students would be going to join as priests. What is required as essential qualification for a priest is that the person has successfully done 'completion of a term of whatever number of years at the theological seminary', not what that person has learnt or did not learn.

G. Traditional Residential Pattern:

Throughout the developing countries like India, a more or less common traditional pattern of theological education has emerged. Seminaries are commonly residential in organization, often located in a remote site which can only be reached by prearranged automobile or other means of transportation. The theological education most of the time is housed in a mission compound and there is hardly any University campus in India where the faculty of theology is taken as one of the faculty or department. The students and faculties are housed in a set of costly buildings paid for by funds from abroad. A typical theological college has a small number of students. The ratio of students is directly proportionate with the academically loaded syllabus- more academic the syllabus, fewer the student. The students are living together with the professors often at standards far above conditions in their homes or future parishes. The higher level schools train a small number of people who will become the ordained elite of the church. Meanwhile a number of Bible schools or *ad hoc* training programmes train a much larger number of un-ordained church workers. These supplementary workers- evangelists, licensed preachers, missionaries often carry the bulk of the preaching and parish work but often are specifically excluded from having a sacramental and administrative leadership. Meanwhile the bulk of mission and church resources for theological education are spent on the ten or twenty percent ordained elite, while the programmes for the inadequately trained majority of village pastoral workers go begging.

The traditional residential pattern is questioned not simply because it is modeled in

western forms but because increasingly the system falls short of meeting the needs of the local church situation.

H. Finance& Management:

About sixty to ninety percent of all the funds required to operate the traditional residential theological colleges in India or in other such countries must come as a foreign mission subsidy and cannot be raised locally. Though there are few exceptions to this and there is a growth in generating local funding for theological education. Now the question is how long and how much the foreign mission bodies will continue to support and subsidize theological enterprise in countries like India in this changed World economic situation? The basic question related with the impact of this help - the finance of Indian theological education by the foreign mission bodies - is whether it is hampering the progress of genuinely indigenous theological education or not. The continued subsidy may simply develop a dependency for the natives and a *status quo* for the foreign mission boards' personnel not only financially but also ideologically/ theologically and culturally. Secondly, in this system of foreign funding where the student is commonly paid to attend the theological college by way of scholarship begins to develop an attitude of dependency and a non-innovative (traditional) ministry.

Then there is an issue of doing theological education in English language at the highest level in a country like India over against its native languages further hampers the theological expression and articulation.

All in all, the Indian theological education can be termed as "transplanted" far from being an organic and natively grown theological education. It would require deliberate and persistent efforts to make a turnaround even after 200 years of receiving theological educational degrees in India authorized by some Danish Royal Charter.

II. Postcolonial Vision(s) of "Revival & Reformation":

A. What is the Purpose of all this?

What is the goal of theological education? Paulo Friere¹, in his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* shows that the student is a subject and not an object. The learning essentially takes place in a dialogical inter-change between teacher and student. It is the vocation of each person involved in the process whether teacher or a student to be a subject to transform their own situation by being empowered with theological education. Even the unschooled person is capable of viewing his or her work critically, and finding within their own resources the power to change it. Theological education will either teach the student to conform as object or it will become practice of freedom where the men and women learn to participate in the transformation of the World. But how can the syllabi of the theological colleges are changed to make the liberation of human potential in response to the Gospel basic to the whole programme. The problem is not simply one of improving teaching methods but of the understanding afresh the dialogical nature of the theological task itself.

B. Wesleyan Vision of Theological Education: The Quadrilateral

John Wesley understood the need of revival and reformation as the sole aim of a believer, and it has to be in that order of individual revival leading on to his/her involvement for reformation. John Wesley insisted on the personal holiness as a required essential for any social and national reformation.

The phrase which has recently come into use to describe the principal factors that John Wesley believed illuminates the core of the Christian faith for the believer. Wesley did not formulate this statement generally referred to as the Wesley Quadrilateral. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral or Methodist Quadrilateral is a methodology for theological reflection that is credited to John Wesley, leader of the Methodist movement in the late 18th Century. Building on the Anglican theological tradition, Wesley added a fourth emphasis, experience. The resulting four components or "sides" of the quadrilateral are (1) Scripture, (2) tradition, (3) reason, and (4) experience. The term 'quadrilateral' was ascribed to the Wesleyan thought and teachings because of his emphasis on the four interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated concepts – scripture, tradition, reason, & experience, but it was coined by 20th century American Methodist scholar Albert C. Outlerⁱⁱ. He is known as a renowned scholar of Wesleyan thought, and his research helped him to coin this term to bring out a good understanding of the interconnections within Wesleyan thought and ministry. The quadrilateral is a suitable designed to comprehend Wesleyan theology for life & ministry.

For the Methodists, *Scripture* is considered the primary source and standard for Christian doctrine. *Tradition* is experience and the witness of development and growth of the faith through the past centuries and in many nations and cultures. *Experience* is the individual's understanding and appropriating of the faith in the light of his or her own life. Through *reason* the individual Christian brings to bear on the Christian faith judicious and convincing thought. These four elements taken together bring the individual Christian to a mature and fulfilling understanding of the Christian faith and the required response of worship and service.ⁱⁱⁱ

This method based its teaching on four sources as the basis of theological and doctrinal development, scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

1. Scripture

Wesley insisted that scripture is the first authority and contains the only measure whereby all other truth is tested. It was delivered by authors who were divinely inspired. It is a rule sufficient of itself. It neither needs, nor is capable of, any further addition. The scripture references to justification by faith as the gateway to scriptural holiness are well known to true Wesleyans: Deut. 30:6; Ps. 130:8; Ezek. 36:25, 29; Matt. 5:48; 22:37; Luke 1:69; John 17:20-23; Rom. 8:3-4; II Cor. 7:1; Eph. 3:14; 5:25-27; I Thess. 5:23; Titus 2:11-14; I John 3:8; 4:17. Wesley affirmed, "We rely on the way of salvation given in the Bible". The Bible is used as the touchstone to examine real or supposed revelation. The Bible is the authority in the matters of faith and practice. Within Scripture is the tradition, reason and experience, and not contrary to it. The Bible needs to be studies and interpreted carefully.

2. Tradition

By tradition Wesley meant Church's doctrines, order and worship. Tradition of the early Church is the inheritance for us and we also create new traditions as well. He wrote that it is generally supposed that traditional evidence is weakened by length of time, as it must necessarily pass through so many hands in a continued succession of ages. Although other evidence is perhaps stronger, he insisted: "Do not undervalue traditional evidence. Let it have its place and its due honour. It is highly serviceable in its kind and in its degree". Wesley states that those of strong and clear understanding should be aware of its full force. For him it supplies a link through 1,700 years of history with Jesus and the apostles. The witness to justification and sanctification is an unbroken chain drawing us into fellowship with those who have finished the race, fought the fight, and who now reign with God in his glory and might. Traditions must be critiqued in light of the Gospel's mandate for justice. But his historical doctrinal standards provide a springboard for our faith today.

3. Reason

Although scripture is sufficient unto it and is the foundation of true religion, Wesley wrote: "Now, of what excellent use is reason, if we would either understand ourselves, or explain to others, those living oracles". He states quite clearly that without reason we cannot understand the essential truths of Scripture. Reason, however, is not a mere human invention. It must be assisted by the Holy Spirit if we are to understand the mysteries of God. With regard to 'justification by faith and sanctification', Wesley said that although reason cannot produce faith, when impartial reason speaks we can understand the new birth, inward holiness, and outward holiness. It is the critical thought; it is a means for giving structure to our beliefs. Although reason helps us to order the evidence of revelation, and to guard against poor interpretation of scripture, but reason cannot prove or disprove God.

4. Experience

The experience of New Life in Christ is the beginning of our faith. The Holy Spirit uses scripture and tradition to bring us to faith. By God's grace we receive a personal experience of faith. There are variations of Christian experience but none can be normative. Thus ours is a "heart religion", but it is not dependent on "feelings". Religion must be relevant to our lives. Apart from Scripture, experience is the strongest proof of Christianity. "What the scriptures promise, I enjoy". Again, Wesley insisted that we cannot have reasonable assurance of something unless we have experienced it personally. John Wesley was assured of both 'justification and sanctification' because he had experienced them in his own life. What Christianity promised (considered as a doctrine) was accomplished in his soul by a personal experience of "heart strangely warmed". Furthermore, Christianity (considered as an inward principle) is the completion of all those promises. Although traditional proof is complex, experience is simple: "One thing I know; I was blind, but now I see." Although tradition establishes the evidence a long way off, experience makes it present to all persons. As for the proof of justification and sanctification Wesley states that Christianity is an experience of

holiness and happiness, the image of God impressed on a created spirit, a fountain of peace and love springing up into everlasting life.

D. Application:

In practice, on the teaching of Wesley, one can say that the core of the Christian faith is revealed in Scripture, it is illumined by tradition, realized in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. Scripture is primary, revealing the Word of God as it is necessary for our salvation.

Wesley saw his four sources of authority not merely as prescriptive of how one should form their ministry, but also as descriptive of how almost anyone does form ministry. As an observer of human behavior, and a practical person, Wesley's approach to the Quadrilateral was a practical way how things work in human experience. Thus, when Wesley talks about "Tradition," he does not refer to ancient Church Tradition and the writings of the great theologians and Church Fathers, but also of the present theological influences that contribute to a person's understanding of God and of Christian ministry. "Tradition" includes influences like- beliefs, values, and instruction of one's family and upbringing. It may also include the various beliefs and values which one encounters and which have an effect on one's understanding of Scripture.

In Methodist understanding, both lay people and clergy share in "our ministerial task." The ministerial task is the ongoing effort to live as Christians in the midst of the complexities of a secular world. Wesley's Quadrilateral is referred as "our ministerial guidelines" and is taught to its pastors in seminary as the primary approach to interpreting the scriptures and gaining guidance for moral questions and dilemmas faced in daily living.

The basic assertion is that the Ministry is functional, not an ontological reality. Ministry is the task of the whole Body of Christ, not an ordained few. The servant form of ministry is characteristic of the missionary church, whose task is both kerygmatic and dialogical to equip the faithful to serve the wider needs of society.

But the problem is that firstly, the traditional pattern is elitist, emphasizing upon 'ordination' over 'service' which is promoting a wrong kind of professionalism with emphasis on 'post' and not on 'function'. Secondly the traditional pattern is one sided and authoritarian, the ordained pastor is required to exercise its authority to support the system, if not by inclination, s/he is asked to be the chief administrator of a large number of smaller congregations. Sometimes the less-trained local preachers are ordained or licensed to preserve the distinctiveness of ordination as a kind of reward for faithful service. The system tends to undercut rather decisively the ministry of the laity and to distort in practice the Church's understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God. And theological colleges feed their graduates into this system. The renewal of ministry and theological education will depend upon the colleges and the churches implementing changes together.

E. Other Vision(s):

The Gospel is both universal and at the same time it is locked in an encounter with each cultural situation. Of course there is a tension between the universal in theology and the local culture. Throughout the history of the Church several men and women of faith have made efforts to respond with the Gospel to a need which is both chronologically and historically conditioned -

persons such as St. Francis, Luther, Wesley, and Bonhoeffer. We can extend the list as we wish, these are the persons who came fresh to the Gospel as a people of their own times. Can the same process take place within the theological colleges now?

Some of the over-arching features and ingredients are being listed^{iv} here, without having any specification for its quantity and order, with a hope that by trial and error we may be able to reach at a point where theological education has been rid of its colonial and oppressive elements.

- First of all while envisioning the models of theological education, there is a need to proceed by making a distinction between priestly formation and theological education, unless we would like them to be one and the same thing. And so if we desire to make that separation between the training of clergy for a denominational church with that of theological education, then it calls for a de-clericalization of theological education.
- Secondly, can we envision a theological education that can initiate, nurture and promote the idea of 'Nation-Building' by asking what has been the contribution of the church and Christians in building up a new society beside opening educational, medical and technical schools, orphanages and old age homes. All these efforts can be termed as therapeutic but not preventive of the causes leading to the deterioration of justice, righteousness and peace in the country. With such a vision will it be possible for theological education to formulate a universalistic approach of involvement in ministry and mission where Christian Church, clergy and theologians can work side by side with the people of other faiths, and of no faith- Atheists, Marxists, in the struggle to build our nation.
- We envision a theological education that provides professional and technical learning of the concepts, models, historical background of Biblical text, along with the linguistic tools. It seeks to promote pursuit of excellence in the details of biblical and theological interpretations, history of Christianity, formation of ministry, etc.
- Can we seek to foster ministerial formation which would be focused on creative, competent men and women for the services needed in the community.
- An education that is participative for theologizing as reflection on faith, a task in which all Christians participate to the extent to which they are discerning members of the community. All have the same aim , namely to enable the whole community to reflect on its life and shape it towards the transformation of the world and prepare it for the coming of the kingdom.
- Theological education should be oriented towards meaningful and integral theological vision of the Indian realities, which is a mosaic of religions, cultures and social conditions. There will be a double emphasis here: on Indian cultural and religious values as well as on the basic option in favour of the poor.
- In a language or medium of English or native vernacular, because it also has a significant element to either enhance its usefulness or mar it as elitist and foreign.

Keeping these issues and challenges before us, we need to delve into an attempt to come up with subjects, curriculum, programmes and model(s) of theological education to move beyond colonial theological education that was originated and imposed on us from a foreign land for a

purpose of maintaining order, status quo and peace by treading a safe-line of action in the form of mission enterprise, suitable to the whims and wishes, sustenance and maintenance of the Empire in India.^v

III. Transition from Colonial to Postcolonial : Towards Collaboration and Participation:

Now looking afresh from a Wesleyan perspective of Quadrilateral, it seems that in Indian theological scenario all is not lost, still there are rays of hope coming out from the debris of colonial theological education in India. After 200 years of theological education of Serampore College (1818-2018) and 100 years of Senate (1918-2018) glimpses of revival and reformation can be traced within it. Most remarkably there have been attempts by the Indian theological education system in its programmes and curriculum that sought the cooperation and collaboration of the people of other faith too. In spite of all of its short comings and limitations, handicaps and baggage some new initiatives which have potentials of joining all the people of India in partnership and collaboration towards ushering in a revival and reformation can be traced in Indian theological education.

Now let us have a closer look at the theological/ideological stand of the Senate of Serampore College (University) on which its educational programme, curriculum and other activities are based. This would be an attempt to have an evaluation of the educational system that has been fostered under the aegis of the Senate of Serampore. Let us look at the wider scenario of Senate of Serampore brand of Theological Education in India and its salient features:

A. Quest for Indigenization:

In spite of having made up of the denominations which are rooted in the West, which are heavily dependent on foreign funding in their initial and subsequent stages of growth, Senate's educational system choose to stand with the concept of "Indigenization"^{vi} as a significant aspect of its theologizing, its form of becoming a church community, with its doctrine and dogmas in India. Senate emphasized that theological education cannot afford to neglect our own culture & traditions, our native-ness and love for the soil. During the time when India was moving ahead in its struggle towards total freedom (*Purna Swaraj*) Senate contributed in it by harping the right notes that Indian Christian community and Indian church cannot afford to be other-worldly or Western in its worship, ministry and mission. This was a participation in the freedom struggle at an intellectual level of becoming Indian (*Swadeshi*) not only in our appearance but also in our perception. Senate's educational system joined the cry of freedom by collaboration and participation in the struggle with its own creativity and dynamism. Senate casted its lot with the idea of freedom and sovereignty of India even though it had enjoyed closer links with the European and American academic and ecclesiastic institutions.

When a need was felt that Indigenization cannot be in appearance only but also in indigenous funding and self-support of our mission and ministry, Senate stood up to correct it. When there was a question on the indigenization that was understood as brahmanical- Hinduism, Senate stood up to bring about the aspect of Dalit and tribal articulations of our faith and practice also

under indigenization.

B. Attempts for Inter-Religious Dialogue:

In spite of being a training ground for Christian priests for the church work, Senate deliberately decided to bring in into its curriculum the need for inter-religious dialogue as a necessity to promote collaboration and participation for the common good of our nation. Even at the annoyance of the traditional churches which grew by preaching hatred to all that is non-Christian as devilish and worthy to be dumped in the fire of hell, Senate continued to inculcate in its education the concepts and methods of inter-religious dialogue where we come together with our neighbour of other faiths to work together, to understand each other, to begin to see each other eye to eye, to see the imprints of divine presence even in other religious and cultural articulations.^{vii}

As a result, the graduates of Senate do not feel threatened or aggrieved by the presence of the people of other faiths, not even angry on their peculiar articulation of the divine, not even zealous to 'convert' them. But the Senate education makes our students sympathetic towards the people of other faith with a bond of closeness for being co-travelers and co-pilgrims in their journey on the path of truth and righteousness. And so, instead of rivalry, competitions, jealousy and anger, there is a propagation of harmony and cooperation, openness and sympathy towards the people of other faiths in and through the Senate educational system.

Can we hope to find such results from a graduate of a Hindu Gurukul or from a graduate coming out of Darul Uloom, Devband?

C. Visibility of Women in Life & Faith:

In spite of being partner with the Indian churches where women were almost invisible in their life and faith, Senate deemed it necessary to change the perception towards women, to bring out women from an invisible status into a concrete & historical role and function. Even at the risk of being ridiculed to support women, even looked down upon by the Churches as supporting a wrong cause, Senate stood firm in its conviction of promoting a liberative Gospel for all those who are marginalized, particularly women. In spite of being surrounded with the male-dominant cultures and traditions where women are taken for granted, Senate curriculum made endless efforts to bring out the women from the shadows of anonymity into forefront. Senate curriculum brought about awareness for gender equality not simply because it was an agenda of the West, but basically because it was the demand of a Gospel that is essentially liberative in its proclamation and practice following the foot-steps of its master Lord Jesus Christ.^{viii}

As a result of these initiatives taken by Senate in its curriculum, by conducting seminars and consultations with the church leaders, laity, and youth the acceptance of women slowly but surely became a reality in the ecclesial realm, both in the ordained ministry as well as in un-ordained ministry the women found a place and a role to do. Because of these seeds sown in tears now at least we find women in the pulpit as priests in the mainline and traditional churches.

Even now these seeds have yet to come to fruition in a real and practical way in terms of role and place of women in the Church and society, it has to move beyond tokenism of having one or

two women ordained clergy. But in the glass ceiling of male patriarchy and domination a hole has been created, a crack and a dent are already made. Still it has a long way to go where the women participation in the life and faith of the church and society is accepted in its fullness and not just as decorative tokens but women taken at par with their male counterparts.

D. Impetus for Tribal & Adivasi Awakening:

Senate of Serampore educational system has provided a great deal of impetus for the tribal & adivasi awakening by providing a space and a forum to study, discuss, read and write on the serious issues which were never heard of or brought to light before, in terms of articulation of their faith journey, their faith statements, their own articulation and appropriation of divine, sin, salvation, anthropology and ecclesiology.^{ix} The main virtue of Senate education has been its openness and inclusivity for different communities within Christian faith to come together and find a space for their particular perspective and articulation without an urgency and need to harmonize or synchronize the differences. Senate educational system never felt threatened or overwhelmed by the growing body of tribal theological literature that is coming out from tribal and adivasi communities when Senate already has had handful of courses and subject in its own curricular system. Inclusion of tribal & adivasi theological concerns and resources into the Senate programme has never been considered as an extra baggage to carry. On the contrary, adivasi & tribal awakening fostered and encouraged in the Senate system brought a native flavour to theologizing in India, an organic and folk rendering of the divine. Senate became richer and dynamic by the advent of tribal & adivasi awakening.

E. Home for Dalit Empowerment:

In the wake of dominant trend of indigenization under the great and renounced scholars (Chenchia, Chakaraya, Devanand 'Trio' & others) when the pendulum of emphasis was moving towards brahmanical--Hinduism as indigenization, a voice of disagreement and protest was raised (A.P.Nirmal, James Massey & others)^x to halt this kind of indigenization in its stride. Dalit thinkers found no resonance and connect of their life and faith with such kind of indigenization, and so they questioned its validity and utility for all Indian-Christians. Senate choose to stand with such lone and scattered Dalit voices of that time, and decided to allow such marginal groups to have a space and platform to express and articulate the dalit-ness of Indian Christianity. Although it would have been easier to ignore these articulations as raw and crude expressions at the face of elitist sophistication with which brahmanical--Hinduism was being served under the banner of 'indigenization'. Again, it would have been easier to judge and condemn the dalits voices of dissent on account of the carefree life-style of its spokes- persons who were espousing such views, and confuse the persona with the critical issue these voices were raising to discredit the dalit voice altogether. But not so, Senate focused its attention and sided with the need of liberation of dalit voices and their faith-statements even from the hegemonic articulation of 'indigenization' that was being carried on when dalit voices were saying that we have no part in such 'indigenization' that stands with the brahmanical expressions

which have oppressed us for centuries. Lo and behold, after the intellectual and academic intervention, acceptance and promotion of dalit theology under the Senate system, a whole new era of theological expressions and articulations began. The catalytic role that Senate has played with its stand on the side of the marginal communities has ushered in a liberative dynamism in the theological education as well as in the church life.

F. Touching the Untouchability:

In continuation with its stand with the Women, Tribals, Adivasi, and Dalits, Senate went on to explore further on such communities and groups which were still being stigmatized and rendered unclean such as people living with HIV-AIDS, and LGBTQ communities^{xi}. Even at the point of being misunderstood and misguided Senate continued to stand firm with its liberative stand on the demands of the Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ. It would have been easier for Senate to play to the galleries, play the game of pleasing the sponsors in India and abroad by keeping a safe distance from such issues and concerns that render the hands unclean. It would have been easier for Senate to promote in its educational programme and curriculum, like ‘how to be successful revival speaker’, ‘how to win souls’, ‘how to save the heathens from the fire of hell’, than to discuss the pathetic condition of people living with HIV-AIDS and LGBTQ communities, in a real hell in their daily life.

G. Sustainable Development and Ecological Crises:

Senate’s educational programme found it necessary to bring in the issues, concerns, and problems of lop-sided development which was leading the nation and the World towards ecological crises. The agenda of development was made into a part of the educational learning and ministerial formation^{xii}. Senate brought in the scriptural sanctions that the whole creation is in turmoil, awaiting liberation. The Gospel of liberation has to be preached even to the rivers, forests, air, water that no more the human would pollute you, no more the human greed would destroy flora and fauna, no more the chemical and nuclear waste from the factories would be unloaded in the sea and rivers, no more the poisonous gasses would be emitted into the atmosphere making it un-breathable. Senate stood at the forefront of raising the red-signal for unabated destruction of the creation under the guise of ‘development’.

Conclusion:

This is the story of an academic community that chose to take the path of walking on the cutting edge of the society, a place where one reaches by leaving aside the comfort zones of an intellectual ivory tower and of an arm chair theologian. This is a unique story of an academic community that did not hide behind the façade of abstraction and conceptualization at the cost of neglecting the hardcore realities of our context. It’s a story of a “University” that did not find it necessary to pursue the decorative and fancy titles of being called a deemed university, or a state university, or even a religious central university, but went about its mission of providing education with a difference, an education that bothers about its context. Senate of Serampore is a

brand of its own kind, unlike other academic communities in India or abroad it has found acceptance among the Churches as standardization, yardstick for those who are aspiring to join in the full-time ministry of the Church .

Senate has been holding a unique stand in its life and journey of 200 years. On the one hand, it opposed the temptation to align with the elitist trend of the academic institutions both secular like JNU and religious ivory tower Bible seminaries, and try to become like them. On the other hand, it stood against the demand of the Church to produce pujaris, crusade speakers, healing evangelists, and TV preachers like figures from the Senate affiliated colleges. Away from the security of academic comfort zones, and totally religious expansionist prosperity Gospel, Senate found its own stand based on the liberative Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ, as depicted in the demands of YHWH ‘Let justice roll down like river and righteousness like every flowing stream’, in all spheres of life. Collaboration and partnership with other groups and communities has always been a part of the Senate but it is always for a cause of liberation and fullness of life for the whole creation. Senate of Serampore College (University) has never been a lone walker on the face of the academic and theological realm. Senate has always welcomed other groups to join in its stand of working towards a harmonious society, and has been open to join with other faith communities.

So when Senate has come of age to celebrate 200th year of its origin and 100th year of its life and faith as a theological educational Council, Senate is standing tall among the theological systems in the whole of South East Asia as a committed, credible and genuine educational system. Senate has come to acquire a stature of an educational system of profound intellectual learning with a faith commitment to obey the demands of the Gospel in an ever changing context of our country India and the World. The voices, impetus, message that are coming out of Senate are not of disharmony, discord, and destruction, but of peace with justice, development with sustainability of the environment, Church with a heart for the marginalized and people living on the edge. Senate has never attempted to be politically correct in order to be self-seeking, self-promoting and self-sustaining educational system. The story of Senate is of taking risks, going an extra mile, and even entering into the troubled waters with the powers-to- be with its commitment and expression. Senate, even after 200 years of its existence, continues to live-dangerously, willing to be vulnerable while seeking to pay the cost of discipleship.

We are proud and privileged to be a part of its journey from a colonial initiative to an authentic, credible and liberative theological education which has potential to usher in an era of revival among the individual lives and reformation in the nation.

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End Notes

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