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Ethical Teachings Of Christianity In The Light Of Dalit Christians In India

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Abstract

The Abrahamic religious traditions are namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All the three religious traditions give importance to the call and life experience of the fore father Abraham. The Incarnation, Teachings, Miracles, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are the basics of Christian belief and practices. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ is the foundation of Christianity. The core values of the Holy Bible make the society with the sense of self respect, respect for others, justice, equality, fraternity and freedom. The practice of ethical teachings of the Bible is not found effective even within the church itself. The data proves that the struggles of Dalit Christians within the fold of the church exists in many ways. For example, the ill-treatment, inequality, injustice are found from time to time. It is an attempt to highlight the ethical teachings of Christianity and how are not practiced particularly against Dalit Christians within the church. The possible suggestions to shun the discrimination of Dalit Christians within the church in India.

Key Terms: Ethics, Dalit Christians, Nazareth Manifesto, Broken God for Broken People.

The Life of Jesus Christ

According to the scripture, Jesus Christ's birth was prophesized by the Old Testament prophets from time to time. The birth of Jesus Christ is understood as a sacrifice to all because the sin entered through Adam this is called original sin and the second Adam who is called Jesus Christ who shed the blood which cleanses the sins of human beings. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are the foundations of Christianity. It is believed that Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected from his death which makes the full gospel of Christianity.

The Scripture of Christianity

The scripture of Christianity is called the Holy Bible. The word Bible comes from the Greek term *Biblia* means "Book." There are sixty books that are thirty-nine books found in the Old Testament Books and twenty-seven books are in the New Testament of mainline Churches. The first book of the Old Testament is Genesis and the last book of the New Testament is called the book of Revelation. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ is recorded in the Gospels of the New Testament namely; Mathew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Ethical Teachings of Christianity

The ethical teachings of Christianity start from the very first book of the Old Testament that is Genesis. All the books of the Old Testament contain the ethical teachings particularly, the ten commandments of God are considered as the most important aspect of ethical teachings in Christianity. The sermon on the mount of Jesus Christ in the New Testament is called the core ethical principles of Christianity. All the ethical concepts of Christianity are building the Individual attitude, behaviour and character. Further, the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ promote the peace and harmony in the family and society. Thus, the ethical teachings of Christianity are most important to keep the wellbeing of all and reminds that human beings are rational, emotional, ethical and spiritual beings.

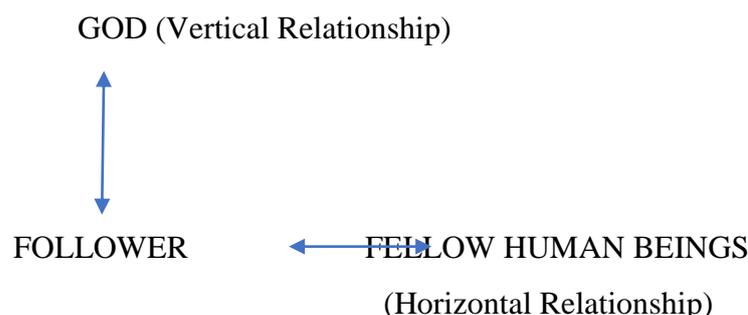
The Ten Commandments

The book of Exodus twentieth chapter of the Old Testament narrates the Ten Commandments. The ten commandments were given to people through Moses by God on the Mount Sinai. It is said that God Himself wrote the commandments and gave to Moses. But the written commandments were broken by Moses and the same has been recollected and written by Moses. The ten commandments are as follows;

1. I am the Lord and you shall no other gods before me
2. You shall not make idols
3. You shall not vain the name of God
4. Remember and keep the sabbath holy
5. Honour your father and mother
6. You shall not murder
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not lie
10. You shall not covet

The Vertical and Horizontal Relationship

The ten commandments of the Bible emphasize on the vertical and horizontal relationship of a follower. The first four commandments denote the relationship between the follower and the Almighty. The last six commandments are related between human to the fellow human beings.



The above diagram explains that the follower of the ten commandments will have the vertical relationship with God which are described in the first four commandments and have the horizontal

relationship with the fellow human beings as given in the last six commandments of the ten commandments.

The Sermon on the Mount of Jesus Christ

The Gospel according to St. Mathew chapter 5 – 7 narrates the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ went on the mount to preach his disciples and the followers. He taught Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer and all other Ethical qualities which are most important for not only the followers but also for everyone in the world.

The Beatitudes

The beatitudes of Jesus Christ explain about the attitude of an individual to fellow human being in a particular context of troubles, sufferings and persecutions. God blesses people who undergo pain and sufferings. The spiritual blessings are given by God to all who are persecuted and tortured by fellow human beings.

The Lord's Prayer

The disciples of Jesus Christ were taught how to pray to God. The prayer teaches about the dependence of followers with God and the simple life style and care and concern of all people in the world. The spiritual growth of followers was emphasised by Jesus Christ.

New Law

The book of Law of the Old Testament teaches about the day today life of people in the family and society. The same law has been taught by Jesus Christ in the sermon on the mount as New Law which goes one step ahead of the Old Law. For example;

- Moses said don't murder but I say don't anger
- Moses said don't commit adultery but I say don't have lust

Thus, Jesus taught the cause of murder and adultery in order to be away from the fall of sin. In other words, Jesus warned his followers not to be tempted of any worldly desires, physical weakness and temptations.

The Perfection of Life

The sermon on the mount of Jesus Christ teaches about the perfection of human life. The ethical life of followers must play a role model to others. The ethical teachings are not just limited to the earthly life but also reflects the spiritual qualities and its necessity for spiritual maturity and growth.

Transformation of Life

The sermon on the mount of Jesus Christ transforms the life of people within an individual and the relationship with others. The transformed life of disciples will help others to be transformed and do so on. It is a continuation of transformations of people in their day today life. The teachings of Christ disciplines all, further, to transforms and empowers others.

The Other Ethical Teachings of Christianity

There are many important ethical teachings that we find in the holy Bible other than the sermon on the mount. The following ethics are addressed in the Bible; Love, Compassion and Forgiveness.

Love

One of the important emphasize on love is found in the holy Bible. Jesus Christ said that “Love your God with all your mind, heart and spirit and love your neighbour.” The words of Jesus Christ urge to love God and fellow human beings as well. The love should not be limited to only with God but also it must be in our day today life too. In other words, the concept of love is understood as the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with fellow human beings and the nature.

Compassion

The other ethical teaching of the Bible is Compassion towards the fellow human beings, fellow human beings and environment. Jesus Christ showed his compassion throughout his life and insisted his disciples and the followers also do the same. The mark of matured spirituality is understood in the compassionate life of followers of Christ.

Forgiveness

The forgiveness results peace and harmony in the society. Jesus Christ forgave the people who tortured him. The peace and harmony build on the sense of forgiveness. The forgiveness is against retaliation.

A Brief about Dalit and Dalit Christians

The social reformer and activist Mahatma Jyotirao Phule used and popularized the Sanskrit root word *Dal* which literally means burst, split, broken, crushed, neglected, rejected, torn asunder etc. Phule used the term Dalits who are untouchables, outcast, *Avarna*, *Panchamas*, *Chandalas*, *Shudra* etc. Dalits are illtreated, disrespected, dishonoured, misused in many centuries in the Indian society. Mahatma Gandhi used the term *Harijan* that is Children of God to address Dalits but it was not welcomed by many social reformers including Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

There is a rigid social hierarchical system exists in the Indian society to discriminate Dalits. K. P. Kuruvila points out that “the social structure of India is stratified, with in built inequalities and injustices, based on the caste system sanctified by *Brahmanic – Hinduism*. Although social stratification exists in almost all societies, the caste system is quite unique to the Indian society. Sanctioned by the religio-philosophical system, the Dalits are socially placed outside the four-fold caste system and they are referred to as the fifth caste (*panchamas*), even when they live as outcasts. Dalits are differentiated from the lowest strata if other societies with regard to their stigma of untouchability,” (George, 2023, p. 1). Dalits are not considered as human and they are at the verge of the society in India.

Counter to Classical Indian Christian Theology

Dalit Theology is a counter to Indian Christian Theology in India to address the struggles of the grass roots. There was a time that the Indian Christian Theology would be named as Brahminical Christian Theology because it was restricted to Vedic studies particularly, Indian Christian Theology was identified with *Gnana*, *Karma* and *Bhakti Margas*. But after 1970's the emergence of Dalit Theology included the people who are downtrodden within the realm of Indian Christian Theology. Notably, Arvind P Nirmal who is the pioneer of Dalit Theology with his writing on “Shudra Theology.” Further, Dalit Theology was

popularized by James Massey, M. E. Prabhakar, M. Azariah, K. Wilson, V. Devasahayam, D. S. Prasad, Peniel Rajkumar and so on.

Rigid Practice of Caste in the Church

Rigid practice of caste is found within the church in many ways. The believers of the church are from multi caste background but still there is a disparity among the believers. Though 70% of the church members are Dalits but still they are neglected and discriminated in the church. According to Prasad, 'Caste practice is more visible and obvious in rural churches and takes less visible, hidden forms in urban churches,' (Prasad, 2006, p.7). Dalits are not given any major responsibility or administrative positions in the church. Mostly they are kept at the level of membership alone not beyond that.

The inter-caste marriages are not welcomed in many of the churches in India. The so-called higher caste believers are willing to restrict their marriages within their caste not willing to support inter-caste marriages. Moreover, some of the worst cases, there are churches established for a particular predominant community of the locality. All the administrative responsibilities are restricted to the predominant community for whom the church was established. Hence, the rigidity of caste system is found within the churches in India.

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The Relevance and Application of Christian Ethics

The ethical teachings of ten commandments, sermon on the mount, love, compassion and forgiveness of Christianity are ever relevant to an individual, family and society. The ethical teachings are practicable in the day today life of people. The spirit of tolerance is the result of love, compassion and forgiveness. The crime rates of the society can be reduced by following the ethical teachings of Christianity. The teachings of Christianity build healthy individual, family and society. The heartedness, retaliation, violence and any kind of vengeance can be reduced by the strict practice of Christian ethics today.

The Dalit Christians who are the followers of Christ by their faith are struggling in the church for their freedom, equality, self-respect. Dalit Christians twice alienated within the church that is in the society where they live and, in the Church, where they exercise their faith. The ethical teachings of Jesus Christ are not practiced even within the church very often. The discrimination of Dalit Christians is found in avoiding them as ordained ministers, office bearers, and other important responsibilities. Mostly, they were used for the head counts to show the numbers in the church. The track history of missionaries works support polarisation among the Dalit and non-Dalit Christians in India. The polarisation is used as one of the

strategies of evangelisation in India. Hence, its stain found in the church today as well and practiced in many ways among the followers of Christ. In this context, the teachings of Christ play a major role to mend the relationships between Dalit and non-Dalit Christians in the church. The ethical teachings of Christianity promote brotherhood and unity of followers irrespective of caste, class, colour, gender etc. Without practicing the teachings of Christ within the church will not set as a role model to the people of other faith in the society. As per the ethical teachings of Christianity, it is necessary to shun the caste discriminations within the church to practice love, compassion and brotherhood.

Conclusion

Dalit Theology addresses how a Dalit Christians are twice alienated in the society. Dalit Christians are oppressed by the following groups like non-Dalit Christians that is within the church, non-Dalits who are the people of other faiths that is outside of the church, religious fundamentalists and so on. In other words, Dalit Christians are oppressed, marginalized, exploited by both non- Dalits within and outside of the church in India. Though the Holy Bible emphasizes on justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity but it is not followed by many of the non-Dalits in the church and their day today life. In this context, the teachings of Christ play a major role to mend the relationships between Dalit and non-Dalit Christians in the church. The ethical teachings of Christianity promote brotherhood and unity of followers irrespective of caste, class, colour, gender etc. Jesus Christ life and teachings, particularly, the Nazareth manifesto condemns the oppression, discrimination and exploitation of Dalit Christians within the church. Jesus is the saviour of Dalit Christians with his atonement on the cross. It symbolizes that broken God for broken people who are Dalit Christians in the Indian churches. Hence, the vertical and horizontal relationships of followers of Christ need to be maintained by practising the ethical teachings of the Holy Bible.

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