

Mission and Conversion in the Changing Context of India with the Growth of Hindutva Movement – the Christian Response

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Samevatting

Ek is inderdaad dankbaar teenoor God en prof. Pieter Verster vir hierdie geleentheid om weer 'n keer na Suid-Afrika te kom, en deel te neem aan internasionale interaksie oor 'n tema wat uitermate belangrik is binne ons Indiese, asook die globale konteks vandag. Sending en bekering is 'n besonder brandende kwessie in hedendaagse Indië. Wat ek hier aanbied is 'n Indiese gevallestudie, met die doel om 'n globale verstaan van ons situasie teweeg te bring en 'n oproep om vennootskapsluiting te doen om die Indiese kerklike sending aan Indië, die grootste demokrasie op aarde vandag, te bevorder. Ten einde ons in 'n historiese perspektief in te lei oor die wyse waarop die sendinggeskiedenis in Indië ontwikkel het, en om die status van bekering in die Indiese situasie te bestudeer, sal ek die gegewens kronologies-omlynd aanbied.

1. Mission and conversion

1.1 Mission and conversion in the first millennium India

Tradition has it that Apostle Thomas preached and formed seven churches in Kerala within the first century. The churches in Kerala preserve their pride of being the ancient church. Given to old traditional patterns, the Orthodox Christian community has a solid presence in the State of Kerala and everywhere else, as folk from this community are bold, innovative and migrant, moving to inhabit both national and global centres. But during the first one thousand years, the Christian church was confined to the Southern State of Kerala. Mission meant the work done by expatriate 'missionaries' from Syria, Persia and the Eastern Church. Why had the church been introverted and did not develop a mission to the nation? It remains an unanswered question why the Thomas Christians did not develop missional efforts for such a long period.¹

1 See Cyril B Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, Chennai: CLS. This yet unanswered question is an area which a research student must undertake to study in future.

1.2 Mission and conversion in the second millennium India

1.2.1 During the first half of the millennium:

The first five hundred years of this period flies fast with no particular missional episode and event. But in the counter reformatory efforts of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Gregory XV installed the first ever organized sending structure in 1622 and missionaries began to go crossing the oceans and mountains to Ladak and Leh in the Western and Tibet and Nepal in the Eastern snow covered Himalayas. The author once read an account of how the Capuchins pioneered the missionary enterprise in the tough hilly terrains and was moved to tears to recognize their sacrificial commitments. Earlier yet was the famous Francis Xavier's mission to Goa where till date there is the strong presence of the church and her traditions. Credit goes to Roberto deNobili at Madurai for the first attempts at accommodation and indigenization. The Jesuits led the educational process and the Franciscans, Benedictines, Dominicans, Carmelites and scores of others spread the church into the nooks and corners of the sprawling landscape among the teeming millions of the Indian sub-continent. The Roman Catholic number is certainly large in India in keeping with the global count.

1.2.2 During the second half of the millennium:

German Pietism caused the Tranquebar Mission in 1706, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, bringing the Lutheran version of the Protestant Christianity to India. Within a very short span of time, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg offered the New Testament in the local Tamil language. British Baptists took the prime lead for modern mission as William Carey arrived in 1793, at the end of the eighteenth century, at the Danish town of Serampore and started his society reforming, school planting, church planting, ministry training and Bible translating mission. The following decades brought the English Anglicans, the Scottish Presbyterians, the Swiss Reformed, the Congregationalists and Methodists – and every other division of the Western Protestants into India. 19th century saw the great growth of the missional expanse of the church in what was identified as the Great Century by church historian Kenneth Scott Larouette. Educational, medical, agricultural, social and industrial missions sprang up and the church grew in what became the colonial period in India.

Conversions happened. But the numbers were extremely small in the beginning. Only at the later part of the nineteenth century, we began to see the conversions of people groups in mass movements. School method and

famine relief work underlay the rationale for conversion. Scottish educational missions of Anderson, Miller, Wilson, Hislop, and such; medical work of Ida Scudder, canal digging project in a famine hit Ongole by John Everett Clough and the industrial approach of the Basel mission contributed to a steady growth of the churches through consistent conversions of the masses, mostly from the lower shudra caste and the untouchable 'dalit' groups.

1.3 Mission and conversion during the Colonial period

Conversion during the colonial period appeared more sociological, communal and economic. Certainly there were cases of conversion that were of a spiritual sort such as the popular stories of Sadhu Sundar Singh and Pandita Ramabai. But the masses were lured into the church by the prospect of educational and vocational opportunities and the possible liberation from caste oppression. The dalits were treated as though 'no people'! They were subservient, landless and oppressed as bonded labour force. They were locked into pitiful invisible prisons of psychological trauma and economic desperation. The offer of new life in Christ with a new status and prospect proved attractive and a sincere motivation for conversion. The missionaries were seen as part of the colonial power and they rode the colonial horse with pomp and ran the schools with the grants-in-aid from the British Government. The schools were the places of conversion, catechism and worship.

1.4 Mission and conversion in the Post-Colonial period

When India became an independent free nation in 1947, the church in India had to undergo a major change in her self perception. Instead of being tied to the apron of the mother churches and missions, she had to gain a certain independence and autonomy. She craved for it and a devolution process was already underway during the first half of the century. But now the church had to step off the colonial horse and stand on ground where the majority India was Hindu and Muslim.

The Preamble to the Indian Constitution states that India is a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic.² This has to be protected and preserved for each generation as a virtue and a reality. The Indian Constitution guarantees equal freedom for all citizens to profess, practice

2 See PD Mathew, *Constitution of India Simplified*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1993, p5.

and propagate any religion of their choice. It does not allow religion to interfere with the secular rights of the citizens or the power of the State to regulate the socio-economic relations. Freedom of religion is articulated clearly through the Constitution in many ways. Article 15 and 16 deal with the right to equality, equal treatment of all religions by the state and equality in the matters of employment, equality of all citizens irrespective of their faith or religion. Articles 25, 26, 27 and 28 of the Indian Constitution speak about the individual's right to freedom of religion. Articles 25 and 26 particularly guarantee religious freedom for minorities.

The whole nation of India had to freshly cope with its democracy and constitution and adjust to it. The Indian Christian church had to revise her relations with the colonial masters and relate with the Hindu-Muslim majority in the country. The self perceptions and changes during the mid-twentieth century shaped the church and her mission in India during the first decades after independence, which is described in the first chapter of my doctoral thesis.³ While the Christian community was reviewing and aligning with the Indian nation, the majoritarian Hindu community had to be welcoming and harmonious. Quite naturally the majority went that route. But there were forces that rose which aroused parts of the Hindu community to become more and more fascist.

The Hindu attitude towards other Faiths⁴

It has been largely acclaimed that Hinduism is a tolerant faith and that the Hindus are a gentle and tolerant lot. By far, this has been true in the past. But the word tolerant is not only the positive virtue of being patient and accepting. It can also be a negative concept of merely tolerating people for a while. To tolerate is to dislike and yet put up with. To tolerate has its time limit and indicates a possible time of eruption of anger and rejection. The Hindu character of tolerance has gone through a systematic change through the twentieth century. Earlier Hinduism proved inclusivistic. It simply absorbed other faiths into itself. This was the case with Buddhism and Jainism. It would happily draw the Christian faith into itself and engulf it as part of the Hindu fold.

3 See Siga Arles, *Theological Education for the Mission of the Church in India: 1947 to 1987*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1990. Frankfurt: Peter Lang/ Studies in the Inter Cultural Study of Christianity, No. 76, 1991.

4 See Siga Arles, Hindu Response to Pluralism. Part of a paper presented to the Partnership in Mission Asia conference on Mission in Plural Context, London, 1986; *Evangelical Review of Theology*, July 1988, pp196-207.

The Hindutva movement: Its origin and growth⁵

When the Muslim League was shaping itself in early twentieth century and demanding partition of Pakistan and when Gandhiji was soft towards them and pleaded for unity and peace, angry Hindus mobilized themselves into a new impetus. In 1923 Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, codified a social and political doctrine known as “Hindutva” and published its essential ideas in a book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* He affirmed that Hindus constitute a single nation and asked them to build up a Hindu-Rashtra in order to maintain, protect and promote the interests of the Hindu race. Hindu community was profusely divided and the Arya Samaj (1875) and the Hindu Maha Sabha (1914/15) were insufficient to help bring a cohesion. Hence, Keshavrao Baliram Hegdewar founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 at Nagpur. The purpose was to consolidate Hindu unity in the face of the Semitic religions of India and the growing Muslim fundamentalism. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar reinforced the Hindutva ideology through his two major works: *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939) and *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966).⁶ He shaped cultural nationalism as the all-embracing ideology of Hindutva. These men took their inspiration and model from the extreme nationalist movements of Europe such as Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy and tried to shape and structure the function and strategy of the Hindutva Movement.⁷

Hindutva movement’s hate campaign

RSS unleashed a hate campaign against Muslims and Christians. The peaceful relation that Gandhi sought from Muslims angered the RSS and one of them Neturam Vinayak Godse shot him dead on 31 January 1948. Hence, the RSS was banned. Next year the ban was shifted on condition that RSS should confine its activities to the cultural sphere and not take part in political activities. RSS floated 50 major frontal organizations

5 See Siga Arles, The Growth of Religious Fundamentalism in India – Its Implications for National Politics and Christian Mission. An unpublished paper presented to the West Bengal Theological Teachers Seminar at Morning Star Regional Seminary, Barrackpore, West Bengal, 16 March 2002.

6 Nagpur, 1938. See Tapan Basu, *et al.*, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1993. Cf. Walter K. Anderson and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revolution*, New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1987.

7 See Siga Arles, Communalism and Fascism. An unpublished paper presented at the Regional Convention on Communal Harmony organized by Peace Trust of Kanyakumari at the History Department of Calcutta University, 5 April 2002.

including Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (1948), the Jana Sangh (1951), Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (1952), The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (1955), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, 1964) and the Bajrang Dal (1984). The Jana Sangh was later transformed into the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, 1980). Whereas VHP and Bajrang Dal are the militant structures, BJP has become the political arm of Hindutva movement.⁸

The Sangh Pariwar movements project in public the cultural, political, social and religious aspects of the Hindutva ideology but they subtly camouflage the economic interests of the upper caste and middle class Hindus. The economic and political developments that have taken place among backward and scheduled castes in post-independent India due to the reservation quota system, and among Muslim and Christian communities through education and transnational influences, have created tremendous fear among high-class Hindus of losing their economic domination and privileges in the country. Consequently, they felt it necessary to protest, further and consolidate their own economic interest. To get the support of the whole Hindu population in this endeavour they use religion as a means of manipulation and exploitation. The combined efforts of the BJP, RSS and VHP for the construction of the Ram temple and various communal riots organized by pro-Hindutva forces conceal the strategy of gaining Hindu votes to capture power at the centre which will help them to control the economy of the nation.⁹

Various factors have contributed to the emergence of Hindutva forces in India. It is noted that the most prominent was “the feeling of insecurity” created among the upper-caste and upper-class Hindus under Muslim and British rule. Politically, economically, culturally and religiously the Hindus felt threatened. Not only there were the denigrations of the Hindu practices such as sati, caste, untouchability, child marriage, etc., but proselytization activities of the Christian missionaries. The wounded psyche of the Hindus made them to seek a way to rediscover their glories and to meet the threats and challenges.

The Hindutva movement’s intolerance and militant attitude

RSS has resorted to arousing a militant tendency among the Hindus and to train them to systematically attack the Christians and people of other faiths. They look at other people with a demand as dictated by Golwalkar:

8 See for details Yogendra K Malik and VB Singh, *Hindu Nationalists in India: The Rise of Bharatiya Janata Party*, New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1994.

9 See the Report *The Challenge of Hindutva: An Indian Christian Response*. In: *Vidyajyoti*, 65:2, February 2001, pp131-143.

Now that we are free from foreign rule and that steps are being taken to achieve economic freedom, let us endeavour to fight against our religious slavery. Let us invite our non-Hindu brethren into temples for common worship of our common God. The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu nation, i.e., they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ingratitude towards this land and its age-long traditions, but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word, they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights.¹⁰

With such an attitude injected into the wider Hindu population, the RSS – VHP – BJP led Hindutva movement has leashed unimaginable terror and attacks on the innocent mission workers. The major strategies of the promoters of Hindutva in rallying support and in putting down others are to rewrite history, provide textbooks with their ideological viewpoints, falsifying of census data, false propaganda against Muslims and Christians and taking up aggressive measures against these communities. The main events they used to mobilize Hindus into forging a collective identity include: the issue of Ayodhya and the building of the Ram Temple through the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, the cow protection movement, the Ekamtata Yatra of 1983, the depiction of Ram as a national hero, the Shilanyas on 9 November 1989 and the Ram Shila Puja, the Rath Yatra of 1990, the Ekata Yatra of 1991, the organization of Kar Seva and the creation of a cult of martyrdom. The burning alive of the Australian missionary Graham Steines and his two young sons in Orissa, the raping of many nuns, the murdering of priests, the beating up of many pastors, the demolition of church buildings, the desecration of holy places and the installation of Hindu shrines right in front of the Churches and Mosques are part of the planned activities of the Hindutva movement to impose their ideal of making India a Hindu nation. In *Divide to Rule* we have a list of “Communal Attacks on Christians in India during 1997-2000” giving full details, reasons, allegations and answers.¹¹

10 See M.S. Golwalkar in *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur, 1938, p27.

11 See Ebe Sunder Raj, Sam Thambusamy and Ezra Samuel, *Divide to Rule*, Chennai: Bharat Jyoti, 2001.

Orissa, Gurajat and Karnataka have been the worst hit states with the power and presence of the Hindutva movement where BJP has had gains.¹² Aiming to rule from the centre, they are desperate to destabilize and hurt and somehow capture the seats of power by gaining Hindu votes. Another of the strategy has become clear – that of demanding reconversion of the Christian and Muslim and adivasi (tribal, primal) people. Each reconversion is seen as another vote gained for Hindutva.

Presently in my state of Karnataka, the BJP has gained ruling power. From then there has been an increase of attacks on Christians, imprisonments of pastors and damaging of Christian property. Appeals to the authorities go unheeded as the police are under orders from the ruling home office and are afraid to disobey the political authority. In order to gain Hindu votes for the upcoming election for Member of Parliament, an agenda is being carried out to portray as though they are protecting Hindu rights and bringing to book the culprits – the converting pastors.

Anti-conversion Laws

In several states of India anti-conversion laws have been passed and imposed already. In Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh and other states, under Congress as well as BJP governments, these laws were installed. Tamilnadu tried but it was revoked. Now the attempt is on to bring the anti-conversion law in Karnataka.

2. Conversion

2.1 Definitions of conversion

The concept of conversion has been emphasized throughout the mission history. But the content of what is involved in conversion has been a variable. Some saw it only as a spiritual experience, but others saw it as holistic with intellectual, physical, emotional, social and psychological content to it. The author was glad to receive a book this week which is relevant here; a collection of eleven essays from the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* put together titled *Speaking about what we have seen and heard: Evangelism in Global Perspective*.¹³ In it Andrew Walls

12 The author has placed some of the reports of the Orissa persecutions in the appendix and if possible he will show some of the reports as a power point presentation.

13 Jonathan J. Bonk, Dwight P. Baker, Daniel J. Nicholas, Craig A. Noll (eds.), *Speaking about what we have seen and heard: Evangelism in Global Perspective*, New Haven, Connecticut: OMSC, 2007.

deals with “Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church”; Christopher J.H. Wright, “Implications of Conversion in the Old Testament and the New Testament”; Richard V. Peace, “Conflicting understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge”; Alan Kreider, “Beyond Bosch: The Early Church and the Christendom Shift”; Wilbert Shenk, “New Wineskins for New Wine: Toward a Post-Christendom Ecclesiology”; Timothy C. Tennent, “The Challenge of Churchless Christianity: An Evangelical Assessment”. According to Jonathan Bonk, this volume aims to

provide some insight into Christian proclamation of the Good News that Jesus the Christ, who both engages and transcends human time and culture, freely offers to liberate the deepest potential of persons, families, and communities so that God’s kingdom can come and God’s will can be done on earth as it is in heaven.¹⁴

Conversion is a large reality. It has to do with God’s will and reign which is set in a large world with large scope. If individual conversion has a significance as the evangelicals would insist, the corporate conversion has equal significance as the ecumenicals would attest. We need both to be emphasized in proper proportion in both theory and action. Shortsighted definitions of conversion would mislead the church in mission to engage in shallow activities which do not contribute to the total purpose of God’s mission.

During the Early part of the twentieth century Conversion was a dominant word in defining Christian mission activities. Later in the middle of the century the word Development took prominence. But at the Wheaton ’83 conference of the World Evangelical Fellowship / Lausanne Movement, the word Transformation was mooted as more suitable to describe what we are attempting in *missio Dei*. The recent growth of the Lausanne off-shoot the AD 2000 and Beyond movement into the ‘Transform World movement’ led by Luis Bush is exploring to discover the goal of Christian mission as ‘transformation’ and to identify the different strands of this transformational ministry and further to establish glocal networks to accomplish the task with a sense of urgency.¹⁵

14 *Ibid.*, “Preface”, p.xiv.

15 See Luis Bush, *Catalysts of World Evangelization*, Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2006. This is Bush’s Ph.D. thesis from Fuller Theological Seminary which deals with the twentieth century development of the vision and method for world evangelization. Bush aims for global partnerships and local initiatives in a combined emphasis – the word glocal = global + local.

Outcome of Conversion as seen by the Hindu society

We are confining our investigation to the Indian scene at this point.

(1)Loss of community: A major concern that the Indian Hindu majority is concerned with is the fact that when a Hindu converts to become a Christian, she/ he leaves the Hindu community and joins into the Christian community. It is the loss of a community member.

(2)Loss of vote: This also means the loss of a vote for the politician who tries to use the religious card for gaining votes. Hence, there is strong aversion against conversion.

(3)Loss of labour: The Shudras are the lowest caste group of people who are the working class – they are the ones who came from the feet of God and are the stone breakers, gold smiths, carpenters, etc. When they convert to Christianity and their children get educated, they compete for the white collar jobs and thus there emerges a discontinuity of the family trade. The social balance is lost.

(4)Loss of menial labour: This is more acute when the no-caste untouchable dalit community members convert and become educated. All the dirty and hard jobs that they did for the whole society, such as, cleaning works – fields, homes, toilets; burying the dead, tilling the ground, etc., are discontinued as the converted children get educated and move on to compete for other jobs. Hence, the Hindu community is angry with Christian mission for disturbing the social order and the peace that prevailed for centuries.

(5)Loss of family status: Conversion of an individual makes not only him/ her to become social outcaste from his/ her community, but hinders the marriage prospect of his/ her sisters and brothers. The family loses status within its community. This is acutely felt by the families and hence, they fight against conversion.

(6)Loss of property and money: Dalits and Tribals have rights and grants from the government based on their identity. Conversion denies to them such privileges. For instance, dalit Christians do not get educational scholarships allotted for dalit Hindus.

Hindu response to conversion

The normal Hindu response was one of tolerance as we noted earlier. But increasingly it is becoming intolerant and anti-conversionist. By legislating or by persecuting and terrorizing, the Hindu wishes to stop the conversion process. The unholy matrimony between politics and religion has become the root of violence. The Swamis, Sadhus and Sannyasis are linked with politicians and are raising rigid communalism for vote banks. They propose violence as a means of stopping the conversions.

Reconversion/ Shuddi¹⁶

Many swamis have emerged to demand reconversion of the tribal and dalit Christians back to Hinduism. This is organized on large scale at times and insisted upon by mob psychology. It is common to drag a Christian worker through the streets and to make him to kneel before Hindu gods in the temple and apply Hindu religious marks on forehead and demand them to renounce Christ and Christianity. If they do not comply, then the next step is to beat them and hand them to the police with false allegations or to chase them out of the village. This is the strategy used by VHP, BD and BJP groups. During 2007 there was a major reconversion program planned at Gujarat with the threat that those who do not reconvert would be beheaded.¹⁷ This was averted by massive efforts of appeals to the President and Prime Minister. International pressure also was aroused to appeal to the President and Prime Minister.

3. Christian response: revised mission

In his recent doctoral dissertation, M.T. Cherian has interpreted the Christian Response to the Hindutva Agenda dealing with it from the angle of minority rights that need to be protected in the Indian setting.¹⁸

In the light of the Hindu militancy and attacks, the Christian community needed to revise her mission method. Let me identify the various responses.

Increase evangelistic and church planting missions

Several of the evangelical indigenous missions of India and the independent church groups which are mostly of the Pentecostal and charismatic type have increased sending their evangelists and missionaries with clear goals of church growth. They ardently seek for more number of converts. There are church growth institutes to train them.

Revise evangelistic methodology

Earlier evangelism meant to go into the street corners and market places with a group, distribute tracts, sing and preach using a megaphone, invite

16 See J.F. Seunarine, *Reconversion to Hinduism through Shuddi*, Madras: CLS, 1977. See the appendices on the way this reconversion is imposed now.

17 See the video coverage on this.

18 See M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights – A Christian Response*, Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, Studies in the Gospel Interface with Indian Contexts, No.8, 2007, pp.359.

people for a decision and counsel and pray with them. Now there is a clear stopping of these methods, but to find friendship evangelism, neighborhood evangelism and home based evangelism.

Revise evangelistic language – semantics

At global and national level there were consultations which reflected on the kind of words and expressions used in communication. It is proposed to avoid military terms such as campaigns, crusades, strategy, mission field as battle field, mission team as mission army, fighting the good fight, spiritual warfare, winning, etc., but to use more of peace, love, celebration and joy in our communication. For example, Festival of Peace instead of Evangelistic Crusade.

Revise mission method

Since there is much opposition in places, the verdict oriented approach is toned down and the way to go about church's mission activities is rethought. Some trends that have emerged are: Instead of Church planting, go for School planting. Instead of church as worship centre, plan for multi-purpose community hall and work with the whole community. Instead of youth meetings, run sports activities and drama society and cultural groups. Open community welfare activities and offer courses that benefit a lot of people. Offer job oriented trainings.

Stop evangelism, church planting and conversion

Over against the evangelical and pentecostal trend is the ecumenical intent to stop evangelism and conversion activities. They do not hold church planting as a necessary process of mission activity. There is no concern to add to the number but simply to maintain the existing church.

Indigenise the church

Often the attack from Hindus included the criticism that the church is too western. And linked to western funds. Hence, the revised approach undertaken by some is to avoid western funding and to go for indigenous patterns of church music, architecture, worship pattern and clothing.

Legalise the church

Many of the independent churches are owned by private individual laymen who have had no theological training. They are in control of the income and when property is bought to build the church and parsonage or other branch institutions, they are registered in his name and remain private properties. The

Hindutva group is systematically attacking these type of private properties rather than the official mainline Roman Catholic or CSI churches. “Too many are misusing the church for private benefit. Such are hit at by the attackers. This should leave the church cleansed in India”.¹⁹ The attackers are also requiring official records and registration of the worship places. This again will help legalise the properties and avoid people using their own houses and terrace rooms as private little churches, which the BJP calls ‘illegal churches’.

Unite the church into the main stream

When Davanagere churches were hit by VHP and Bajrang Dal groups, the mainstream church pastors of the Roman Catholic and CSI churches stayed put and ministered in their churches. But the independent pastors of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches went off to Bangalore city and stayed meeting with Bangalore Christian leaders and raising funds. “In the name of attacks and persecution, some of these pastors are trying to mint money and become rich” criticizes a concerned Christian leader who has observed the recent developments in Davanagere and Bangalore in Karnataka.²⁰

Participate in nation building

The larger emphasis now is this – to join hands with the rest of the human community and to build the nation into a better one economically, socially and in every way.

Promote secularism

Join hands with the secular minded and promote secularism and communal harmony. This is an agenda that is needing to be explored into. Even the Government of India has launched a program named *sadhbhavana* in honour of Rajiv Gandhi to promote a concept of communal harmony, national integration and goodwill.

4. Conclusion: Transformational mission in bold humility

Christian Mission involves conversion and there is no escape from it or avoiding of it. Given the religiously plural setting and the increase of the

19 So says Mallanna, the Director of South India Gospel Outreach and Vice Chairman of Karnataka Mission Network who is actively involved in encouraging the hurt and imprisoned pastors.

20 See appendices for latest information on attack on churches in Karnataka on 13 September 2008.

awareness of all peoples to their right to their own faith, we have to develop mission as sharing, mission as caring and mission as mutual enabling / partnering / protecting. We have to hold our loyalties that are legitimate – such as our family, community, nationality, religious belonging, etc., – as private and respect the loyalties of others. Yet, as gently as possible we will have to live the Gospel and share the Gospel with all without appearing arrogant or pompous.

Mission in the Spirit of Christ ... Mission in the Way of the Cross ... Mission in Jesus way ... and perhaps Mission in bold humility as you in South Africa have told us in the rest of the world, that is what we have to explore. Conversion shall be sure, definite and incidental as God draws all men (and women) to Himself. We simply should raise the cross high and hold its values in lifestyle.

May God of Mission convert our hearts to His ways and enable us to do His will.

Appendix 1

Brutal assault on nuns in Durg, Chhattisgarh

In the wake of the recent persecution wave that broke out all across Orissa the fires of communal hatred now seems to be spreading in Chhattisgarh as well.

On 5th September 2008, Durg District of Chhattisgarh State witnessed a heinous and cowardly assault on four nuns belonging to Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa order). The nuns were travelling with the two accomplices' from Raipur to Indore along with few infants when around 6 pm the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council) and *Bajrang Dal* extremists boarded the train and amidst slogan shouting dragged them out and started assaulting them. Thrashing them and physically assaulting them they dragged them to the nearby police station.

As the news spread a group of local pastors immediately approached *Mohan Nagar Thana* where the Nuns were taken to, and protested the incident demanding to register FIR against the VHP and Bajrang Dal ruffians, but the police favoring the culprits refused to do so.

The pastors then approached Mr. Prem Prakash Pandey the Speaker of Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly and registered their protest. But the BJP leader, turning the blind eye to the incident instead misbehaved with the pastors.

Till the reporting of this incident no FIR has been launched. It is reported that the Nuns have sustained severe injuries and were taken to Raipur after the medical checkup.

The names of four Nuns are Sister Vinaisa(58), Sister Mamta(65), Sister Leena(63) and Sister Kripa(27) all belonging to the Missionaries of Charity.

The local newspapers are also favoring with the BJP ruled authority and giving the headlines in such a way which demeans the work that Christian missionaries are doing. A local daily, *Haribhoomi*, carried out this incident as “*Manas Taskari ka Bhandaphor*”(Human trafficking exposed) accusing the four nuns of trafficking the infants without any evidence whatsoever.

EFI is concerned for the safety of the Christians in Chhattisgarh as this incident can only embolden the sinister ideas of Hindutva forces that are leaving no stone unturned to sow the seeds of communal hatred as is evident from the ongoing violence against the Christian Minorities in Orissa.

Appendix 2

Convert to Hinduism or die: Say fundamentalists

New Delhi, September 11, 2008: Forced Conversion drive in Orissa is in full swing amidst threats from *VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal* activists to the Christian community. Christians hiding in the jungles have no choice as they receive instructions from the informers belonging to militant outfits to either convert to Hinduism or stay in the jungles.

Rev. Ashis Parida reporting from Orissa confirmed the incidents of forced conversion from different parts of the State. 30 Christian families from Damba Village, 10 families from Patapanga Village and 20 families from Tatamaha village in Phulbani have been forced to convert to Hinduism. “You can stay in village only if you practice Hinduism, live as Hindu or face death” are the threatening words echoed to the Christians.

Mr. Nagarjuna Pradhan, an MLA from Patapanga, married to a Christian wife is also not spared. His wife has been forced to convert to Hinduism. One pastor’s family from Damba village is now forced in worshipping Hindu gods.

Dejected and anguished villagers, who followed Christianity from generations, are forced to decorate their homes with idols of Hindu gods and goddesses even as they reconstruct their mud houses and thatched roofs.

EFI requests prayers for these poorest of the poor Orissa Christians who are now the target of forceful conversion and continuous threats. We request you to voice your concerns at the below mentioned addresses:

Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India

Room No. 152, South Block, New Delhi, 110001

(O) Tel : +91-11-23012312

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Appendix 3

Forceful reconversion carries on;

Supreme court raps State, asks to submit report

Hindu mobs led by fundamentalists are roaming in the whole of Kandhamal district & threatening the Christians to reconvert or else face death. Yesterday 5 families were forcefully reconverted, against their will, to Hinduism in Adaskupa in Kandhamal.

Working on a Public Interest Litigation filed by Cuttack Archbishop Raphael Cheenath, seeking a CBI probe into the recent incidents of violence in Orissa, the Supreme Court directed the State Government of Orissa to inform if any permission had been granted to *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council) leader Praveen Togodia for his proposed *yatra* that is scheduled on September 6, in Bhubneshwar, carrying the ashes of slain leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati.

Archbishop's counsel Colin Gonsalves requested the court to intervene to stop Togodia's *yatra*, asserting it would foment more trouble in the area, which is already tense. He alleged that the state Government and its police

force were not cooperating and assisting the central paramilitary forces, including the Rapid Action Force and CRPF, which was clear from the reported statement of the Commandant of the CRPF.

The Court further directed the Orissa Government to place a report of steps taken to protect lives of people in riot-hit Kandhamal district. “The court wanted to know what the state government was doing to protect the lives of people belonging to the Christian community,” the court official said.

The religious fanaticism, which started on the night of August 23, has drawn strong condemnation from the international community.

In a letter sent to the Bishop Joel Mal, Moderator of North India, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, called for an end to the violence and urged Christians elsewhere to show their support for the Christian community in Orissa. “I hope that Christians and people of faith around the world will make known their horror at this violence, their support for the rebuilding of lives and the churches, orphanages and schools destroyed, and for work towards future reconciliation,” he said.

Pope Benedict also condemned spiralling violence against Christians in Orissa. Expressing his profound sadness he said “While I firmly condemn every attack on human life, whose sacredness required respect by all, I express my spiritual closeness and solidarity to the brothers and sisters in the faith who are so sorely tried.”

EFI has compiled a comprehensive list of database with assistance from *Archbishop’s House Bhubaneswar, John Dayal, Christian Legal Association, Light Foundation and EFI News reporters and other sources*, which can be found at [Orissa Christian Persecution Fact Finding Report](#).

Appendix 4

Churches attacked in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa

1. Karnataka: Hindu fanaticism is fast spreading its tentacles and reaching out to other States too.

EFI correspondent in Bangalore Rev. Noel Kotian reports, today during the worship service several churches belonging to New Life, Roman Catholics and CSI are attacked. The places are Belthangadi, Modanthiar, Moodabidri, Kodikal, Tokottu, and many in Mangalore. The Catholic church called Milagres was attacked statue of Jesus and St Joseph were smashed to pieces. In all 8 churches of New Life

Fellowship, 4 churches of Roman Catholics, 1 of CSI are attacked. The worshippers were beaten. Men, women and even children were beaten and Bibles burned.

There is a bandh called by Christians tomorrow. Please pray.

2. Madhya Pradesh: Masihi Mandir CNI Church in Indore was burnt by Hindu activists on Saturday, September 13, 2008.

The miscreants entered the Church at around 10:30 pm and set it on fire. The church is located in the Chawni area. Interestingly, the Church is only a few minutes walk from the Chawni Police station.

The fire was spotted by few onlookers who managed to douse it quickly. The damage due to fire has not been very extensive but doors, windows and other wooden material has been burnt irrecoverably.

Sometime back this Church was attacked by Bajrang Dal activists causing severe damage to its property. They shattered its window panes, broke the furniture and other items kept in the Church.

3. Orissa: Rev. Patnayak of the Orissa Missionary Movement, reported to EFI that a Church was burnt by irate mob having allegiance with Hindu militant outfits in village Anchhla, Borigumma, Koraput on the night of September 13th.