

## **MISSION TRENDS: Vision and challenges for the Future**

The mission paradigm that inspired the heroic pioneering German and Swiss missionaries and others who followed them was that of church planting. According to this concept, these missionaries would preach the Good News to some pagans in the mission territories entrusted to them. They would in due course of time, convert and baptize some of the pagans and make them members of the Church. They would be progressively catechized and then other sacraments also would be administered to them. The children of these converts would be educated in the mission schools and from among them some of the promising young men and women would come forward to become religious and priests. Some among them would be chosen to become local bishops. Thus a native clergy and local hierarchy would be established in due course of time. When this happens, the missionaries considered that their mission of Church planting is accomplished in the new territory and then through natural growth the numbers would increase and consolidation would take place gradually.

Missionary expansion understood as church planting took place in the latter part of the 19th century and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Western India and other parts of India. Mass conversion took place mainly among the tribal and the dalits.

This understanding of mission method was questioned at the Second Vatican Council and new paradigms emerged in due course of time.

### **Mission after Second Vatican Council**

The Council affirmed that the 'Church is missionary by its very nature' (A.G. 2). The Church is not the sender but the one sent and it exists in being sent in building up itself for the sake of its mission. Witness is the starting point of the evangelisation (Acts 1.8).

Vatican II redefined its relationship with the world. Earlier the Church considered the world as a hostile power. The Council declared that the Church is in the Modern World and that 'the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. This community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history' (*Gaudium et Spes* 1).

In the pre-Vatican period the tendency was to identify the Church with the Kingdom of God. Modernization and industrialization brought in a great shift in ideologies and societies. As a result artists and intellectuals questioned the authority of the Church in secular matters, which made the Church defensive, inward looking, institutionalized and legalistic. In this context Vatican II opens herself to the world and Church becomes a reality open to other cultures and religions. In this renewed understanding the Kingdom of God is at the centre of missionary activity. The Church is in solidarity with the world and participates in the world being at the service of the world by upholding the dignity of every human being.

The Church is understood not just as an institution but as the people of God (L.G. chapter 2), which means it is a living community. When we say that the Church is missionary it means that the community is missionary. Thus the community is the primary agent of mission.

Before Vatican II territories were assigned to mission congregations by Propaganda Fide. Now due to secularization and the alienation of the working class from the Church and the indifference of believers towards the Church and its teachings, the whole world, is in need of constant evangelization. All cultures must be transformed. It means the whole process of the coming of the Kingdom among a people: witnessing, preaching, conversion, faith education, ongoing conversion, transformation of culture and sending forth new evangelizers to other communities. Mission is an essential part of God's plan of integral salvation, concerned with the whole person. So human promotion, struggles for justice and peace, etc., are integral parts of the Church's mission.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) by Pope Paul VI, the fruit of the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization stresses the community character of the Church's mission. The Pope stresses witnessing which is not only personal, but essentially communitarian which produces the fruits of communion of life and solidarity. In this document, the Pope exhorted the missionaries to evolve new methods and new vision in evangelization. According to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, mission effects personal and collective conversion where groups of believers unite into a community in the name of Jesus (EN 13).

An important aspect of evangelization stressed by the document is that of renewal and transformation of humanity from within, under the influence of the Gospel. Renewal of humanity means new creation and new vision of the world.

Evangelization is no more geographical expansion or planting of churches but affecting cultures and ideas of every strata of humanity. It means transforming the people in their thinking and the value systems they hold. In other words it deals with what upsets mankind's criteria of judgment, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration, models of life which are in contrast with the Word of God (EN 19). Thus, evangelization is the renewal of humanity in all its aspects. Gospel must penetrate every strata of society and change both personal and collective consciences, which means hearts and structures (EN 59).

As every Christian is called to be a missionary, he or she is called to witness to faith which is a continuous process. Witnessing is not only personal, but also communitarian, based on communion of life and solidarity. Thus an evangelized community in its turn should become evangelizing community. This is the test of truth, and the touchstone of every effort of evangelization (EN 24).

## **GC 32 and Mission**

The Society of Jesus too reflected on its mission in the light of the new understanding of mission spelt out by Vatican II and the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization in 1974. The 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation spelt out the mission of the Society as “the service of faith of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement” (GC 32. Our Mission Today, no. 2). The Society became aware that “too often we are insulated from any real contact with unbelief and with the hard, everyday consequences of injustice and oppression. As a result we run the risk of not being able to hear the cry for the Gospel as it is addressed to us by the men and women of our time. A deeper involvement with others in the world will therefore be a decisive test of our faith, of our hope, and of our apostolic charity. (GC 32, Our Mission Today, no. 35).

Reflecting on the need to evangelize cultures, the Congregation stated that “Wherever we serve we must be attentive to “inculturation” (GC 32, “Our Mission Today”, no. 36). “Mindful that from its very beginning the Society has had a long and venerable missionary tradition of promoting inculturation, the Congregation judges that this work must be pursued with even greater determination in our own day and that it deserves the progressively greater concern and attention of the whole Society” (GC 32, “The Work of Inculturation of the Faith and Promotion of Christian Life”, No. 1).

The Society is deeply aware of another important attitude that should be cultivated in order to transform the individual and collective consciences of people. For this, “we should collaborate with all who strive to make a world fit for men and women to live in... ( GC 32, “Our Mission Today”, no. 37).

### **Challenges for the future**

What are the challenges for the future of our mission in the Western region if we take the new trends in mission theology seriously as we have seen above?

#### **A Community witness and solidarity with the Human Community**

The Christian community and we Jesuits in particular are challenged to become agents who can facilitate the growth of communities where the individuals are able to grow in critical consciousness and can take responsibility to transform the existing oppressive and unjust social system. If a group of such persons exists in a community, they are able to motivate and mobilize others for collective struggle and praxis so as to transform society into a human community.

The challenge for the Society of Jesus today is to create conditions for the conscientization of the Christians to facilitate their growth from magical, fatalistic consciousness to critical consciousness, whereby they experience a new awareness of self as well as self dignity and feel responsible members of the Church who are participating in the building up of God's Kingdom. This awareness would lead the Christian community to be involved in civil society in issues such as fighting against human rights abuses and the rising tide of fascist forces of the Sangh Parivar.

The Sangh Parivar has succeeded to poison the minds of a sizable number of Hindus in India especially in the Western region, through mass mobilization and false propaganda. Its aim is to establish a Hindu rashtra where the minorities will have to live at the mercy of the majority Hindus. It has succeeded to a great extent in projecting the image of the Christians and Muslims as enemies of the Hindus and traitors of the nation. They have begun their experiments to create a Hindu rashtra by demonizing the minorities and persecuting them in Orissa, Gujarat and other parts of the country. When the Muslims were butchered, raped and burnt alive in Gujarat, the majority of the Hindus silently and even publicly approved of it and supported it. The Christians expected that the beneficiaries of our services, such as those who were educated in our institutions and are influential in public life would speak up and defend the minorities. But this large majority colluded silently, which was a shocking and an eye-opening experience for the Christian community, especially in Gujarat..

Those who came to the aid of the persecuted minorities and raised their voices and organized protests were the secular activists, intellectuals and journalists. Though most of them were not educated in church run schools and colleges, they came out to defend the values of human rights and minority rights enshrined in our Constitution. This is a lesson for the Christian

community to realize that it needs to shed its ghetto thinking and come forward to collaborate with all these groups of courageous people in solidarity to make its voice heard in the civil society by joining in the public discourse to expose the hidden agenda of the Sangh Parivar.

Usually, the Christian community and the Church hierarchy expect and welcome support in times of distress. In the past, the Churches mobilized Christians to protest in public only when the interests of the Church run institutions were threatened, as a communal response to a communal event. But the Christian community as a rule has not associated itself with organizations and individuals committed to the promotion of Constitutional values of democracy, human rights, justice, equality, cultural pluralism, and religious freedom.

As we have seen in the first part, the Second Vatican Council affirmed the solidarity of the Catholic Church with the world, which is the world of secular civil society. To make her mission authentic in today's world, she should find civil society as one of the major spheres of her mission and collaborate with the people of good will to build a better just, equitable and peaceful world.

The concept of civil society is a dynamic step in the evolution of human society towards progress and advancement in living in a modern society, recognizing and respecting each other's rights, and thereby safeguarding the orderly freedom and security of persons and their property (Pushparajan 2002:2).

Civil society is indispensable to sustain democracy. It is in this space that the citizens get mobilized and struggle for the defense of their rights. It is in and through civil society that the individuals are constituted as the citizens who enjoy equal rights and responsibilities. The only weapon available to the citizens in a civil society to safeguard their rights is that of discussions, debates, and peaceful protest demonstrations. The absence of this mechanism in the civil society indicates the absence of democracy and secular values. Civil society is based on the notion of pluralism as a positive fact and value. It represents people's collective assertion against the uncaring state, sphere of solidarity and empowerment of self-help groups and social activists. Only when the civil society is self-conscious of its responsibilities vis-à-vis the oppression within the public sphere itself, and only when it ensures democracy within its own sphere, can it ensure a democratic state (Chandhoke 1995:234).

Though it is the duty of the state to safeguard the rights of its citizens, it may use its powers to manipulate and stifle the growth of the individuals and communities. The powerful castes, the influential political class and the rich also take advantage of the political, social and economic systems to exploit the poor and thus exclude and marginalize them from the benefits of modern political state.

In such a situation the Society of Jesus should not only recognize the importance of collaborating with secular and social activists in the sphere of civil society for emancipation of people at all levels. The secular field of civil society should be recognized as the valid field of mission. Consequently, the discourse on the meaning of secularism and the Christian community's role in civil society has been revived once again in India.

The false propaganda of the Sangh Parivar has created a misconception in the minds of many citizens about the motives of the Christian community's involvement with the poor, the Dalits and the tribals in the fields of education, health, social justice, and human rights. They attribute the ulterior motive of converting them to the Christian faith only to play the number game. As the Sangh Parivar is making all out efforts to monopolize the civil space by their

fascist discourse, the Christian community should not withdraw itself but should face the challenge by benefiting from the opportunities provided by civil society to make clear their motives and actions in context (Wilfred 2001:105-7).

The majority of church personnel involved in pastoral and educational activities prefer to continue their activities based on the traditional methodologies, which keep the followers busy with a lot of activities like novenas, pilgrimages and charismatic prayers, etc., but not much involvement in the public sphere of the civil society. The Christians have given the impression to the public that they take to the streets to demonstrate only when the institutional interests of the Churches are threatened (Philip 2002:12).

But when it comes to participation in a public demonstration or a seminar or to speak at a conference, or to write in the local press, the Christian presence is limited to only a few religious priests and sisters and a couple of Christians. Our involvement with the secular activists has made us realize that the Churches should not limit their mission only to dialogue with other religions, but should also focus on collaboration with secular forces in the civil society. The human society needs to be sensitized to the plight of underprivileged, exploited and poor everywhere who are denied the basic human rights. It is a challenge for us as Jesuits of the Western region to initiate movements or join existing movements to protect the rights of the poor and underprivileged.

### **Advocacy for Justice and Peace**

Advocacy<sup>1</sup> is considered to be one of the effective means available to us as Jesuits to bring about social and political change through our involvement in the arena of the civil society, in collaboration with all the people of good will as spelt out by GC 32. Empowerment of the marginalized communities and sensitizing the rich to have a social conscience in favour of the less privileged in society has proved to be essential components of action in the present context of the development processes. Daily we come across campaigns, struggles, marches against mal developmental interventions that destroy the people and environment. We need to use judicial and legislative advocacy and overall grass root mobilization, networking and direction actions (Stanley 2002:105-108)

Advocacy for justice and peace is our path to God's Kingdom. Advocacy seeks to address the causes of poverty, conflict and injustice. "Solidarity helps us to see the 'other'—whether a person, people or nation—not just as some kind of instrument, with a weak capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost, and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our neighbour and a helper" (John Paul II: 34).

Advocacy is expressed through a variety of methodologies at different levels, including public education and awareness-raising efforts, lobbying, empowering people to speak out against their own oppressors, and empowering Churches to make advocacy part of their ministry.

Advocacy is not only action but involves a comprehensive, in-depth analysis and reflection. Social analysis is precondition for social action: analysis of issues (identification of what is happening, points of leverage, targets for lobbying, allies and strategies). Advocacy has

---

<sup>1</sup> Advocacy is the act or process of advocating. It comes from the Latin *advocatus*, which means called to or summoned. An advocate is one who pleads the cause of another, especially before a tribunal or judicial court. Advocacy, as a legal term, means pleading for someone else. The counterpart to advocacy in religious terminology is witnessing. It means actively taking up the case of those whose rights are violated. The term advocacy has a more particular meaning as a form of political witness on economic and political issues .

to be at various levels, namely global, regional, national and local, and attempts to confront unjust ideologies. It also includes networking locally, regionally and globally through organizing groups, sharing information, building a database of people with information and/or skills. It includes action such as lobbying decision-makers, using connections, public campaigns, and consumer actions.

Advocacy should start at the grassroots-local levels with identifying the needs and rights of the disadvantaged in society, involving a comprehensive, in-depth social analysis and reflection, including faith analysis. It calls for justice and solidarity with the suffering, and works towards the creation of equitable power structures. The creation of alternatives is, indeed, the greatest challenge for promoters of social advocacy (Valiamangalam 2004:45).

### **Mission as building Base Ecclesial or Christian Communities**

There is lot of scope for finding new ways and methods to fulfill the mission of the Christian communities as urged by Pope Paul VI and John Paul II in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*. The Popes have suggested the building up of "Basic Ecclesial Communities" as one such method (EN 58; RM 51), which has the potential to renew Christian communities, which are capable of transforming themselves to be communities in mission.

Small Christian Communities at the grassroots or the base of the Church and society offer new hope to humanity to build a just and humane world; following the model of the Kingdom community began by Jesus and the Apostles. The Church has been promoting the formation of Small Christian Communities, as we have seen wherein every member finds his or her rightful place, and is heard and valued as a person. These communities foster solidarity among the members and they are able to solve their local problems as a community. As these communities are not sects or closed ghettos but open communities, they have the natural scope to relate to their neighbors who may belong to other religious and ideological traditions. This relationship results in the formation of Basic Human Communities.

Basic Christian communities present a radically new model of the Church, which has brought about a paradigm shift in the understanding of the Church after Vatican II. It is the smallest unit of the Church, which has within itself all the essential elements of the Church, which exists in a particular social and cultural milieu. These communities reflect on the events of their own daily life in the light of the Bible and discover the presence or absence of God in them in their particular social and political context.

The most important elements of the basis Christian communities can be listed thus: they take the present day reality in which it is placed very seriously. They read and reflect on the Word of God and relate it to the reality around them. Their methodology of reflection can be summed up in the following activities: see, judge, act, evaluate and celebrate as communities. They perform a prophetic function in society by being counter-cultural communities, which offer a radical critique of society and its values, which are against the Gospel values. They are missionary following the paths of proclamation, inculturation, dialogue, and liberation (Marins 1993:172).

### **Characteristics of Basic Christian Communities**

Base ecclesial communities or basic Christian communities originated in Brazil in Latin America where they were known as *comunidades eclesiales de base* because the members of these communities came from lower-class, grassroots people or the base of society as opposed to

the rich and powerful upper class of society. These communities embody the salient features of Church of the First Christian communities. They can be termed basic since they refer to the grass roots level where the ordinary and poor people find their rightful place as members of the community. They are Christian in that they signify that their motivation is derived from the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus and his disciples. They are communities since they derive their inspiration from the primary relationship of solidarity and fellowship among the members of the group or community.

These communities are born from the reflection on the Word of God. They consider the Gospel as good news, as a message of hope, promise and joy from the real oppressive situations of the poor. They reflect on the problems of their life in the light of the Gospel in the communities in absolute freedom. Every one gets the opportunity to share their reflections about a given fact or situation. The gospel passage serves as the basic inspiration for the group's reflection on life. In the beginning, they reflect on the problems of the group such as illness of one of the members, or unemployment, etc., in the light of the Gospel. Gradually, the focus shifts to social problems affecting the community, such as water, electricity, schools, etc. As they gain experience, the communities begin to discuss political issues and to question the prevailing political system, and take a political stand toward the social system. At this level of consciousness, the communities begin to participate in the struggles of the people through various people's movements, trade unions and political parties, etc.

Base ecclesial communities are seen as 'A New Way of Being Church'. The main feature of this way of being Church is the aspect of community where everyone is treated as a true brother and sister and all share in the common tasks. The communities become missionary when they in turn establish new communities and also facilitate their growth and development.

Base communities are signs and instruments of liberation, which are open to the society around them. As the community members read and share Gospel, it motivates and empowers them to engage themselves in social action. As the members bring their problems to the community, they go to the root of the problems and the consequences that follow. They are ready to face exploitation and even torture as the real problems they encounter. Social analysis leads them to conscientizing the people and motivates them to denounce the injustices they suffer.

The communities promote a new type of society. Through the direct participation of all the members of the community in sharing, discussions, responsibilities, decision-making, leadership, and the exercise of power as service, they learn to overcome the unjust relationships that dominate the larger society.

Basic Christian communities place great importance to *Celebration of Faith and Life* and of liberation that God achieved for us in Jesus. His presence through the Word and sacraments is celebrated and the members are comforted by his promises in their misery and struggles of life. They place a great value on popular religiosity such as devotions to particular saints, procession and other popular feasts. They are taken to be the way in which the people of the base have accepted the message of Jesus. Through these celebrations, the essential unity between faith and life finds a place in the community and so the presence of God in life is celebrated there.

In order to involve the members of the communities in actively in the mission of the communities, the SCCs are encouraged by their members to participate in activities within the community at least once every two months. They are encouraged to have a blend of spiritual and socio-cultural activities, such as to tackle community issues and solve community problems.

Many communities engage in outreach programmes, while a few have even become involved in civic issues.

Finally, these Communities must reach out to peoples of other faiths. Basic or Small Christian communities do not exist for themselves, but they are a sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God. Hence they must engage in a dialogue of life and action with peoples of all faiths.

### **Small Christian Communities to promote Basic Human Communities**

The Small Christian Communities do not become a closed sect or a ghetto community but communities, which are inclusive and open to the neighbourhood world around them. They become a sign and an instrument for others, in a spirit of service (*diakonia*) and communion (*koinonia*). These small Christian communities are thus based on the servant model of the Church, which promotes not only prayer and worship among members but also better relationships with people in the neighbourhood. This process can lead to the formation of Basic Human Communities (BHC). BCCs "aim to help their members to live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service, and are therefore a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a civilization of love" (*Ecclesia in Asia* no.25). Thus we can say that a natural growth of Basic Christian Communities can lead to the formation of Basic Human Communities where all the people in the neighbourhood will come together for fellowship, prayer, discussion of problems and finding of solutions.

Why do we need to promote Basic Human Communities? Many Church leaders think that when Basic Christian Communities have not yet taken root why do we need to talk about promoting Basic Human Communities. Clarifying such doubts, Father M.J. Edwin of Kottar Diocese, a pioneer in promoting Basic Christian as well as Basic Human communities proposes that building Basic Human Communities forms part of the core mission of the Church and that we should work towards a situation where one strengthens the other (Edwin 2002:25).

Fr. Edwin explains the similarities and differences between the Basic Christian and Basic Human Communities, thus: The Base Christian Community limits its membership to Catholics/Christians while Basic Human Community includes everybody. Both are territory based and include every person residing in the locality. The BCCs are the Church itself in a given neighbourhood, while the BHCs are nation itself in a given neighbourhood. As the BCCs are the basic constitutive units of the Church, the BHCs are linked to the civil structures like gram sabhas and panchayats and are the basic constitutive units of the nation. Both BCCs and BHCs are guided by the principle of subsidiarity. Whatever activity can be done at the grassroots level is done at that level and not at any other levels. The higher levels take up only those tasks that cannot be handled at the lower levels. Both BCCs and BHCs promote non-dominating type of leadership. While BCCs are ecclesial communities, BHCs could be called Kingdom Communities (Edwin 2002:28).

Building Basic Human Communities forms part of the crucial mission of the Church. The core task of the Church or community is to build the Kingdom of God. The task of the Kingdom is to fulfill God's will here on earth as it is in heaven, as we pray in the prayer 'Our Father' taught by Jesus. The Father wills the fullness of life for all. It is the place where people will get their daily bread and also where people will forgive one another as the Father forgives, where the rich will be sent away empty and the poor will be filled with good things. BHCs are the structural

tool for the Kingdom. They are the most effective structural tools today for the preferential option for the poor because of the smallness of the forums and the structural networking.

Basic Human Communities (BHC) are communities with a pluralistic outlook on religion, culture, ideology and life style, advocating a new world order, breaking down barriers of caste, creed, colour, economic status, etc. We can say that the credibility and maturity of the small Christian communities depend in fact on how they are able to fulfill their mission of being open communities promoting Basic Human Communities based on the values of the Kingdom of God, where God is the Father of all and all are accepted as brothers and sisters of the one human family, or '*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*' (*Gaudium et Spes* no.24). These communities become communities or contrast societies, where brotherly and sisterly love is practiced and justice, human dignity and solidarity among all are promoted.

### **Popular religiosity and mission**

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) has highlighted the need of rediscovering the value of popular religiosity by the Church in order to incarnate the Gospel in a particular culture and to evangelize that culture. It states that “popular religiosity is rich in values. It manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know. Popular religiosity manifests itself as seeking the meaning of life. It is a cry of hope of the people who desire to live a life together in fraternity and equality. Popular religiosity is a search for security and salvation” (EN 48).

The Society of Jesus in the Western region is in a privileged time today to get involved in the lives of ordinary, exploited and marginalized people. It means to enter into dialogue with the people's culture and religions and help them to liberate themselves from every form of falsehood, superstitions and magic. For this, we need to enter into the world views, symbols, myths and the deeper feelings of the people being marginalised and oppressed. We also need to be exposed to the faith of the ordinary people and as we aim to liberate and transform them, we in turn also should be open to share in the God experience, in the festivals, celebrations, devotions and pilgrimages which would liberate us to identify ourselves with the cause of the people. This means that the Church is challenged as evangelizer to enter into a serious, deep and sympathetic study of popular religions

The experience of coming into contact with Christianity through the colonizers and the European missionaries who are seen as agents of the colonizers by the Hindu elite, Christian missionaries could not make much headway in evangelization with them, except running prestigious schools and other educational institutions for their benefit. Christian missionaries were more successful among the Tribals. These missionaries were able to study and appreciate the tribals culture and religious practices and adapt and inculturate successfully. They were able to educate the tribals and free them from the clutches of money lenders and help them to regain their self dignity and self-identity as tribals. They are able to develop their own tribal theology also which shows that Christianity has taken deep roots among them.

Mass conversions to Christianity took place among the dalits in most states in India during the colonial period. This is true also of the Western region. The missionaries appeared to the socially and religiously oppressed and marginalised dalits who were denied education and entry into temples by the caste Hindus. The schools, hospitals and other welfare programmes started by the missionaries helped the dalits to become Christians and get out of the thousands of years old curse of caste discrimination and thus gain some self respect. The missionaries were not well equipped to appreciate the popular culture of the oppressed or they were so

overwhelmed by the problems they faced in evangelizing the dalits that they could not find sufficient time and other resources to study deeper their culture and religion. Due to the 'sanskritization' process the educated dalits in general were ashamed to accept their culture and would try to adopt the religion of the dominant high caste Hinduism. Ambedkar tried to conscientize the dalits by taking them to Buddhism and also organizing them politically. Now attempts are made by the Christian dalits to evolve a dalit theology.

As mentioned above, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* urges the local churches to 'discover the people' and their culture and religion as a valid approach to the interpretation of culture in order to evangelize culture. The Jesuits in the Western region are being challenged today not only to dialogue with Hinduism and Buddhism of the Great Tradition but to enter into a deeper participation in the life and struggles and culture of the majority of the people who belong to the Little Tradition. Promoting popular religiosity is an essential aspect of our efforts at inculturation.

Popular religiosity is a search for security and salvation. It manifests itself as seeking the meaning of life. It is a cry of hope of the people who desire to live a life together in fraternity, justice and equality. Popular religion is attractive to the masses because they are spontaneous and agreeable to the individual person's manner of thinking and feeling and it satisfies the inner urge to piety. It has a spontaneous and festive character. By naming popular, it can be understood anything which springs from 'the people' and is distinguished from that which is institutional and official (Arulsamy, 1986:58).

Among the several characteristics of popular religion the following can be noted: First, there is a tendency toward freedom and autonomy in which the simple people find emotional support. For example, in Christianity, though popular religiosity uses religious channels to express itself, it emphasizes values and practices that do not always follow official teaching. Hence, the feasts of saints and that of Mother Mary may be more important than the importance given to Christ in the liturgy.

Second, it stresses devotions and religious symbols as mediations of God. It celebrates the presence of God in nature, in images and in special places considered holy. As heart and sentiments are stressed in popular religion, relationship to God is expressed through narratives, images, places, things and persons which speak directly to the heart..

Third, it manifests a strong sense of God's presence in everyday life. God is seen intervening continuously in favour of His children and this intervention can be due to the promises of the people to undertake some penance or vows to be fulfilled if the favour is granted.

Fourth, it is collective. It is often expressed in collective events like processions, pilgrimages and festivals which are a mixture of religious and folk gatherings.

Fifth, popular religiosity is the vehicle for communicating the experience of God. Processions and pilgrimages to shrines and holy places on foot is believed to bestow special graces and experience of God which for most religious minded rural folk may be the climax of their religious experience during the year (Galilea 1987:442)..

Theological developments in Latin American countries like Brazil, Argentina, Colombia etc. and African countries like Zaire point to the emerging trend in the evangelizing activity of the Church where the culture of the poor, the humble and the powerless people, that is, the popular culture is emerging as the point of reference. The Society and the Church in India need to take this challenge seriously and discern how to get involved in the experience of people who

follow popular religions and who form the majority of the people of India. Now let us see the implications of this understanding in the various spheres of the mission of the Society in the Western region today.

As we have seen above, popular religiosity reflects the actual God-experience of the vast majority of the people. It is evident that it is the popular religions that represent the reality of the religious experience of most of the people. The mission of dialogue of the Society and the Church in actual practice, therefore, should not be so much a dialogue with the institutionalized religions of the 'Great Tradition' but with the people's religion of the 'Little Tradition' in their concrete daily life.

Though the Society has been involved in the lives of ordinary poor and marginalised people through education, health work and developmental activities, it can be said that their religious life and culture were not touched to a great extent by our activities. By and large we have not taken the myths, symbols, legends and celebrations of the people seriously to accept them as vehicles of God's revelation to them as agents of God experience for the people.

Zeitler (1986:112) points out the marvellous example of Buddhism in Japan which entered into dialogue with the popular Japanese religions and succeeded in becoming a Japanese religion whereas Christianity was not successful. Whenever Buddhism entered a new area it presented itself as a supplement to the existing religions and not as their rival. In this way Buddhism has reached the local cultures and religions and adjusted itself to the genius of the various parts of Asia without destroying them.

## Conclusion

The renewed understanding and practice of the mission of the Church and the Society of Jesus today demands that we are open to be led by the Spirit who leads us in various situations of social conflict and communal tension we are facing today in the Western region. Let us follow in the footsteps of our pioneering German and Swiss missionaries who dedicated themselves to spread God's Kingdom by their total dedication to the mission entrusted to them by being faithful to the Gospel and to the people whom we are called to serve.

## References

- Arulsamy, S. (1986) "Popular Devotions an Experience of the Divine", in Paul Puthanangady, (ed.) *Popular Devotions*, Bangalore, N.B.C.L.C.
- Chandhoke, Neera (1995), *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- Edwin, M.J. (2002), "Basic Human Communities", *Vaiharai*, Vol.7. No.1, March.
- Galillea, Segundo (1987), "Popular Christian Religiosity", in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York.
- John Paul II, (1987), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Roma.
- Marins Jose, Chanona Caroleen & Trevisan Tholide (1991), "The Church in Latin America, Basic Ecclesial Communities", William Jenkinson & Helene O'Sullivan (eds.), *Trends in Mission*, Orbis, Maryknoll, New York.
- Philip, K.C.(2002) "Good willed people, but lacking a political approach?", *Jivan*, May June.

- Pushparajan, A. (2002), "Mission in Civil Society", *The Church In Mission, Univesal Mandate and Local Concerns*, Thomas Malipurathu, & L. Stanislaus (eds.), Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand.
- Rahner, Karl (1969), "The Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," *Theological Investigations*, Vol.6, Baltimore.
- Stanley, William (2002), "The Need for an International Forum (Faith Based Organizations, NGOs, Other Actors in Civil Society to Encounter Economic Globalization)", *National Council of Churches Review*, Jan-Feb.
- Valiamangalam, J. (2004), "Mission to the Secular World – Christian Mission in a Civil Society", Joseph Mattam, Philomena Parackal (eds.), *Creative Ministries*, St Pauls Mumbai.
- Wilfred, Felix (2001), "A Vision for the New Century: Role of Religions and Approaches to Christian Mission", in *A Vision of Mission in the New Millennium*, Malipurathu, T. and Stanislaus, L (eds.), St. Paul's, Mumbai.
- Zeitler, Engelbert (1986) "Popular Christian Piety and Colonial Mission", in *Popular Devotions*, Bangalore, N.B.C.L.C.
- .