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As trained social workers engaged in development work among marginalised communities struggling for livelihood, dignity and justice, proclaiming Christ is a constant challenge.

Contemporary India is at cross roads, facing 'a clash within' between values such as democracy, pluralism, secularism and equality on the one hand, and ethnocentric homogeneity, theocracy and religious nationalism on the other. Economic globalisation, alienating people from their land, culture and livelihood, is another force heightening this struggle. Chris Wright's missiological reflections are relevant to India, especially the discussion on theological, ethical and personal dimensions of mission.

Wright's missional framework of the biblical narrative helps in understanding mission as God's mission, through God's people, in God's world, for God's purpose. We can participate in such a mission only in the context of an intimate relationship with Christ. Often the 'doing' of mission takes precedence over the 'being' in Christ. How many 'souls are harvested' becomes more important than what God is doing among the people. This has attracted different responses. Among Hindu Nationalists and secularists, it creates opposition, mistrust and hatred. Sometimes, among missionaries, it causes disunity, disillusionment and burnout as the whole burden rests on the person rather than on God. The time of 'being' in relationship with the Lord is taken up with 'mission activities'. An understanding that mission is God's develops an attitude of humility, openness to learn and sensitivity to his world, rather than the subtle arrogance of 'I have the truth and you need to hear it'.

Ethical dimensions of mission have a huge impact on the world today. Often taking care of people's physical needs is perceived as a means to mission. Yet, God is a God of justice, and ethics is an integral part of everything close to God's heart. As Wright succinctly puts it, 'There is no biblical mission without biblical ethics'. His statement 'God's mission to the nations is being hindered because of Israel's continuing spiritual and ethical failure' has significant ramifications today. It is pertinent to reflect whether the Church's spiritual and ethical standards are hindering or hastening God's mission. The caste system has for generations inflicted injustice in India, and it is tragic that the marginalised and the oppressed often see the Church as being partners with the oppressors (either as passive observers or as active perpetrators), rather than partners sharing their hurts and pains, and struggle for justice.

The Church's ethical response is critical in the context of the further marginalisation that is being caused by economic globalisation. Are we, 'the new Israel', going to fulfil God's calling or are we going to fail God like Israel of old? Do we dare to repent, turn to God and by His strength stand for the marginalised against the powers of the world today? In Wright's words, 'there is a fundamental, inextricable connection between the ethical quality of life of the people of God and their mission to the nations' and 'a return to the true God would necessarily mean a return to the ways of the true God – i.e., to the ethical demands of the covenant'.

Increasingly, in India, the term 'missionary' is perceived and portrayed to mean traitor, imperialist, anti-national, destroyer of Indian culture and more. The cost of being a missionary is very high. In this light, Jeremiah's rejection and attack from his own family, unpopularity with the whole nation, disillusionment and frustration with the failure of his ministry, suicidal rejection of his calling, disappointment with God, aching grief, profound and life-long loneliness, and treatment as a traitor, is quite similar to what many followers of Christ face in India today. Jeremiah's exemplary life is a comforting message to faithfully do

God's work, though one could be subjected to all such unpleasant responses, especially in the context of popular teaching such as 'follow Christ and all your problems will disappear' or 'if your troubles are not disappearing, see whether you have enough faith'. It also brings to the fore the need for missionaries to have a sound mission perspective, and solid support and care. Member-care is not one of the strengths of indigenous missions and it is good to discuss what shape this should take within our context.

In the light of Chris Wright's exhortation that mission is intrinsically theological, ethical and personal, we Indian Christians ought to study these aspects and engage in constant dialogue, redefining them in a way relevant to our unique contexts and challenges, within an intimate relationship with Christ. Shalom!

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