

GOSPEL: BLESSING TO CULTURES

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Abstract

The primary invitation of God to the whole of creation is to be in a blessed and happy state of existence. This primeval joy and happiness ordered by God was ruptured by human sin which shook the harmonious existence among the three matrices of reality: God, humans and the cosmos. But God entered into human history by incarnating as a cultural person to lead creation back to its original blessedness. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the divinely-devised blue print to assist humans in this regard. The article shows how cultures that accept the Biblical world view achieve a better record of value consciousness as well as progress in economic and scientific pursuits.

Key words: Bible, Gospel, incarnation, blessing, human dignity, integration, hope, liberation, option for the poor, judicial process, historical sense.

1. Introduction

*“The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.”*¹ With these words, Pope Francis begins his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. The blessings of the Gospel are for all people, all cultures; no one excluded.² This is what the angels proclaimed to the shepherds in Bethlehem, *“Do not be afraid, I bring you*

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¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), 1.

² EG 3.

good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Lk 2:10).³ This article is a humble attempt at highlighting the potential of the Gospel of Jesus to become a blessing for all cultures or the entire humanity.

2. Creation: The Primary Blessing

Creation was the first instance of blessing from God to all. Creation was not a chance event but something planned and willed by the eternal God. He created everything through his Word. Everything that exist enjoy a degree of dignity because they have been brought into existence by the divine intelligence of the creator God. It gave birth to a harmonious divine-human-cosmic relationship.⁴ But God gave humans a special, unique and exclusive dignity by creating them in his image and likeness and appointing them stewards of everything else. But the sinfulness of humanity caused fissures in this harmonious divine-human-cosmic relationship. Since then, an element of struggle entered into their life. Henceforth, humans had to struggle with reality to retrieve their lost paradise. The Bible puts it symbolically: humans have to toil upon the earth that would produce thorns and thistles: symbolic of the struggle they will have to undergo by way of hard work and explorations in order to retrieve what they lost. It means that not only agriculture and gardening, but, by extension, science, technology, and concerns of culture in general fall within the framework of the mission entrusted to man and woman by God.⁵

The Bible portrays this creator, the transcendent God, as a God of compassion. His compassion led him to involve himself in the struggles of human beings to win back their lost blessedness.⁶ As part of this pedagogy, he selected a people (Gen 12: 1-5; Deut 7: 6) and gave them laws 'so great such as no other nations had' (Deut 4: 8). He revealed himself progressively to them through theophanies, signs, symbols and prophets⁷ and led them in their struggles so that the whole world would be blessed through them. His intervention to liberate the people of Israel from the culture of slavery of the mighty

³ EG 23.

⁴ P. Joseph Titus, "God-Man-Nature: Trio in the Creation Accounts (Gen 1-3)," in *Jeevadhara* LIII/314 (2023), 7.

⁵ P. Joseph Titus, "God-Man-Nature: Trio in the Creation Accounts (Gen 1-3)," 19.

⁶ *The New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*, London: Authentic Books, 2009, 799.

⁷ Anto Karokaran, "Faith and Culture: Individual Conversions or Evangelization at the Level of Totality?" in Jacob Kavunkal, F. Hrangkhuma (eds), *Christ and Cultures*, Bombay: St. Paul's Publications, 1994, 64.

Pharaoh of Egypt in order to lead them to the Promised Land was both an event and a symbol in this perspective. On the one hand, it was a great life changing experience for Israelites, the constant reference point to turn back to Yahweh, their true liberator: *"I am Yahweh, your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"* (Ex 20: 2).⁸ On the other, this event was symbolic of the final blessedness or salvation that humans will attain through the redemptive mission of Jesus.

But the key to all the blessings that were going to visit the earth through the chosen people of God was to be the offspring of Abraham. God promised that through the offspring of Abraham, the earth would be blessed (Gen 22: 18). This promise made to Abraham made the vague promise in Gen 3: 15, which is considered as the first hint of a saviour for mankind, more specific.⁹ Paul confirms it saying that the offspring of whom Genesis speaks is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God (Gal 3: 16). Paul says, *"The fulfilment of God's promise is found in the person of Jesus Christ."*¹⁰ Thus, the final phase of redemption was to be effected through the intervention of Jesus, Son of God, in human history.

3. Incarnation and the Gospel

Incarnation of Jesus was the most decisive phase in the history of God's intervention with humanity to regain their lost blessedness. Jesus lived as a cultural person, a Jewish person, participating in all that marked the identity of a Jewish person.¹¹ The Gospel is the result of this encounter of Jesus with the Greco-Judean culture in which he wanted to present the original Biblical message of salvation and redemption. The Jewish religious culture had petrified into a religion of the Law of Moses. A strong religious cult based on animal sacrifice led by the priestly class had bypassed the noble ideals of worship proclaimed by God through the prophets, who advocated for an ethically oriented worship that promotes a life of justice and

⁸ Clodovis Boff and George V. Pixley, *The Bible, the Church, and the Poor*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986, 18.

⁹ *The New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*, 63.

¹⁰ Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "The Land Flowing with Milk and Honey: The Need for Renewed Experience and Articulation of Christian Experience," in *Jeevadhara* LII/315 (2023), 43.

¹¹ Anto Karokaran, "Faith and Culture," 64.

righteousness (Amos 5: 21-24, Is 58: 6-9).¹² The human society that was created with equal dignity had got stratified into unequal groups based on pollution laws and gender. The priestly class covered up the liberator God in cult and Law.

Jesus brought to the Jewish people and through them to humanity the full knowledge of God's self-revelation in his encounters with the religio-cultural realities of the time. The way the Pharisees were leading religious practices had turned out to be "oppression rather than concern, self-interest rather than divine interest, rejection rather than acceptance, God against human beings, rather than God with them."¹³ In answer to their cultic religious practice and blind obedience to the Law of Moses, forgetting the law of love of neighbour, Jesus called them back to the ideal vision of harmonious coexistence. Jesus portrayed a loving and merciful God and proclaimed values of equal human dignity, compassion and mercy, love and forgiveness, renunciation and humility, patience and gentleness, freedom of the spirit and liberation, etc., against the prevailing culture of segregation, exploitation, marginalization and domination by religious and political leaders.

The Kingdom of God was his overarching theme, which was to be the model domain that would reflect life according to biblical values. In a way, Jesus replaced the Old Testament idea of the Promised Land with the Kingdom of God.¹⁴ The Kingdom is a unifying space open to diversity and pluralistic perspectives, where all feel communion irrespective of culture, religion, race or status.¹⁵ In the Kingdom of God ideal, the preferential focus is not so much on the "God" in whom one believes, as on the kind of person that one is supposed to become, a universal citizen. On the contrary, when 'God' becomes the point of exclusive attention rather than the human person, it turns into the Kingdom of Satan. The truth of this statement is amply being proved

¹² *The Anchor Bible: Amos, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, London: Doubleday, 1989, 481-482.

¹³ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1980, 119.

¹⁴ Kurivilla Pandikattu, "The Land Flowing with Milk and Honey," 43. The Promised land was the place where Israelites had to find peace and joy and a permanent dwelling. But this land was meant to be exclusively for the Israelites.

¹⁵ Joy Thomas, "Folk Culture and Christ: The Role of Traditional Folk Media in Communicating the good News," in Jacob Kavunkal, and F. Hrangkhuma (eds), *Christ and Cultures*, 42.

by the recurring stories of merciless killings and destruction of property in the name of God.

4. How does the Gospel become a Blessing?

If we look at human life in countries, where the Gospel has taken roots we can easily understand the blessings of the Gospel. There is marked difference in the quality of life and the value systems practised in these societies compared to other cultures. Let's have a cursory look at some of these values that have shaped the western culture.

4.1. Human Dignity

The creation narrative in the Bible, that holds that man and woman were created in the image of God provides the rationale for human dignity. Susan Haack says, "This dignity is equally shared by everyone because we are equal to each other precisely because none of us is the maker of another - we have all received our life equally as a gift from the creator. For in fact, each of us was given infinite significance, as a gift, by a personal creator, which is the foundation of our human dignity."¹⁶ It is the image of God that gives dignity to human beings and hence, ethnic, racial, gender or status considerations do not increase nor diminish his/her dignity. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3: 28). The universal declaration of human rights by the United Nations on 10 December 1948, is the political fruition of the Gospel ideal of the Kingdom of God.

From such a high ideal of the dignity of humanity derived the consciousness of human rights and the appreciation of democracy and the priority for social service. The West invented methods and machineries for the unfortunate, such as, Braille, walking sticks, wheelchairs, hearing aids, spectacles and artificial limbs, because it believes that everyone has the right to a dignified life. Care homes, orphanages, social securities, welfare schemes by the Government and openness to refugees and migrants are all cultural developments born out of this gospel vision. "It [the gospel vision] continues to inspire all sorts of movements for justice and equity."¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://www.cbhd.org/dignitas-articles/christian-explorations-in-the-concept-of-human-dignity> (accessed on 20.8.2023)

¹⁷ Vishal Mangalwadi, *Truth and Transformation: A Manifesto for Ailing Nations*, Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2009, 63.

4.2. Dignity of Women and Children

Jesus spoke and acted against the social barriers that dehumanized women. By insisting on monogamy and denying divorce, Jesus made sure that women remained free and dignified and liberated from possible social and sexual exploitation.¹⁸ He extended dignity to little children by proclaiming that the Kingdom of God belonged to those who were like children (Lk 18: 16) and that “their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Mt 18: 11).

The Gospel abolished the barrier between women and men. Jesus didn't carry any negative image of women. He does not accept, even passively, the sexist views of his time and social environment.¹⁹ Schussler Fiorenza puts it clearly: “It is remarkable that the canonical literature does not transit a single andocentric statement or sexist story of Jesus, although he lived and preached in patriarchal culture and society”.²⁰ Jesus asked humanity to look at women not through sexual lens. He declared, “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5: 28). St Paul's admonition to women in 1 Cor 11: 2-16 to cover their head in assemblies was not gender-based oppression. It was to be understood against the cultural practice of that time. It was to protect the women disciples from sexual exploitation that he gave such a command. In the sexually promiscuous culture of Corinth, a woman's covered head was a signal that she was under the protection of an upper-class husband or father and was therefore not sexually available.²¹

4.3. Integration of the Religious and the Secular

The secular and the religious should not be considered as mutually opposing. Even as each is autonomous,²² they are interrelated. Jesus' command, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's” (Mk 12: 17) shows the autonomous nature of these two. However, it was by invoking the realities and relationships existing in the secular world that Jesus explained the nature of God

¹⁸ Vishal Mangalwadi, *Truth and Transformation*, 48-53.

¹⁹ Kenneth Aman, *Border Regions of Faith: An Anthology of Religion and Social Change*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1988, 3.

²⁰ Kenneth Aman, *Border Regions of Faith*, 3.

²¹ “Authority to Cover Her Head: The Liberating Message of 1 Cor 11: 3-16” in <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/authority-to-cover-her-head-the-liberating-message-of-1-corinthians/> (accessed on 20.8.2023)

²² Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 110.

and his Kingdom.²³ The secular world is not just a store of evil. As the parable of the weeds shows good and evil coexist in this world (Mt 13: 30-32). The enormous sacrifices people take for their own loved ones as well as genuine humanitarian sacrifices of philanthropists in their struggles to bring about social reformation are examples of the good existing in the world.²⁴

The mind of the Gospel is that religion should not cocoon itself in ritualism; instead act as stimulus for integrating the good present everywhere as well as cure wounds. Eugene Bianchi says, "The most fundamental mission of the Church is that of reconciliation, the overcoming of the various alienations that vex humanity today."²⁵ According to Teilhard, "the Church is divinely called to be a progressive society...and... it must be open to everything good that emerges from the dynamism of the human spirit as found in science and technology."²⁶ Therefore, the Church best imitates her Master, who constantly moved "to more and more towns and villages, new cultures and diversities of peoples and to unexpected and uncharted vicissitudes of history,"²⁷ when she fosters dialogue between the sacred and the secular so that all human activities, such as, worship of God, marriage, society life, politics, governance, economic activities, banking, social service, law and order, business, arts and science become means for glorification of God and service of people and the world. The general western mind of appreciating good everywhere and reaching out to people in need and conflicts irrespective of religion or distance is a mindset born out of the non-fundamentalist and all welcoming attitude promoted by the Gospel.

4.4. Liberation, Essential Condition of Love

The Gospel identifies liberation as an essential condition of love of God and humanity. Many religions speak of liberation which is to be attained after death. For Jesus, a liberated life here and now is the essential condition for a life of love. This liberation that Gospel calls for

²³ Jacob Marangattu, "Fully Religious, Fully Secular: A New Way of being Holy in the Light of *Gaudete et Exsultate*," in *Jeevadhara* LI/304 (2021), 38-57.

²⁴ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, n. 7; See also Lancy Lobo, "Dehumanization through Caste and Religion: Two Shining Human Rights Activists of Gujarat, India," in *Third Millennium* 20/2 (2017), 9-17.

²⁵ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in all its Aspects*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976, 90.

²⁶ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 87-88.

²⁷ Anto Karokaran, *Our Vision*, Editorial Third Millennium 1 (1998), 1- 2.

is to be attained here on earth by all: the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed. "The freer we become, the more we can really love, for love is not a matter of some feeling or instinct. Love is the gift one person makes to another in freedom."²⁸ "Were there no freedom, there would be no love. Love and freedom are the two sides of the same coin. Freedom makes love possible. Love makes freedom meaningful."²⁹

4.5. Message of Hope

The Christian hope is that no repentant sinner is excluded from the divine grace and Providence. Suffering is nobody's *Vidhi* (unchangeable destiny). "Suffering is not written in our stars, karma, fate or destiny."³⁰ Gods' merciful arms are spread on everyone. No sinner needs to be hopeless that there is no possibility for regeneration. The Gospel message is a message of hope for even hardcore sinners. It is a mercy that crosses the borders of races, cultures, religions, regions, gender, classes, and states of life. God chose the Israelites in order to heal and bless all the nations of the earth. Divine mercy embraces whoever deserves it. Jesus sent this message across through the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son (Lk 15: 1-32). Jesus is one who can convert not only the sinners but also those who persecute sinners (Jn 8: 1-11), not only the exploited but also the exploiters (Lk 19:1-10).

4.6. Option for the Poor

The Bible is the story of God's taking sides with the poor. The poor are the favourites of God.³¹ They found a welcoming person in Jesus. He was their refuge, bosom, and mother. The lepers, the tax collectors, the thieves and the robbers experienced a consoling love in Jesus. Christianity offers hope for the marginalized and the outcastes in all cultures. In the graded inequality of the caste system, Dalits have no role except to do menial service to higher castes and remain forever bound to the limits prescribed for their caste, and never try to rise up.³²

²⁸ Subhash Anand, "Satyagraha: Journey towards Authenticity, Part II," in *Third Millennium* 23/2 (2019), 25.

²⁹ Subhash Anand, "Satyagraha Journey towards Authenticity," 25.

³⁰ Vishal Mangalwadi, *Truth and Transformation*, 61.

³¹ <https://www.uiw.edu/mission/reflections/the-poor-as-gods-favorites.html>, (accessed on 31.8.2023).

³² P. Arockiadoss, "Dalits and the Indian Church," in *Third Millennium* 8/4 (2005), 41, Also see, C.V. Vaidya, *Downfall of Hindu India*, Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1986, 361.

The Gospel, on the other hand, urges its followers to take care of the sinners, the abandoned, the orphans, the weak, and the poor and give them back their lost human dignity.

Option for the poor doesn't mean doing mere charity work. Service that doesn't bring about change in society is enslaving.³³ Jesus' aim was to address the root cause of poverty and to heal it. Healing a lame person meant empowering the person to stand alone and work. This is the message that Jesus gave by healing the person who was crippled for 38 years (Jn 5: 1-17). The poor had to trust in the God, who provides for them, and had to produce fruits in life.

The global mission command is not just a command to convert people; rather, it is a command to heal all sicknesses, make free all those who are enslaved, liberate the poor, educate people, civilize them, bring them to true knowledge and finally make of this world a suitable habitat for every human being. It is to teach the message of sharing to everyone. "Were we all to love, care, and share, there would not be any needy people in the world. The Kingdom of God would slowly be emerging among us."³⁴

4.7. High Sense of Morality

The Gospel culture abhors sin but welcomes the sinner. The sinner is to be invited to convert, get reconciled and grow. The laws are not to be blindly applied but have to be administered with love and mercy. Morality cannot be established through punishment, but through love. It also promotes the voluntary acceptance of suffering by the victim to facilitate the conversion of the wrong-doer. What is important is to avoid the cycle of vengeance. The cycle of vengeance comes to an end when the victim liberates the offender from the burden of guilt through unconditional forgiveness, as Esau forgave Jacob and Joseph, his brothers.³⁵ Hence the command of the Gospel, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5: 44).

The Commandments alone cannot lay the foundations for a life of integral morality, for the Commandments serve negatively by

³³ Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for the Transformation of a Culture*, Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1993, 37.

³⁴ Subhash Anand, *Seven baskets full: The All-Embracing Lord's Supper*, Noida: Media House, 2021, 105.

³⁵ Soroj Mullick, "Manipur, A Frying Pan for the 'Good Friday' People: Reflections on the Manipur Violence from a Christian Perspective," in *Third Millennium* 26/2 (2023), 59.

avoiding sin and wrong doings.³⁶ They cannot give a person the power not to do what one is not supposed to do. Besides, Commandments do not show proactive dimensions of human life. Jesus compensated for this deficiency of Commandments by announcing the Beatitudes to prepare a person interiorly for a proactive life. Beatitudes call one to be interiorly free, gentle, patient, merciful, meek, and work for justice and peace even facing persecution. However, the life of Beatitudes will require the shedding of one's ego. This is the cross of Christianity. There is no Gospel life without the cross.³⁷ In other words, the Gospel morality is comprehensive, proactive, demanding, reasonable and indispensable. "The good news of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen man."³⁸

4.8. Development of Science and Human Progress

"It is remarkable that until recently all the discoveries of science were confined to those parts of the globe which were in possession of Judeo-Christian culture, and the factor which has contributed the most to the rise in this particular cultural milieu has been the influence of the Bible with its emphasis on man's obligation to exercise dominion over the material world."³⁹ Science is order and science can work only in an orderly world. Creation theology holds within itself the seed for scientific pursuits. First of all, the universe was created with an "astounding order and harmony."⁴⁰ Kakkanattu says that "The whole creative activity is dominated by God's attempt to bring order from the primeval chaotic situation."⁴¹ Secondly, the Bible projects a transcendent God, and so God and the universe have separate essence and existence.⁴² The universe is neither extension of God as in Pantheism, nor is it Maya or illusion. The earth, the moon, and the sun have no divinity about them. They are not to be venerated but to be

³⁶ Bernard Häring, "The Specific Character of the New Testament Moral Theology," in Bosco Puthur (ed), *Moral Theology Today: Trends and Issues*, Alwaye: Pontifical Institute Publications, 1991, 18.

³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, London: SCM Press, 1948, 35.

³⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2527.

³⁹ K. Luke, *Genesis 1-3 - An Exposition*, Alwaye: 1980, 46.

⁴⁰ Anthony R. Ceresko, "Ecology and genesis 1: 26-28, An Interpretative Strategy," in Joseph Mattam and Jacob Kavunkal (eds), *Ecological Concerns: An Indian Christian Response*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1998, 21.

⁴¹ Joy Philip Kakkanattu, "Recovering the Biblical Vision of a Harmonious Creation," in *Sanyasa XI/2* (2016), 17.

⁴² Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythology: The Masks of God*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962, 10.

subjected to study, and their forces to be worked out or manipulated to produce better tools.

The stewardship that God bestowed upon humans was a call for exploration into the mysteries of the universe to make it an ever perfecting habitat.⁴³ This exploration or scientific pursuit is hard work, not magic. Adam learnt this lesson when he failed to become like God by eating a fruit! God warned the first man to be ready for hard work. The earth will produce thorns and thistles, which they have to clear off and progress (Gen 3: 17-19).

The Bible presents God as a worker, not as a meditator.⁴⁴ It gives a balancing scheme of work and rest in the law of Sabbath. Narrations of activities of Yahweh, prophets and kings occupy a good portion of the Biblical narrative. The Bible is the story of a people who keep moving forward and advance in life by overcoming superstitions, removing evil customs, and establishing the reign of God through the correct principles of life. God is after results or fruits. St. Paul told, "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (2 Thes 3: 10).

4.9. Fairness of the Judicial Process

The basic principle of the western criminal justice system is that even if hundred criminals escape punishment, one innocent person should not be penalized. Though the criminal justice system in the Old Testament might have been far away from ideal, it has given some sound principles for all cultures to emulate. 'The blood of an innocent person should not be shed' was the law of OT (Deut 19:10; Deut 27: 25). Many references in the Bible point out that God hates the shedding of innocent blood (Prov 16-17, Ps 10: 38; 106: 38; Is 59: 7; Jer 19: 4). The law of Moses prescribed setting apart cities (Num 35: 6) in the land they were going to occupy as cities of refuge, that is to say, cities to which anyone who committed a murder unintentionally or accidentally could escape from the wrath of the avenger of blood, meaning the

⁴³ In 1967 Lynn White Jr. stated in his thesis, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" that western Christianity was the major cause of world ecological crisis by offering a questionable interpretation to the creation account in Gen 1: 26-28 which lead was taken up by numerous other authors from different areas of discipline making Christianity the chief villain in the slow process of destruction of our common home. Cf: Edwin Rodrigues, Editorial, "Interrelated Web of Creation: Understanding the Biblical Roots of Cosmotheanthropism" in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 87/6 (2023), 402. For various interpretations of the creation account, see Anthony R. Ceresko, "Ecology and genesis 1: 26-28, An Interpretative Strategy," 20-34.

⁴⁴ Vishal Mangalwadi, *Truth and Transformation*, 41.

person who had the right to take revenge (Deut 19: 4-6). "It was the ancient custom for the close relative of a victim of murder to avenge his kin. This could lead to a series of tit-for-tat killings".⁴⁵ These cities were to be called places of refuge from the avenger so that anyone accused of murder may not die before they stood trial before the assembly.

The law made sure that the juridical process was assumed in full justice. A basic safeguard against an unjust verdict was the requirement for at least two witnesses to agree (Deut 19: 15). The law also provided for a deterrent against deliberate false witness.⁴⁶ Whatever penalty was to be awarded to the offender had to be incurred by false witnesses (Deut 19: 16-19).

The point was that legal procedures had to be flawless and just. This remains still a dream in many cultures. There are cases where public prosecutors take the side of the accused.⁴⁷ There are numerous cases where witnesses change sides out of fear or favour. Today, India is facing a nexus between politicians, police and criminals. Such a nexus has resulted in the loss of principles of the rule of law. The rule of law, which is the primary pillar of a democracy is being shaken by such a nexus.⁴⁸ Persons with criminal background contest the election and get selected as members of Parliament or the state legislature.⁴⁹

The Gospel knows that court cases are long and winding processes that can drain one's economy as well as waste fruitful years of work. So the Gospel advises to avoid accessing courts and find solution against conflicts through fruitful discussions or mediation by wise people or the church (Mt 18: 15-17). It shows the maturity of a culture where differences can be sorted out through fruitful dialogue mediated by credible and authentic people.

4.10. Historical Sense

Historical sense presumes the knowledge of history, which enables a person to compare events taking place in the present with events in

⁴⁵ *The New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*, 197.

⁴⁶ *The New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*, 218.

⁴⁷ Indian Express, 20 August 2023.

⁴⁸ "Politicians, Police and Criminal Nexus," in <https://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/636/Politicians,-Police-&-Criminal-nexus.html>, (accessed on 23.9.2023).

⁴⁹ "Criminalization of Politics," in <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/rationalthoughts/criminalization-of-politics-2-37946/> (accessed on 20.9.2023).

the past. It helps a person understand the importance of the past and present and see things as if taking place in a continuum. Historical knowledge is power. It shows us what the problems were in the past and how societies either succumbed to them or survived. By studying history, one comes to know that the problems we face today are not all too new, but already people had faced similar problems and solved them, and it helps us take measures to avoid their recurrence. It helps save ourselves from natural catastrophes.⁵⁰ It helps self-understanding as well as relationship with the rest of the society. It is because of the knowledge of the power of historical knowledge that political parties want to exert their “power over the archive.”⁵¹

How does the Bible help develop a historical sense? The major part of the Bible is the narrations of interventions of God in history. The ethical, moral and spiritual teachings we find in the Bible are also the teachings of God who is acting in history. The Bible traces history back to the moment of creation describing the names of the first human beings. By formulating genealogies, the Bible gives the names of the heads of families of each generation from the moment of creation to the times of God’s incarnation in Jesus. It describes how the different people and their cultures originated, flourished or perished, the wars they fought, the casualties suffered in the war, etc. History is given with the precision of the year, month and date. One should not look for historical accuracy; what is important is the idea behind it: the desire to keep the knowledge and memory of the unbroken continuity of events and to decipher meaning for those living in the present.

Remembrance is a great theme in the Bible. People are asked to remember all that Yahweh did to liberate them from Egypt. There is the recurring command, “Remember what Yahweh has done of you.” The Psalmist says that remembering what God has done in the past gives us hope (Ps 77:11). There are many occasions when the whole story of the people is narrated from the time of their liberation from Egypt, which made them a people (Joshua, Psalms 78, etc.). During the annual paschal celebration, the head of the family was required to narrate the whole events of salvation history to the younger ones (Ex 13: 14). Every seven years, the whole law had to be solemnly read at

⁵⁰ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-trilby-kent-the-vanishing-past-excerpt/> (accessed on 01.9.2023)

⁵¹ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-trilby-kent-the-vanishing-past-excerpt/> (accessed on 01.9.2023).

the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 16: 13-17)⁵² A society that loses the memory of its rootedness cannot grow in proper identity.

Historiography mainly developed in countries which grew up on Christian traditions. The highly spiritual Indian mind that was interested in metaphysical debates and a life of interiority was interested in the meaning of things and not in keeping their record. It is said, "Ancient Indians, though were excellent in science, arts, spirituality, martial arts, and medical science were poor in history." Will Durant writes, "Hindu literature is especially rich in fables; indeed, India is probably responsible for most of the fables that have passed like an international currency across the frontiers of the world.... Historical literature did not succeed in rising above the level of either bare chronicles or gorgeous romance... Details of place and date were so scantily recorded, even in the case of famous men ..."⁵³ Until scientific histories began to be written in the modern times, it was from the writings of travellers like Fa-Hien of China and Megasthenes of Greece that we received information on ancient India. It was James Mill, an English scholar, who wrote the first Indian history that covered all the major periods.⁵⁴

5. The Gospel is Counter Cultural

What is the condition of cultures, where Gospel values have little influence? Just as the Gospel has improved human life in societies where it has been accepted, it challenges every culture for introspection where true human values are not practiced. The evil of caste expresses itself through atrocities against Dalits, honour killings, and denial of equal access to opportunities in life. Dehumanization of women through the practice of polygamy is indeed an alarming situation. Corruption, violence, child labour, carelessness in governance and neglect of common good are just the results of the absence of respect for human beings. Countries that are increasingly corrupt are the ones that lag behind in development.⁵⁵ At the same time, even countries with Gospel roots record the spread of anti-human values such as hedonism, materialism, hopelessness,

⁵² *The New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*, 227.

⁵³ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: 1, Our Oriental Heritage*, New York: MJF Books, 1935, 578.

⁵⁴ <https://www.google.com/search?q=who+wrote+indian+history&coq=who+wrote+indian+his&aqs=chrome.0.0i512j69i57j0i512j0i10i22i30j0i22i30i3j0i15i22i30i2j0i22i30.8155j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>, (accessed on 01.9.2023).

⁵⁵ Vishal Mangalwadi, *Truth and Transformation*, 31.

uncontrolled pleasure seeking through overindulgence in sex and drugs, dominant political ideologies such as fascism, ill-conceived family systems, and tools of sanctioned murder such as abortion. The reason is that the people there are tempted to distance themselves from the moral and ethical demands of the Gospel as well as the church, the messenger of these gospel values.⁵⁶

6. Conclusion

The Bible, especially, the Gospel, though is a Holy Scripture, contains in it orientations, outlooks, and worldviews that can enhance the spiritual as well as cultural life of any society, regardless of culture and ethnicity. The message of the Bible has no borders. It has influenced countless social reformers outside of the Christian fold, such as Mahatma Gandhi, the prophet of Non-violence, who was confirmed in the applicability of the principle of non-violence after reading the Sermon on the Mount. The Christian culture rooted in the Gospel has made noted contributions in a broad and wide range of fields: science, technology, medicine, fine arts, architecture, agriculture, literature, politics, music, philanthropy, philosophy, ethics, theatre arts, etc.⁵⁷ It has contributed to the universalization of human rights consciousness, human dignity, equality, morality, love of neighbour, love of enemy, love of the poor, forgiveness, justice, humility, common good, etc., which are the essential building blocks of a healthy society. The idea of the Kingdom of God and the life of Beatitudes are priceless legacy that the Gospel leaves for all. The Gospel's thrust on liberation from all bondages, especially from the basic slavery to sin and its consequences, can visualize the creation of a just and happy society. Modern psychology, management principles, governance policies, and inspirational talks and writings use the messages of the Gospel profusely, without mentioning it. The Gospel's integration of the secular and the religious offers a way out of the proliferation of fundamentalist ideologies.

⁵⁶ Vishal Mangalwadi, *Truth and Transformation*, 63.

⁵⁷[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_culture#:~:text=Christian%20culture%20generally%20includes%20all,in%20different%20cultures%20and%20traditions,\(accessed on 01.9.2023\).](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_culture#:~:text=Christian%20culture%20generally%20includes%20all,in%20different%20cultures%20and%20traditions,(accessed%20on%2001.9.2023).)