

ONGOING RENEWAL OF MORAL THEOLOGY IN INDIA

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Abstract

Indian moral theologians have enthusiastically responded to the call for renewal of moral theology by the Second Vatican Council. This paper presents some of the contributions of Indian moral theologians after the Council, and delineates some of the concerns for further development of moral theology in India. Seminary continues to be the main context of the moral theologian. Although it helps address the pastoral issues, it does not facilitate the engagement with many social issues. Similarly, moral theology needs to enter into a deeper and more open dialogue with the cultures and religions of India. It is also necessary that moral theologians become more courageous enough to 'read the signs of the times' and learn from them, instead of identifying his/her role merely as a commentator of the texts given. In the changed socio-political and economic context, preferential option for the poor has become a more challenging task. Moral theologians should strive for ensuring justice in the internal structures of the Church, and to work towards a more gender-just Church. Since there are two Eastern rites in India, the task of integrating Eastern perspectives into moral theological reflection is also important for further development and renewal of moral theology in India.

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Keywords: Moral Theology in India, Option for the Poor, Role of Moral Theologian, Dialogue, Dialogue with Cultures and Religions, Gender Justice, Eastern Moral Theology, Justice

Introduction

As in other areas of theology, the Second Vatican Council initiated radical and far-reaching renewal of moral theology. On the one hand, direct treatment of moral theology in the Council was very brief, as we find in OT, 16. However, a number of moral issues were dealt with in *Gaudium et Spes* and other documents. Decades following the Council witnessed tremendous developments in moral theology, in its various branches.

Ethical issues are often the most debated issues in the world today, and Catholic theology is one of the most active partners in this debate. Even within the Catholic Church, ethical issues are often the bone of contention. Moral theology is one of the most developing branches in theology. We can say that this is the “Age of Ethics” in theology. This can be found in the secular field as well. Secular ethics has developed a lot in the recent decades.

Development of moral theology is not confined to any particular country or continent. Indian subcontinent is not an exception to it. In the years after the Council, Indian moral theologians have considerably contributed to the development of moral theology. Works by Indian moral theologians like George V. Lobo,¹ Felix Podimattam,² Thomas Srampickal,³ S. Arokiasamy⁴ and so on are noteworthy. Whereas formerly moral theology was taught by canonists, and moral theology was considered as an ancillary subject of canon law in the past, a number of moral theologians have occupied teaching position in the theological faculties and institutions in India, and many of them enthusiastically contribute to the development of moral theology through their publications. As far as

¹Especially his *Christian Living according to Vatican II*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1982.

²Felix Podimattam has extensively written on almost all areas of moral theology, publishing more than 135 books, and a number of articles. *Relativity of Natural Law in the Renewal of Moral Theology; Masturbation: A Difficult Problem in Chastity; The Saga of Sex; Responsible Parenthood; Sexual Morality in the Third Millennium; The Ten Commandments in the Law of Christ (20 Volumes)* are some of his works.

³Beginning with *Concept of Conscience*, Innsbruck, 1976, Thomas Srampickal has contributed many books and articles.

⁴For example, S. Arokiasamy, ed., *Liberation in Asia: Theological Perspectives*, Delhi, 1987.

the opportunity for specialization in moral theology is concerned, the Faculty of Theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, offers Licentiate and Doctorate in moral theology. Ten batches have completed their Licentiate in moral theology and many are undergoing doctoral studies in moral theology.

In this paper, I shall refer to some of the contributions of Indian moral theologians after the Council. Evidently, I don't intend to give an exhaustive list. I am also aware of the contribution that many moral theologians have made through their dedicated service as teachers, though some of them might not have published many works. Moreover, the main attempt in this article is to identify a few areas of concern for the further development of moral theology in India.

1. Seminary: The Context of Moral Theological Reflection

We know that from the very beginning moral theology was developed in relation to the sacrament of penance/reconciliation. The role of the moral theologian was often confined to the seminary, namely, training future priests for exercising the sacrament of penance, and to deal with various moral issues in the pastoral context. Moral theologian was considered as an expert 'judge' in moral matters — judging right and wrong, discerning or identifying when something becomes a sin. Thus, he was supposed to equip the priests in their ministry of 'binding and loosing' so as to ensure a smooth entry of souls into the heaven. Spiritual, sacramental, ecclesial and social aspects of life were left to other branches of theology. Moreover, sin was mainly understood in terms of personal sin alone, without taking into consideration its social and structural dimensions.

The seminary continues to be the major arena of the Indian moral theologian. Usually, all the students, or the vast majority of them are clerical students or religious, whose main interest in studying moral theology is to equip themselves with the skills of discerning sins and 'judging' the penitents in the role of the confessor, or to have readymade answers for the various situations that they have to face in the pastoral life. Often, many look for 'yes' or 'no' answers to moral issues. Many are not so much interested in understanding the complexities that people face in the decision making process in their day-to-day life, or to learn as to how to assist the faithful to become capable of making proper decisions as mature grown up Christians. In short, not only that moral theology is confined to the seminary

context, but its scope is primarily understood in terms of equipping the future 'judges' in the confessional.

Such a context encourages the moral theologian to limit his/her moral theological reflection to the safe and secure environment of the seminary, and does not challenge him/her to engage the changing and challenging situations of life and to respond to them creatively. There is no doubt that theological studies, especially the study of moral theology, should equip the future priests with the necessary skills for their pastoral ministry, particularly in the confessional. However, is it the only role of moral theology today, especially in a society that is becoming more and more secular? This question is particularly pertinent in a country like India, where the Christians are a small minority. The Christian is called not only to work for his/her own faith community, but above all for the realization of the Kingdom of God, where everyone is a child of God, and hence a brother or sister belonging to the same family.

This does not mean that the Indian moral theologians haven't engaged with various issues that the society faces. Indian moral theologians have attempted to make moral theology more contextual, reflecting upon the social-structural dimensions of morality, as well as to engage with the wider society in their moral reflections. For example, S. Arokiasamy has written on various forms of injustice that exist in the Indian society, especially from Dalit and Sabaltern Perspectives. He has emphasised the significance of socio-political and economic liberation in the ethical discourse in the Indian context. Hormis Mynatty has similarly highlighted the social-structural dimensions of sin.⁵ John Kusumalayam⁶ and Koodapuzha⁷ have dealt with human rights issues. Srampickal's attempt to present the Christian concept of justice, simultaneously engaging in dialogue with the civil law is noteworthy.⁸ Recently, there have been many contributions from

⁵Hormis Mynatty, *Proposals for a Comprehensive Moral Methodology*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2008.

⁶John Kusumalayam, *Human Rights: Individual or/and Group Rights?* Mumbai: St Paul's, 2008.

⁷Jose Koodapuzha, *Free in Church: A Ecclesio-Moral Discussion on Religious Freedom*, Kunnoth: Good Shepherd Major Seminary, 2011; *Human Dignity in the Teachings of Vatican II*, Kottayam: OIRISI, 1998.

⁸Thomas Srampickal and Joji Chirayil, *To Act Justly and Deal Honestly: A Course in Justice and Truthfulness for Undergraduates in Theology*, Thrissur: Marymatha Publications, 2008.

Indian moral theologians in the field of bioethics.⁹ Thomas Kalam's contribution in this field is remarkable. He taught medical ethics at St John's Medical College, Bangalore for more than two decades and was instrumental in designing the syllabus for the course on medical ethics for the medical students, which became a model for many other medical schools in India. Moreover, when he was the Director of St John's Medical College, he took initiatives to train doctors in medical ethics rooted in the Christian vision, but at the same time conversing with the developments in medical science and healthcare. Some of the moral theologians are also working in the Institutional Ethics Committees of medical colleges and other medical institutions. In the area of Sexual ethics and family, there are many contributions. Besides Felix Podimattam, who has extensively written on various issues in sexual and marriage ethics, many others have contributed in this field.¹⁰ Thomas Kalam was a member of the committee that prepared the text book on sex education for the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and the chapters on sexuality were prepared by him. It is an example of presenting the concept of sexuality and the values involved in a multi-religious, multi-cultural context, rooted in the Christian vision.¹¹

Moreover, the Association of Moral Theologians of India has taken up as themes many socio-political and cultural issues for its annual meetings.¹² For example, the topic of discussion for one of the first meetings of the Association was Social Sin (1988). Many other themes pertinent to the Indian context, such as economic liberalization, option for the poor, ecological ethics, globalization, media ethics,

⁹For example, Lucose Chamakala, *The Sanctity of Life vs. Quality of Life*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2005; Scaria Kanniyakonil, *Towards an Ethical Paradigm of Charity with Proportionality*, Leuven, 2002; S. Kanniyakonil, *Fundamentals of Bio-ethics*, Kottayam: OIRISI, 2007.

¹⁰Works on marriage and sexuality by Indian moral theologians include: Joseph A. Fonseca, *Marriage in India in a Christian Perspective: A Historical-Social-Theological Investigation*, Bangalore: Redemptorist Publications in India, 1988; Maria Michael Peters, CPPS, *The Family Moral Values in Valmiki Ramayana and in the Teachings of the Catholic Church: A Comparative Study* (Doctoral Dissertation, Pontifical St Thomas University), Roma, 2011; Shaji George Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2007.

¹¹Thomas Kalam, *Understanding Man and Woman, Block 2: Sexual Health Education, Basics of Family Education*, New Delhi, 2001.

¹²I would like to acknowledge the commendable service that Clement Campos rendered to the Association as its secretary for many years. At present he is its president. Clement Campos has also published many articles on various ethical issues.

violence and terrorism, Indian politics and ethics, moral problems of the youth, moral theologian in the public square, family, etc., were taken up as themes for these annual meetings.¹³ These meetings might have given the members an orientation to engage with the wider society in their moral theological reflections. The impact of these meetings and discussions could have been much greater, if the papers of these meetings would have been regularly published.¹⁴

Of the annual meetings of the Moral Theology Association, I would like to particularly refer to the 2010 meeting, which had the theme, "Doing Ethics in the Public Square: A Christian Approach." This theme was chosen due to the growing awareness that, "Doing ethics in the public square is not an easy task in the Indian society," especially in the pluralistic context of India. Ethical approaches and value systems differ from culture to culture and religion to religion. Indian moral theologians face more acutely the burning question, "When the secular approach does not share Christian values how we focus on the certain directive principles for doing ethics in the public square?"¹⁵

In the wake of the increasing number of violence against women, Streevani, Pune, an organisation for Women's rights led by Julie George, SSpS, of the Holy Spirit sisters, organised a conference in 2013 to call attention to the need of increasing consciousness in the Church and society to collectively act against the violence on women. Although it was not particularly an initiative from an organisation of moral theologians, a few moral theologians also joined for the conference and presented papers.¹⁶ The Department of Moral Theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, similarly organised a

¹³For a more detailed account of the evolution and development of the Association of Moral Theologians of India, see, Thomas Srampickal, "Moral Theology in India: An Historical Overview," in Scaria Kanniyakonil, ed., *New Horizons in Christian Ethics: Reflections from India*, Bangalore: ATC Publications, 2014, 11-42, at 38-42.

¹⁴Although the Association has completed twenty five years of its existence, so far, papers of only three meetings have been published: 1. George V. Lobo, Soosai Arokiasamy and Felix Podimattam, *Social Sin: Its Challenges to Christian Life*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1991; 2. Scaria Kanniyakonil, ed., "Doing Ethics in the Public Square: A Christian Approach," *Dhyana: Journal of Religion and Spirituality* (Special Issue) 11 (2011); 3. Scaria Kanniyakonil, ed., *New Horizons in Christian Ethics: Reflections from India*, Bangalore: ATC Publications, 2014.

¹⁵Scaria Kanniyakonil, "Editorial," "Doing Ethics in the Public Square: A Christian Approach," *Dhyana: Journal of Religion and Spirituality* (Special Issue) 11 (2011) 3.

¹⁶The proceedings of this conference are published in Varghese Thekkanath, SG and Julie George, SSpS, ed., *Living Nirbhaya: Pathways to Violence Free Church and Society*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2014.

national level seminar on "Gender Justice in the Church and Society," (17-20 July 2014) to respond to the spiralling cases of violence and injustice against women. Although it was organised as the second national seminar on "Moral Theology in India Today," not only moral theologians, but also researchers and activists from different areas participated in the seminar, thus facilitating collective reflection and action, and a more creative dialogue between moral theologians and the wider society. Surely, there are many such initiatives.

In spite of all these, I think that moral theology is still confined to the seminary context, at least to a great extent. For example, when the whole nation was involved in the fight against corruption, many moral theologians did not have anything to say about it. Or, when millions of people protested against the brutal rape and killing of "Nirbhaya", Indian moral theology or Indian Church in general, did not have much in particular to say. This cold response or indifference was severely criticised by many Catholics themselves. Evidently, we do not approve of such atrocities. At the same time, our response to such burning issues which profoundly disturb the society, and to which society at a large vociferously respond, is often inaudible. We may ask whether our response will be heard as we are a small minority, but at the same time we are aware of the fact that the Church's role and importance in the society is significant in spite of its minority status.

Similarly, the response to autocratic tendencies and the violation of the principles of democracy in recent times, attempts to deny freedom of expression, silencing of human rights organisations and activists, ecological issues,¹⁷ etc. do not get ample attention of moral theology. I am not arguing that a moral theologian should necessarily become an activist. At the same time, if such issues which affect the day-to-day life of the people are not perceived as serious ethical issues and hence subjects of ethical reflection, it may raise doubts about the role and function of moral theology itself.

Have the safe havens of the seminary made us insensitive to the 'griefs' and pains of the ordinary people, especially of the poor? Or, perhaps we are not trained to dialogue with the wider society and various ethical issues the society faces? Or, we are not interested in

¹⁷However, I do not ignore the recent excellent work by Saji Mathew Kanayankal, CST, *Beyond Human Dominion: Ecotheology of Creation & Sabbath*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2012. He has also contributed a few articles on ecological issues.

developing skills and language for such a dialogue? Or, we do not consider it as our field of work?

2. Dialogue with the Cultures and Religions of India

Vatican II has emphasised the need of dialogue with the cultures and religions. FABC has emphasised the need of triple dialogue in Asia, namely, dialogue with religions, cultures and the poor.¹⁸ Following Vatican II, Indian theologians showed great enthusiasm in developing a theology of religions. Many interreligious dialogue centres and Ashrams were established, many theologians and philosophers specialised in interreligious studies, and courses in interreligious theology were introduced in the seminaries. Gradually this enthusiasm subsided, perhaps mainly due to excessive control and scepticism from various quarters. In recent years we find that this enthusiasm is rekindled.¹⁹

It may be pertinent to evaluate the influence of 'dialogue' and interreligious theology on moral theology. I feel that moral theology may be the branch of theology least influenced by the theology of religions, or least engaging in dialogue with other religions. There have been a few attempts to understand the moral systems of other religions, but often the tendency is to compare other systems with the Catholic understanding of morality, and to evaluate them, rather than entering into a fruitful dialogue. We do not have a clear idea of the implications of interreligious dialogue for moral theology. Rather, we do not know whether in matters of morality any dialogue is possible. Moral theologians face serious obstacles for a fruitful dialogue with other religious traditions:

1. Concepts like 'moral absolutes', 'intrinsic evil', etc. have to be understood in such a way that dialogue and discussion with other religions is still possible. The difficulty is not with these concepts, but what all things should be considered, for example, as intrinsically evil.

2. We may think that the concept of natural law helps us enter into a fruitful dialogue with other religions and cultures. However, that

¹⁸FABC's call for dialogue can be seen from its First Plenary Assembly itself. The importance of triple dialogue is explicitly re-emphasised in its Fifth and Sixth Plenary Assemblies: Franz-Josef Eilers, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Vol. 2, 2.

¹⁹For example, in the last few years, *Asian Horizons* dedicated three issues for the discussion on interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions and the response from scholars was very enthusiastic: Vol. 5, 1 & 2 (2011): "Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*, art., 72"; Vol. 8, 3 (2014): "After 50 Years: Dialogue with Other Churches; Dialogue with Religions". There are also many other articles published in other issues.

natural law is historical and cultural is resisted at least by some prominent schools. This makes genuine dialogue difficult. The use of natural law principle should not be means of asserting the superiority of Catholic morality, that is, as if we have the best understanding of the natural law. In his natural law theory Thomas Aquinas has said that, when it comes to the application of natural law to concrete issues, differences of opinion are possible. At the same time, the application of natural law even to concrete issues is often argued with claims of certainty and absoluteness, leaving not much space for dialogue. Hence, if dialogue is to be facilitated, a redefinition of the natural law theory and its role and function are necessary.

3. There are many issues in Catholic moral theology which are not open to discussion. Particularly, many issues in sexual ethics and bioethics seem to belong to this category. As a result, moral theologians are hesitant to enter into open discussion and dialogue. This may be a hindrance to initiatives in dialogue.

There may be radical differences in the moral vision. For example, the Christian vision conceives every human being as equal in dignity, as everyone is a child of God. Caste system, for example, does not agree with this basic Christian vision. Even after dialogue we may have to differ on many points. That is expected of dialogue — dialogue does not mean that we have to lose our identity or our unique vision and convictions. At the same time, a basic openness to understand the vision of others and its value and uniqueness is necessary for dialogue. In concrete issues, we may still differ after dialogue. But, to understand the basic moral vision of others and its value, we have to be open to others with sincerity. As Edmund Chia points out, “How the various religions engage with and encounter one another will to a great extent determine the future of not only religions in general but of the human community as well.”²⁰ A greater openness to other religions and other cultures seems to be necessary for the further development of moral theology in India.

3. The Role of Moral Theologian

Often, the moral theologian is supposed to consider himself as a defender of the magisterium. That is, for many moral theologians, the only role that she/he has to play is to defend the teaching of the magisterium, to explain it to the public. Especially in the seminary context, many appear to think that the moral theologian’s role is that

²⁰Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, “Sharing the Joy of the Gospel in Asia through Dialogue,” *Asian Horizons* 8, 3 (2014) 528.

of a commentator, explaining the official teaching, defending it, and making students convinced of it. Although Vatican II has shown the need of considering human experience a source for theological reflection, attempts to enter into dialogue with human experience and to critically evaluate the teachings in light of human experience are not encouraged much. Rather than facilitating critical consciousness to form mature conscience, what is encouraged is uncritical defence of the teaching and blind obedience.

Take for example, the public debate on homosexuality, transgender and pre-marital sex, or issues related to beginning of life and end of life, following a few court judgements. Interventions of moral theologians have been few except for defending the official positions. Such vigorous arguments do not even reflect the open debates going within the universal Catholic Church, or the compassionate approach that Pope Francis himself has taken. Informal discussions and personal sharing indicate that all moral theologians do not subscribe to rigid positions on these issues, but many believe it more prudent to avoid expressing their opinions and ideas. Surely, the Catholic Church has its evaluation of these issues based on its value consciousness and vision of life. However, an atmosphere that does not facilitate dialogue does not help us learn from life experience of others and does not allow us to learn from critically and creatively reflecting on our own vision and experience.

This may also lead us to the question why in the decades after the Council many prominent theologians haven't come up. It does not mean that there were not many talented theologians. But, it seems that many became reluctant to express their ideas openly. It is pertinent to ask how many moral theologians of reputation have emerged during the past few decades. What happened to liberation theology or interreligious theology or other such initiatives and public disciplining of many Catholic theologians might have created an atmosphere of fear in theological circles. The same can be said about theologians who differed from the position of *Humanae Vitae*, or who were branded as 'proportionalists'. For example, many doubt whether the response of Indian moral theologians or the Indian Church as a whole to *Humanae Vitae* reflected the Indian reality.²¹

²¹Here I would like to mention a talk on "Catholic Church's Teaching on Family: Moral Theological and Pastoral Perspectives," by Thomas Kalam to the CBCI general body meeting in 1996. In his paper he shows the wide gap between the teaching of the Church regarding family planning and the actual practice of the faithful. He also

Any community needs discipline, and discipline requires obedience as well. But, obedience does not always mean blind obedience. And, though obedience is an important Christian virtue, it cannot be considered the only virtue or even the most important virtue. Faith is entrusted to the whole Christian community and each one has his/her unique role to play, complementing each other, respecting the unique role and vocation of each one. Fidelity is first of all to the Word of God, lived and experienced in the community. Moral theologian, while respecting the unique role of the teaching authority, should also try to be faithful to his vocation of interpreting the "signs of the times" in light of the revelation and its understanding in the tradition, as well as in light of human experience, and in dialogue with the teaching authority. Differences in understanding call for mutual listening and discernment together. This discernment of the unique vocation is needed for further development of moral theology.

4. Preferential Option for the Poor

After independence (1947), India had adopted a semi-socialist economic policy. In 1991, a new economic policy of liberalization was adopted, leading to more privatization and globalization. The positive effects of this new policy are seen in increase in GDP growth rate. India is often presented as one of the growing economic powers. It is a member of the G 20 and of BRICS. Besides, it is predicted that by 2030 India may become the second largest economy in the world and by 2050 the largest. Does it mean that poverty is no more a problem for India? The percentage of people living below the poverty line may give an idea of the continuing poverty and growing disparity. According to the Reserve Bank of India statistics, the percentage of those below the poverty line was 35.97 in 1993-94, 26.10 in 1999-2000 and 21.80 (based on the MRP=Mixed Recall Period) and 27.50 (based on the URP=Uniform Recall Period).²² The statistical

argues that, "Therefore it would be beneficial and relevant to declare unequivocally to the world at large that the Church considers some methods of family planning to be ethical and others to be unethical, not because the former are 'natural' and the latter are 'artificial,' but *because the some methods are more conducive for 'salvation' 'fullness of life' 'joy' in marital life.*" But, such open discussions on the issue can be found only very rarely. The talk was subsequently published: Thomas Kalam, "Population and Human Development," *Word and Worship* 29, 2 (March-April 1996) 43-63.

²²Reserve Bank of India, Table 162: Number and Percentage of Population below Poverty Line, <http://www.rbi.org.in/scripts/PublicationsView.aspx?id=13750>

data provided by different agencies do not agree with each other, and the criteria for deciding the poverty line is varied and confusing. The income criterion to determine the poverty line in India is based on 2004-05 data where it is stated that all India level minimum income for rural and urban areas for a person per month should be Rs. 356.30 and Rs.538.60 respectively [*1 US \$ is about 63 Indian rupees at present, but was much lower before*].²³ However, according to a 2005 World Bank estimate, 41.6% of the total Indian population falls below the international poverty line of US\$ 1.25 a day.²⁴ Recently, the criterion to define the poverty line resulted in a heated debate. The Indian Planning Commission's affidavit to the Supreme Court of India states that adjusting for inflation, the poverty line for an urban person is Rs 32.5 per day per person and for a rural person it is Rs 29.3 per day per person. This raised an outcry from many. [Those who live in a city like Bangalore may wonder how with Rs 32.5 someone can survive!]. Based on these calculations of poverty line, the Planning Commission estimates that there are 407.4 million persons below the poverty line in 2010-11.²⁵ In calculating the poverty line, political interests also play with the statistical data provided. For example, in his paper, "Transcending the Washington View of Development,"²⁶ Thomas Pogge shows how the official poverty statistics issued by the World Bank regarding the schedule towards achieving the first Millennium

²³Shankar Chatterjee, "Estimation of Rural Poverty: A Discussion with Reference to India," Paper presented at WYE City Group on Rural Development and Agriculture Household Income, at FAO Headquarters, Rome, June 11-12, 2009, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CDcQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fao.org%2Ffileadmin%2Ftemplates%2Fess%2Fpages%2Frural%2Fwye_city_group%2F2009%2Fpaper_3_1_chatterjee_ITALY.doc&ei=H-J5T_SDK4j3rQfu7qmrDQ&usq=AFQjCNHnFqLT7P45OuoyjHzFdcBPCAjTxA. Also, Udit Misra, "India's Poverty Estimates: Don't Just Get Outraged, Understand Them!" <http://forbesindia.com/blog/economy-policy/indias-poverty-estimates-dont-just-get-outraged-understand-them/>

²⁴<http://www.worldbank.org.in/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/INDIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21880725~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:295584,00.html>

²⁵Kirit Parikh, "The Poverty Line Debate," *Hindustan Times*, (2 April 2012): <http://www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/ColumnsOthers/The-poverty-line-debate/Article1-752547.aspx>, accessed on 2nd April, 2012. Refer also, Government of India Planning Commission, "Press Note on Poverty Estimate, 2009-10," (19 March 2012), http://planningcommission.nic.in/news/press_pov1903.pdf

²⁶Thomas Pogge, "Transcending the Washington View of Development," in *Towards a Strong Global Economic System: Revealing the Logic of Gratuitousness in the Market Economy*, ed. Saju Chackalackal, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2013, 73-101.

Development Goal (MDG1) which claims that poverty has been reduced, does not reflect the reality. According to him, on the contrary, poverty and undernourishment has only increased.²⁷ Even if we take the lowest figures given, it is clear that in India there are more than 400 million people living below the poverty line. Let us also remember that the 'poverty line' is practically the line of starvation! Moreover, think of the millions of people who are not included in the 'below poverty line' just because they earn 50 paise or 1 rupee more!

Poverty has existed in India even before the onset of liberalization and globalization. But, with globalization there is a widening gap between the poor and the rich. Similarly, the claim that globalization creates more jobs is not accepted by many. It is pointed out that in recent years the number of unemployed persons has increased.²⁸ Agricultural sectors have suffered a lot due to globalization. The agricultural land of small farmers is taken to create Special Economic Zones (SEZ), without giving them sufficient compensation and without rehabilitating them. Though in places like Nandigram²⁹ in West Bengal the farmers have succeeded to resist forceful acquisition of their land, in many other places they have failed. Since subsidies are reduced or removed, many are unable to continue farming. Take for example, the thousands of farmers who committed suicide in the last few years. It is said that in the state of Gujarat alone, the state which is often presented as the model of development, more than 16000 farmers committed suicide in the last 10 years.³⁰ Add to this the thousands of farmers who committed suicide in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra and even in Kerala which is considered to be rather developed. Recent reports from Maharashtra show that in the current year, the situation has even worsened.

²⁷Thomas Pogge, "Transcending the Washington View of Development," 84-86.

²⁸http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-06-23/india/40146190_1_urban-india-urban-women-rural-women

²⁹At Nandigram in West Bengal, the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM) led government decided to expropriate 10000 acres (40km²) of land from the farmers for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to be developed by the Indonesian based Salim Group for industrialization. This was opposed by the farmers and this led to widespread violence and killing and rape of many by the police and allegedly by the CPIM party workers in March 2007. Finally the government was forced to abandon the project. It may be paradoxical that the CPIM, who claims to be protectors of farmers, acted against the farmers and let loose violence on them. Eventually, the CPIM which ruled West Bengal for about three decades, lost the assembly election in 2011.

³⁰Mallika Sarabhai, "Modi and His Mayajaal," *The Week*, October 30, 2011, 98.

Living in a country where at least 30% of people live below poverty line [rather starvation line!], moral theologians in India need to keep this preferential option for the poor clearly in his/her mind. This is particularly important as economic liberalization and market-oriented economy, and many government policies are making the life of the poor more and more unbearable. Without doubt, the Indian Church has been committed to serve the poor. Liberation theology has had its impact on Indian theologians as well. As already mentioned, moral theologians have written on justice and various socio-economic issues. In spite of all these, it seems that the poor, the marginalized, the discriminated need to occupy much more space in moral theological reflection in India. The problems that the poor face, government policies that affect the life of the poor, market economy that is driven by the rich and the powerful, etc. do not get the keen attention of the moral theologian, compared to various issues in sexual ethics and bioethics.

This is particularly important due to the changes that have taken place in education and healthcare sectors, two main areas of Christian ministry in India. Due to privatization, many business groups have entered these areas, turning them into big business concerns. On the one hand, the Church has to compete with these business groups, on the other it has to keep these as ministries, especially to serve the less privileged and the marginalised. Eventually, many of the educational and healthcare institutions of the Church have become 'big' institutions, practically inaccessible to the poor. We continue to claim that we cater to the needs to the poor, but it is to be examined how many poor can approach us today. As the institutions of the Church become bigger, it is easier that we forget the concerns of the poor, and become more concerned about protecting the interests of our 'big' institutions. When the poor are distanced from us, directly or indirectly, we become alienated from them, and we distance ourselves from Christ who became poor. It is pertinent to listen to Pope Francis, who has been frequently arguing for the preferential option for the poor. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis speaks against an economy of exclusion, against an idolatry of money, against the "globalization of indifference." He clearly states that the Church can never neglect the poor: "Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected

members.”³¹ He repeats the importance of taking care of the poor: “Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down...”³² Ethical reflections in India should have this preferential option for the poor, especially, reminding the Church herself of her commitment to the poor.

5. Justice within the Structures of the Church

Ensuring justice is one of the basic concerns of moral theology. However, this ‘thirst for justice’ should not be applicable only to the society outside the Church. Justice has to be ensured, first of all, within the Church. If the Church’s commitment for justice has to be convincing and effective, justice has to be ensured within the Church.

In his book *The Future Church*, John L. Allen, Jr. underscores that only institutions which are conscientious about public accountability will survive in future.³³ He has repeated this idea in many of his articles. In the society there is a more profound awareness of justice, of the rights and duties of every person, and of personal dignity. People are aware of their right to have clear and accurate information. Hence, it is not enough that we are just, but we have to convince others that we are just.

One of the accusations levelled against the Church in the wake of sexual abuse of minors by the clergy is that the Church failed to ensure justice in its own structures, and that there was blatant abuse of power, not only from the part of the culprits, but also from the part of the hierarchy, to cover up the cases. Many would agree that the Church needs greater openness and accountability — in its administration, policies, financial matters, etc. Transparency, accountability and ensuring of justice in the internal structures is not merely a question of the style of administration, but an ethical question. Institutions of the Church are not ‘owned’ by the hierarchy or the religious congregations to serve others, but they are only

³¹Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 186.

³²Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 207.

³³John L. Allen, Jr., *The Future Church. How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009); John L. Allen, Jr., “A Global Case for Good Government in the Church,” in *National Catholic Reporter*, 25-06-2010, www.ncronline.org, accessed on 11-07-2010.

'entrusted' to them on behalf of the community. That is, they are not 'owners' but only caretakers, and hence they have to be accountable to the community.

6. A More Gender-Just Church

Despite the tremendous progress achieved towards actualizing equality of man and woman, in the real life of the Church and society discrimination against women continues. Women is viewed as dependent on men. Woman's personality, her worth is defined in terms of her relationship with men — as daughter, as wife, as mother. Apart from this, often it seems that, she is not considered to have a personality or value. Though changes begin to be visible, this is the predominant perspective on women, especially in countries like India.

I have mentioned above the increasing cases of violence against women in India and the lack of adequate response from moral theologians. But, that is not the only area inviting the attention of moral theologians. In the family, though changes have taken place, in general, only the husband is considered as the head.³⁴ Besides, many practices of discrimination against women continue in societies like India. Dowry is a typical example of such practices. Dowry turns marriage into a union between a superior and an inferior partner.³⁵ Even decades after marriage, the wife's real family is that of her parents. Domestic violence, female foeticide,³⁶ etc. are expressions of the continuing inequality that women experience in the family. The theology of marriage of the Church hasn't been effective enough to create the awareness that marriage is a partnership of equals. Marriage preparation courses also are often silent on this.

³⁴It may be interesting to note that even today the 'headship' of the husband is supported with patriarchal interpretations of the symbolism of Christ and Church relationship as found in Eph 5:22-33.

³⁵For a detailed discussion on dowry and its implications for marriage and family life, see Shaji George Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," in Linda Hogan and A.E. Orobator, ed., *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church*, Maryknoll, New York, 2014, 108-122, and A. Vimal Kumar, MMI, Bala Kiran Vannekuty, Joseph Thambi Gone, M.R. Sharma and Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, "The Impact of Dowry System in the Christian Communities: Report of the Field Study Conducted in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu," *Asian Horizons* 7, 2 (2013) 357-375.

³⁶For details on female foeticide, see John Karuvelil, "Dignity of Women and Elective Abortions in India: An Ethical Reflection," in Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., *Moral Theology in India Today: The DVK National Workshop on Moral Theology*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2013, 589-626.

Although the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) declared a "Gender Policy" in 2010,³⁷ it seems that many have not yet heard of such a document. Discrimination on the basis of gender, is not merely an ecclesiological issue, but is basically an issue of justice. 'Gender injustice' does not seem to have occupied sufficient space in the moral considerations of moral theologians in India. Faculties that include courses on gender or gender justice or feminist theology are not many. But, it is also important that the Church as a whole becomes more conscious of the different forms of discrimination against women existing in its own structures. Any form of discrimination on the basis of gender justifies other forms of discrimination and violence based on gender, and that becomes a violation of the basic principle of justice.

To become more contextual and relevant, it is important that moral theological reflections take more seriously various forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, and various forms of violence against women existing in the Indian society. Injustice, in any form, and against anyone, is injustice against humanity, and hence incompatible with the Christian values.

7. Eastern Perspectives

Indian Catholic Church is a communion of three Churches — Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and the Latin Churches. The first two belong to the Eastern tradition, and trace their origin to the first century, from St Thomas the Apostle. In spite of this long tradition, the Eastern perspectives of moral life are not yet developed in India, or they have become extant. Almost all moral theologians in the two Eastern Churches had their moral theological formation, and hence, the basis for their moral theological reflections, in the Latin theological tradition. It has to be acknowledged that the renowned institutions have provided them with systematic training in moral theological reflection. At the same time, it is necessary that they begin to integrate this knowledge to the tradition of their Eastern Churches. For example, traditionally, the Church of St Thomas (Syro-Malabar) was known as "Mar Thoma Margam" (The Way of St Thomas), indicating Christianity as a "way of life." The Christian was called, "Margavasi" (one who lives/walks in the way). That is, the identity and uniqueness of a Christian is understood in terms of his/her moral life. However, such profound In recent years there have been a

³⁷Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India* (2010), New Delhi: CBCI Commission for Women, 2009.

few attempts to develop Eastern perspectives in moral theology.³⁸ At the same time, it seems that greater attention is needed in this area. A moral theology that is integrated into the liturgical and ecclesial life of the Eastern Churches will considerably enhance the development of moral theology as a whole.

Concluding Remarks

In spite of the limitations of working in a religion that is a small minority in the country, and of working in a multi-cultural, multi-religious context, Indian moral theologians try to respond to the call for renewal. While acknowledging and appreciating the contributions made, Indian moral theologians should have the determination and the courage to go forward, responding to the 'signs of the times', entering into active conversation with other religions and cultures and with the civil society. Moral theologian must constantly learn from 'human experience', especially from the 'griefs' and sufferings of the poor and the marginalised. Fidelity to Jesus will prompt him/her to strive for a just Church and a just society, so as to realize the Kingdom of God.

³⁸Some of the works in this direction: Paulachan Kochappilly, CMI, *Celebrative Ethics. Ecological Issues in the Light of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, Dharmaram Publications: Bangalore, 1999; Paulachan Kochappilly, CMI, *Life in Christ: Eastern Perspectives on Christian Ethics*, Dharmaram Publications: Bangalore, 2010; Dominic Vechoor, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation: Learning from the East and the West*, Kottayam: OIRISI, 2014.