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CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND FORMATION FOR MISSION: AN IMITATION OF JESUS' METHOD OF THEOLOGIZING

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Abstract

The gospel is intended for all peoples, all ages, land and context and therefore it pervades all cultures and illumines them all with the divine light. The gospel must be adapted to different cultural contexts to develop meaningful contextual theologies, for it is an articulation of the message of the gospel in the cultural categories of the people. Hence the missionaries should take into consideration the existing socio-cultural and religious situations and have a genuine love and respect for all peoples, cultures and religions; and the gospel is to be preached. The evangelization is neither conquering the culture and faith experience of the people nor communicating them that they are erroneous in faith and life, but consists in respecting local cultures, ethos and faith expressions. In this pursuit of theologizing in context Jesus sets the perfect method and model to be imitated by his disciples in realizing the vision of a 'Church of the Poor.'

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1. Introduction

Mission is intrinsic to the nature of the Church and, as Pope Francis recaptures, “evangelization is the task of the Church,”¹ for “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”² Mission could be also called the “mother of the Church,” a great task that binds the believers together, nourishes, energises, heals and provides them with challenges and vision.³ Hence the relevance and impact of the Church depend on the significance and emphasis given to the mission *ad gentes*, and it takes her into a variety of contexts and invites her to respond to the challenges they pose before her. The Church, her mission and the message to be pertinent, has to face the contextual issues and questions. The concern for an ongoing hermeneutic of the dialogue of the gospel with the contexts, cultures and religions is relevant and opportune,⁴ and today the Church, especially in India, takes serious efforts “marked by significant breakthroughs and shifts alternating with long periods of non-contextual, non-creative repetitive scholastic theology.”⁵

The gospel by its very nature is intended for all peoples, all ages, land and context and therefore is not bound exclusively to any particular culture, for it pervades all cultures and illumines them all with the divine light. The gospel must be adapted to different cultural contexts to develop meaningful contextual theologies, for it is an articulation of the message of the gospel in the cultural categories of the people. Hence the missionaries should take into consideration the existing socio-cultural and religious situations and have a genuine love and respect for all peoples, cultures and religions; and the gospel is to be preached. The evangelization is neither vanquishing

¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, 111.

² Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html, 14.

³ S.B. Bevans – R.P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Malleswaram & Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2005, 11.

⁴ J. Saldanha, *Exploring Frontiers*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2016, 13, 97.

⁵ S. Arokiasamy, “Towards Contextual Theology: Reflections on the Development in the Indian Church,” in J. Massey, ed., *Contextual Theological Education*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1993, 50.

the culture and faith experience of the people nor recounting them that they are erroneous in what they believe and do, but consists in respecting local cultures, ethos and faith expressions.⁶ It is the incarnation of Christian faith in other cultures; it attempts to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context, which according to Bevans is a theological imperative.⁷ In this pursuit of theologizing in context, Jesus sets the perfect method and model, and if he is the model, his disciples need to “have the same mind of Jesus” (Phil 2:5).

2. Jesus’ Method of Theologizing

Jesus adopted new forms and new approaches in carrying out his saving mission⁸ and espoused the style of sincere and serious expressions of immersion into and assimilation of the culture.⁹ Mission presupposes exposure to the lives and contexts of the people. In exposure, one is still an outsider of that which one experiences, but in immersion, one enters into and becomes united or identified with the reality of other persons: However both exposure and immersion are real life encounters with the reality.¹⁰ Such encounters initiate the theologians to the real life-situations and urge them to reflect in the light of the gospel, and therefore, contextual theological reflection starts from live-in experience of life, history, struggles, pains and hopes of the people through participation and immersion, for the experience enables us to theologize in context.¹¹ In other words, the relevant theologizing consists in the dialectical interaction of the Word and world, i.e., it prompts to “interpret the Christian faith in the light of the events and experiences of today as well as to understand the events and experiences of today in the light of the Christian faith.”¹²

⁶J. Mariadas, “Institutionalization Paralyzes Evangelization,” *Ephrem’s Theological Journal* 21, 2 (October 2017) 29.

⁷S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll, NY: ORBIS Books, 1992, 1.

⁸A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, London: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1991, 62.

⁹S. Athappilly, “Inculturation in the Model of Incarnation,” in S. Chackalackal, ed., *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, Bengaluru/Coimbatore: Vidyavanam Publications/Preshita Communications, 2009, 440.

¹⁰D. D’Sousa, “Exposure-Immersion Programmes: From Concern to Solidarity with the Poor,” *Third Millennium* 3, 2 (April-June 2000) 35-36.

¹¹S. Arokiasamy, “Towards Contextual Theology: Reflections on the Development in the Indian Church,” in J. Massey, ed., *Contextual Theological Education*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1993, 50.

¹²K. Kunnumpuram, “Theological Method in Vatican II,” in M. Jayanth, ed., *Indian Theologies: In Search of Methods and Models for Theologizing*, New Delhi: Christian World Imprints & Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2017, 2.

The incarnation is immersion into history and by incarnation Jesus became the perfect exigent of God.¹³ “He is the visible image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). The solidarity of Jesus with the poor and the outcastes is evident in the incarnation (Jn 1:14). Pope Francis states, “Unafraid of the fringes, he himself became a fringe (cf. Phil 2:6-8; Jn 1:14). So if we dare to go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation.”¹⁴ Kudilil delineates the dynamics of incarnation, “A hitherto unknown and far away God became near to humankind, took on the limitations of time and space unto himself, began to speak their language and share their life with all its dimensions.”¹⁵ The Word made flesh integrated both heaven and earth. Jesus was a victim of insults, mockery and contempt due to his immersion in the context of common people. He was called “a glutton and drunkard and a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Mt 11:19), “a mad man” (Mk 3:22-30), “the carpenter’s son” (Mk 6:3) and “a Samaritan...possessed by a devil (Jn 8:48-52).

The identification of Jesus with the poor and the needy is clearly visible in his Nazareth manifesto (Lk 4:18). There is a radical shift from the values of the clever and the wise of the world to the wisdom of the marginalized and the downtrodden in the society. He is the liberator of those who expected a saviour, who are vulnerable and kicked to the outskirts of the society due to poverty, illness, handicaps and other deprivations. Jesus was always sensitive to the context where he lived and was eager to reach out to the people, especially to those at the periphery (Lk 8:1-3), and confronted the reality in the form of sin, sickness, injustice, hypocrisy, love, fear, pain, etc. There he proclaimed the Word and fulfilled it. He confronted the reality and interpreted the context of sin with forgiveness (Jn 8:11), sickness with healing (Mt 8:3; Mk 1:40; Lk 13:12-13; 18:42; Jn 5:8; 9:6-7), evil spirits with driving them out from persons (Mk 9:25; Lk 8:29), injustice with denouncing (Lk 12:45-46), hypocrisy with condemning (Mt 23:13; Lk 11:39), and worry, fear and pain with instructing (Mt 6:25; Lk 12:22-23) and praying. Being totally available

¹³Athappilly, “Inculturation in the Model of Incarnation,” 435.

¹⁴Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, https://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html,135.

¹⁵G. Kudilil, “Mission Approaches in Evangelizing Process - With Special Emphasis on Human Promotion in the Missionary Context of India,” *Ephrem’s Theological Journal* 21, 2 (October 2017) 14.

at the service of the marginalized, he gave them freedom, hope, wholeness and new orientation to their lives and transformed them.

The credibility of Jesus lies in his solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, and hence, for the one who proclaims Jesus who was poor and stood for the cause of the poor, has no better option than to be in solidarity with them which in turn adds his or her credibility and integrity.¹⁶ Jesus visualized true liberation of humanity, a setting where everyone lives in solidarity, freedom and justice, for his "mission was to lead humans to realize true freedom by their becoming authentic humans."¹⁷

According to J. Massey, every theological expression has to pass two tests, which are based on the two divine interventions, 'God takes the side of the oppressed' (Ex 3:7-9), and the message that 'God liberates the oppressed' (Lk 4:18-19), and these two messages have to be the spirit behind all theological expressions.¹⁸ Therefore, theologizing in the Indian Context necessitates addressing itself to the liberative praxis of the oppressed, exploited and marginalized people, taking a serious note of stark realities within social, cultural, political, economic and religious pluralism to help the people in their struggle to alter their situation of injustice and oppression.¹⁹

Jesus who entered into and got united with the reality of human beings in their poverty-stricken and unjust context and preached liberation, and appeared to the disciples in "secular" contexts of life like fishing (Jn 21:4-6), travelling (Mk 16:12; Lk 24:15), and wanted them to find him in the ordinary events of life, and communicated the Word in the language and idiom of the people is the model in theologizing in context. Therefore "contextual approach should start from the scratch, from below, from the concrete life of the people, and then should strive at a new interpretation of the messages and ideals of Jesus in the gospels and the Christian tradition."²⁰ This understanding might have urged a number of contextual theologians like Rahner, Lonergan, and Gutierrez to reiterate that theology is not

¹⁶Kudilil, "Mission Approaches in Evangelizing Process," 18.

¹⁷J. Parappally, "Christian Leadership and the Praxis of Jesus," in A. Kalliath, ed., *Christian Leadership: The Shifting Focus in Theological Education*, Bangalore: Dharmaram publications, 2001, 79.

¹⁸J. Massey, "Christianity to be Renewed? Rethink Theology," in J. Massey - T.K. John, ed., *Rethinking Theology in India: Christianity in the Twenty-first Century*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2013, 28.

¹⁹K.C. Abraham, "Contextual Theologies," in J. Massey, ed., *Contextual Theological Education*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1993, 18.

²⁰J. Chittooparampil, *A Christian Vision for a New Society in India: Theological and Countercultural Perspectives*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2014, xiii.

really done by experts and then “trickled down” to the people for their consumption, rather, done by people themselves who are subjects and agents of culture and its change.²¹

3. Contextual Theological Education and Formation: Samanvaya Model

Samanvaya Theology College, established on 3rd July 1994, is a movement of the religious Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) to impart contextualized theological education and formation for the future priests and missionaries.²² The urgency of the ideal of incarnating the gospel in north India, felt in the theological education and formation is the immediate context of launching the programme. Samanvaya, meaning ‘integration,’ envisages a programme for contextual theological formation, integrating both the text and the context in view of making the Church and her mission relevant. It was “launched as a movement for *samanvayam*, integration of faith with life, the text with the context and the classroom with the field.”²³ The integration obtained through the theological programme is a liberative experience both for the person and the society.²⁴ It enables one to share the message of Jesus Christ with the people creatively with commitment,²⁵ for it integrates life with learning, knowledge with action and personal growth with community’s mission. It triggers transformation to the person. *Samanvayam* is achieving wholeness and harmony within oneself and the rest of reality through a dialogical interaction of the person and the realities around.

In Samanvaya, the theological formation is given with a special emphasis to interiorize the values from the context. The formation and education in Samanvaya starts in the context of the rural and tribal people of Bastar,²⁶ continues in the interreligious milieu of

²¹Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 13.

²²*Handbook*, Bhopal: Samanvaya Theology College, 2018, 5.

²³D. Varayilan, “Theology on Wheels: A Movement for Samanvayam,” in D. Varayilan, ed., *Theology on Wheels: A Movement for Contextualized Theological Education*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2011, 1.

²⁴S. Elavathingal, “Integration (*Samanvayam*) in Theological Formation: A CMI Experience,” in A. Kalliath, ed., *Christian Leadership: The Shifting Focus in Theological Education*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publication, 2001, 314-315.

²⁵A. Karokaran, *Mission: An Alternative Model*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 151.

²⁶Bastar, a district in Chattisgarh is a subaltern or rural and tribal context. The interaction with the rural or tribal folk helps the students to imbibe their sublime values. N.J. Kalambukattu, “Theologizing in Tribal Context: A Paradigm for Integration,” in N.J. Kalambukattu, ed., *Theologizing in Context: A Hermeneutic of*

Rishikesh,²⁷ urban and pastoral contexts of Bangalore and Bhopal²⁸ moving from one to the other doing *theology on wheels*. The students get ample opportunities to gather experiences that are typical of the multi-cultural and religious context of India and they “learn to understand and accept without prejudices different cultural and religious traditions and develop a dialogical attitude towards them.”²⁹ Therefore, the point of departure for theologizing in context, a theology “from below” is the data of experience.³⁰

The three thrusts of the academic and formation programmes in each year are: 1. God and the World, 2. Jesus Christ and the Human, and 3. The Church and the Spirit.³¹ As Samanvaya life style gives more importance to community life and it fosters small and interactive communities, which necessitates participation and involvement of each member, a week of prayerful reflection is conducted each year as per the thrusts to guide the students. Apart from the input sessions by the experts and mentors in each context, the students are guided to write journals of their experiences, tutorials focussing the context, paper on the field experience,

Living Dialogue between the Word and the World, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 13-14; See also J. Chittooparampil, “Tribal Culture on Limelight: Subaltern Hermeneutics,” in N.J. Kalambukattu, ed., *Theologizing in Context: A Hermeneutic of Living Dialogue between the Word and the World*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 141-150; P. Kochappilly, “Celebrating Life in Christ with the Community of Creation: Theological Education in the Tribal Setting of Bastar,” in N.J. Kalambukattu, ed., *Theologizing in Context: A Hermeneutic of Living Dialogue between the Word and the World*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 151-175.

²⁷Rishikesh, a township in the foothills of lower Himalayan ranges, on the serene banks of the sacred river Ganga, in Uttarakhand, is a hub of yoga and meditation. It is a land filled with temples, ashrams and hermitages and the atmosphere in general is vibrant with holy chants, and therefore could be considered a spiritual haven. It is twenty four kilometers away from Haridwar which is known as the entrance of the Holy City. Pilgrimage and tourism still continue to be the major pillars of strength for Rishikesh. The religious-cultural context of Rishikesh challenges one to deepen one’s faith and appreciate the faith of the other. D. Varayilan, “Samanvaya in the Inter-religious Context of Rishikesh,” in B. Thettayil, ed., *God-Talk in Context: A North Indian Theological Experiment*, Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 2016, 131-144.

²⁸Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh in central India, has a social and pastoral setting. Bhopal provides pastoral and social fields for involvements. L. Malieckal, “Socio-Pastoral Urban Contexts: Spirit and the Church,” in B. Thettayil, ed., *God-Talk in Context: A North Indian Theological Experiment*, Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 2016, 241-242.

²⁹Elavathingal, “Integration (*Samanvayam*) in Theological Formation,” 319.

³⁰S. Elavathingal, “Integration (*Samanvayam*) in Theological Formation,” 319.

³¹*Handbook*, Bhopal: Samanvaya Theology College, 2018, 16-17; L. Malieckal, “Socio-Pastoral Urban Contexts: Spirit and the Church,” 242.

comprehensive academic paper, comprehensive viva-voce in each year, research paper, etc.³²

The entire course programme and life style in the first year in Bastar is centred on the main theme God and the World.³³ The focus of the training at Bastar “is to imagine, investigate, and interiorize the wisdom of God as revealed in the Bible and in history, especially in the tribal context of Bastar.”³⁴ Besides the courses on Scripture, Tribal Theology, Cultural Analysis, Social Analysis, and theoretical inputs on methods of analysis, critical reflection and communication, students are constantly in touch with the rural folk by way of weekly village visits, participation in the local celebrations and *melas*, three week long rural life in a family³⁵ and week-end pastoral ministries in various parishes. In prayer and adoration, the students are guided to identify themselves with the world around them.

The complete programme in the second year in Rishikesh is centred on the theme Jesus Christ and the Human. In the Inter-religious context of Rishikesh, a deeper theological understanding of the person of Jesus is developed through serious study and daily exposures to life and religious practices of other traditions. Academically, the focus is intensified and heightened by courses on systematic theology.³⁶ Apart from classroom learning and input sessions by experts, the students visit the *ashrams*, *sadhus* and *gurus*, participate in the rituals such as *bhajans*, *kirtans* and *arti*. They also stay for a week in Hindu ashram and make pilgrimages to the shrines of various religions and are geared to prayerful reflection and evaluation.

The whole programme in the third year in Bangalore and Bhopal is centred on the theme the Holy Spirit and the Church.³⁷ The students

³²For the details see B. Thettayil, “Making God-Talk from the Gutters: Academics in Samanvaya,” in B. Thettayil, ed., *God-Talk in Context: A North Indian Theological Experiment*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 64, 67-68, 71.

³³B. Thettayil, “The Rural Context of Jagdalpur: God and the World,” in B. Thettayil, ed., *God-Talk in Context: A North Indian Theological Experiment*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 98-99.

³⁴P. Kochappilly, “Celebrating Life in Christ with the Community of Creation: Theological Education in the Tribal Setting of Bastar,” 173.

³⁵For the reflections of the students’ faith journey in the rural context see N.J. Kalambukattu, “Immersion in the Rural and Tribal Context,” in N.J. Kalambukattu, ed., *Theologizing in Context: A Hermeneutic of Living Dialogue between the Word and the World*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 205-216.

³⁶For the details see B. Thettayil, “Making God-Talk from the Gutters: Academics in Samanvaya,” 65-68.

³⁷L. Malieckal, “Socio-Pastoral Urban Contexts: Spirit and the Church,” 242-257.

spend the first semester of the third year in DVK Bengaluru and the second semester till they get ordained are spent in Bhopal, where they are given occasions to experience the working of the Spirit of God in ecclesial communities and in the lives of the people, which in turn develop in them an attitude for pastoral concern and care.³⁸ They are given both pastoral courses and opportunities to organize social development activities, animating urban and rural children and youth, services to the prisoners, street children, attending to the sick in hospitals, building up ecumenical contacts, etc. Thus the students “learn to interpret the Word of God with sensitivity to the context, and feelings of the individuals in the community and equip themselves with the modern means of communication to preach the Word of God and retreats to different groups of people.”³⁹

Samanvaya has a context-sensitive, experience-based, student-centred and people-oriented pedagogy.⁴⁰ It deals with the land and the language of the people promoting co-existence and co-operation. Hence it is creative, liberative, contextual and appreciative of plurality. There is an absolute need of openness to the diversity and pluralism, for “a true believer must be broad-minded and open-hearted to learn from the other.”⁴¹ Samanvaya invites the students to respond to the challenges and queries critically and creatively. Hence, the theological formation, which Samanvaya offers is dynamic and moving.

The contextual theological education and formation emerge through encounter, exposure and experience. It creates a positive and open attitude to life and realities. There is a contextual and experiential in-take of knowledge, which converts them into effective sharers of the good news. The message of the gospel, to be effective, must be adapted to the local culture and lifestyle, which in turn demands “a deep understanding of the aspirations, feelings, thought patterns, outlook, etc., of receiving culture and shows genuine concern and sensitivity to those factors. Thus the good news becomes intelligible, acceptable and realistic for the hearers.”⁴² It also means

³⁸S. Elavathingal, *Samanvaya Contextualized Theological Formation: A CMI Initiative*, Bhopal: Samanvaya, 2009, 14.

³⁹B. Thettayil, “Making God-Talk from the Gutters: Academics in Samanvaya,” 70.

⁴⁰Varayilan, “Theology on Wheels: A Movement for Samanvayam,” 1.

⁴¹J.P. Vallabadoss, “Dialoguing with Religions: The Impact of Pope Francis on ‘Inter-Cultural and Inter-Faith Interactions,’” in K. Pandikattu, ed., *Pope Francis: His Impact on and Relevance for the Church and Society Commemorating Five Years of His Papacy*, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth/New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2018, 157.

⁴²Kudilil, “Mission Approaches in Evangelizing Process,” 14.

the reasonable and harmonious development of all faculties of the students helping them to become genuinely human. Bevans rightly captures that theologizing in context takes into account not only the gospel message and the tradition of the Church, but also the culture of the one who is doing theology and social change within that culture.⁴³

Life-experiences in the contexts and theologizing them will enable the students to cherish the “vision of Church as a correlative, cooperative, collaborative, collegial, and co-inclusive People of God with its task of ‘mystery of moon,’ and really radiating the light of her Master, outgoing and evangelizing the world.”⁴⁴ In the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, the exposure and immersion programmes make “the joy and hope, the grief and anguish”⁴⁵ of the people their own, and establish a deep solidarity with the people.

The experiences of encounter and immersion are geared to a process of sound theological reflection. The teacher facilitates and guides the students in reflecting the experiences and assimilating new information, for “experiences, duly reflected upon, can certainly be much more formative than mere information or knowledge.”⁴⁶ The students become critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher promoting dialogue and a healthy teacher-taught relationship.⁴⁷

The theologizing becomes a process of making one’s faith alive, meaningful and contextual, i.e., discovering the divine in the concrete life situations. Aykara expounds, “Experience is the fertile field of mature thoughts. Original, healthy and unique thoughts are born from the sedimentation of personal experiences; and not from borrowed ideas and undigested theories swallowed from others.”⁴⁸ The experiences help the students to develop into a person of

⁴³Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 1.

⁴⁴A. Pushparajan, “Embracing the Laity: The Vision of Pope Francis,” in K. Pandikattu, ed., *Pope Francis: His Impact on and Relevance for the Church and Society Commemorating Five Years of His Papacy*, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth/New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2018, 134.

⁴⁵Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

⁴⁶J. Saldanha, “Formation in Context,” *Third Millennium* 6, 4 (October-December 2003) 34.

⁴⁷L. Fernando, “Doing Theology in Context, Teacher-Student Partnership,” *Third Millennium* 6, 4 (October-December 2003) 9.

⁴⁸T. Aykara, “CMI Legacy of Ecclesiastical Education and Mission: Dream for the Future,” in P. Kochappilly, ed., *Contextual Ecclesial Education and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church: Proceedings of the CMI Philosophers’ and Theologians’ Forum on “CMI Legacy of Contextual Ecclesiastical Education and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church,”* Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 68.

compassion, competence and commitment to be at the service of the least ones in the society. The theological education and formation “rooted in the life-situation of the people should also affect the *life-style* of those who theologize, especially by living the simplicity of the poor.”⁴⁹

The theologizing in context clarifies the logic of self-giving and inspires the students to volunteer and to serve the poor with the ‘Smell of the Sheep.’ To phrase differently, they are challenged to become the ‘People of Heart’ who can feel with the people and commit themselves for their cause,⁵⁰ and as the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:33-35), they become the good news to the people. They enable the students to be in the shoes of the carpenter of Nazareth who was always at the periphery and inspire them to take a stand with the marginalized who are at the periphery of human existence. Hence the exigency of the formation of priests and religious adapted to the cultural contexts, where they are to witness and proclaim the good news. This will lead to the realization of the ardent wish of Pope Francis: “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor... We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.”⁵¹

The theologizing in context enables the students to accept and appreciate themselves and others leading them to an integrated or comprehensive growth, which is the need of the challenging situations, they are placed in. It enables the students to live together with different people and get identified with them in various contexts, and helps them to grow into a new life-style by experiencing the life of the weak and the poor, the sick and the marginalized (1 Cor 9:22-23). It enables them to respect all and to have a sense of justice, for the experience of living together with the poor in the context equip and enable the students to engage in the works of justice and the tasks of human development and liberation.⁵² It also enables them to be people of integrity, for “if the

⁴⁹P. Arockiadoss, “Regional Theology Centres and Formation of Christian Leadership,” in A. Kalliath, ed., *Christian Leadership: The Shifting Focus in Theological Education*, Bangalore: Dharmaram publications, 2001, 289.

⁵⁰L. Fernando, “Doing Theology in Context, Teacher-Student Partnership,” 9.

⁵¹Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198.

⁵²D. Varayilan, “Contextualized Theological Formation in Samanvaya: Vision, Orientation and Impact,” in B. Thettayil, ed., *God-Talk In Context: A North Indian Theological Experiment*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 35.

human qualities are lacking in the life of a priest who is supposed to witness to Christ, he will fail in his mission."⁵³

Samanvaya has a personalized formation, a process through which the students are gradually guided to reach greater heights of understanding the person and message of Jesus Christ and assimilating it into the life situations. It inspires them to touch and be touched by the miserable lives, and helps them to become prophetic leaders following the example of Jesus and his preferential option for the poor as well as his courage to break down the social and cultural barriers. Students become keenly sensitive to the diverse contexts and dare to take prophetic steps for the mission of the Church and the well being of the people, for the prophets have both a sense of God and a sense of human beings, denounce the evil,⁵⁴ and cry out for justice and care of the poor.⁵⁵ Therefore, as Thettayil captures, "the 'samanvayic' spirituality is a happy blending of the concerns for the human and for the divine."⁵⁶ Elavathingal explicates:

[It is] a holistic and harmonious experience of integration in which knowing, loving and doing, that is, *jnana*, *bhakti* and *karma* are united. Such a process of integration must begin with direct experience (*anubhava*), through involvement and active participation (*karma*/action). It is then reflected and meditated upon (*Gnana*/knowledge). The realization that follows is personalized and expressed creatively in love, devotion and selfless service (*bhakti*/love).⁵⁷

Theologizing in context requires leaving the comfort of one's nests and structures, to get acquainted with the life-experiences of the people at the periphery.⁵⁸ The encounters, immersions, experiences, reflections and interpretations constantly challenge the students to leave the security, which the institution provides in order to embrace the insecurity that Jesus offers. They spur them on to equip themselves with sound theological reflections to prepare themselves for the future ministry. Therefore it is essential to do theology

⁵³J. Bala H., "A Paradigm Shift for Integral Human Formation of Priests," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 82, 4 (April 2018) 291.

⁵⁴B. Haring, *Sin in the Secular Age*, Slough-England: St Paul Publications, 1974, 114.

⁵⁵W.T. Murma, "Poverty: A Catholic Social Teaching Perspective," *Asian Horizons* 11, 3 (September 2017) 564.

⁵⁶B. Thettayil, "The Rural Context of Jagdalpur: God and the World," in B. Thettayil, ed., *God-Talk in Context: A North Indian Theological Experiment*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 110.

⁵⁷Elavathingal, "Integration (*Samanvayam*) in Theological Formation," 313.

⁵⁸R. Joseph, "Reinventing Religious Life: The Challenge of Pope Francis," in K. Pandikattu, ed., *Pope Francis: His Impact on and Relevance for the Church and Society Commemorating Five Years of His Papacy*, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth/New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2018, 145.

through a programme of action-reflection-action ensuring that the notional knowledge of divine truths become possessive and transforming one.⁵⁹

The students are encouraged to articulate their theological insights and reflections by way of symbols, poems, write-ups, parables, music, paintings, etc. Thus they are initiated to do theology in line with the style and manner of Jesus who shared the profound mysteries of the Kingdom through the parables and made them intelligible to the people. As Karokaran rightly elucidates in the contextualization, there is an “affirmation of solidarity and identification with a people in the process of the contextualization of the Christian faith.”⁶⁰ It is not exporting Jesus from outside to the people in a particular cultural context, but presentation of him from within a people, and getting identified with them.⁶¹

4. Conclusion

The very dynamics of incarnation by which Jesus entered and got immersed into the human history constantly challenge the disciples to get in his shoes, for the Samanvayic person and mission of Jesus, the good shepherd is the bedrock of theologizing in context. The contextual theological education promotes a radical option for a life of simplicity and identification with the poor. It creates a universal vision among the students and enables them to stand with and for the people. It helps the students to preserve and promote the cultural, social and religious diversities of the tribals, aboriginal, dalits and other ethnic and religious minorities to nurture the pluralistic spirit of India. It triggers an ongoing process making the message of salvation incarnate in the specific and living cultures of the people.⁶² “Widen the space of your tent, extend the curtains of your home, do not hold back!” (Is 54:2) is true to the task of immersion and getting exposed to the various cultural realities of the context.

The task is to interpret the context and assimilate the text critically in freedom, and St Paul who “opposed Cephas” (Gal 2:11-14) and proclaimed the good news without disturbing the existing system

⁵⁹ A. Karokaran, *Mission: An Alternative Model*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 179.

⁶⁰A. Karokaran, *Mission: An Alternative Model*, 138.

⁶¹A. Karokaran, *Mission: An Alternative Model*, 138-139.

⁶²J. Pathrapankal, “Scribes Trained for the Kingdom of God,” in P. Kochappilly, ed., *Contextual Ecclesial Education and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church: Proceedings of the CMI Philosophers’ and Theologians’ Forum on “CMI Legacy of Contextual Ecclesiastical Education and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church,”* Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 45.

and understanding in the Athenian society (Acts 17:22-23, 28) sets an example to imitate. And for that as Pope Francis instructs, it is essential to "... strip away the fear of opening the doors and going out to encounter all especially the poorest of the poor, the needy, the remote, without waiting..."⁶³ Thus theologizing in context becomes a serious imitation of the method of Jesus, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14). It is taking a step forward in realizing the vision of a 'Church of the poor,' articulating a liberative spirituality (Lk 4:18-19) drawn from Jesus, and achieving a structural change in the life of the Church returning to her original roots to meet the present world in mission with its challenges and promises. It is following the stand point of Jesus with determination in responding courageously and creatively to the challenges, especially, in transcending all that prevent people from becoming better humans in various contexts.

⁶³Francis, *Meeting with the Poor Assisted by Caritas*, Assisi (Perugia), 4 October 2013.