

‘Social Dimension’ in Christian Mission: An Appraisal of Social Mission of the Church in India

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ABSTRACT

The social dimension of the Christian mission played a vital role in the mission of the church. This has to do with uplifting the poor, eradicating social evil, reflecting fraternity, bringing social justice, seeing the progress of better humanity, peace, unity, etc. With the arrival of colonial rule in India, the mission of the church appeared to be engaged in so many social activities. Foreign missionaries arrived with their strategy, but with the pressure of colonial rulers in India, they could have achieved exactly what the mission of the church was supposed to be. However, an attempt to strengthen society is always as appreciable as service to God in favour of human beings. In the present era, the social dimension has gone down in the mission of the church. Therefore, it is important to research for better humanity when one thinks of the service of the church. Even amid difficulties in the church, social division is seen as a service to God. Here I appeal for continuing the social acts in Indian society in service of God as a reflection of the true mission of church. For this article, I have used the technique of socio-historic analysis in an ethno-religious approach.

Key Words: church, social, crisis, globalization, entrepreneurship, mission, diakonia

INTRODUCTION

The social mission becomes just a task of reflecting the social upliftment of the poor, Dalit, tribal, and marginalized. Mostly, it is using of education, health care, and charity. Recent social thinkers in Christian missions have debated the traditional style of the mission since the social dimension of Christian missions such as, Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden,^[1] Vishal Mangalwadi, Chuck Van Engel,^[2] and others have debated the traditional style of the mission since the social dimension of Christian missions has been neglected by the church. The mission of God is the mission of society, because the church exists in society.^[3] The existence of a church as a theological body that maintains doctrine, catechism, and worship without social impact is a church without meeting the whole purpose of God. The builder of the church is Christ. His body must function as salt and light in the place where it exists. This prepares people to enter His kingdom. Serving people is a service to God. The coming of Christ is for the holistic transformation of society. His living example is vivid in his mission, which appeals to Christians to do the same.

Human society is complex, but there is also the possibility of harmony, peace, unity, and sanctity in it. The concept of loving a neighbour and loving one's enemy is the central idea of the social mission (Lev 19:18, c.f. Mk 12:31). The arrival of missionaries in India has paved the way for social improvement. The outset of the Indian social system has been stagnated with social evils, barbarism, religious extremism, hierarchy, conspiracy, bondage, and oppression.^[4] Even in the weakness of colonial Christianization in Romish and commercial style, the mission of God has continued with less sensitiveness. The European behavioural aspect of Indian converts has alienated reciprocal civil relations, and compatriots have presupposed the non-

applicable Christian path.

The imbalance of virtuous deeds without sharing the gospel and evangelism without social concern in Christian missions has been seen in the past. With the rise of social approaches in the 18th and 19th centuries, the church has emphasized social dimensions in its mission.^[5] Traditional orthodoxy of mission has turned to a social reformatory pattern by realizing the holistic mission of Jesus. Now social concern becomes an important aspect of fulfilling the mission of God. The World Council of Churches has importantly tried to balance the social dimension of the Christian mission in both ecumenical and evangelical segments.^[6] No doubt the traditional way of doing missions only through evangelism has realised the social aspect. Nevertheless, the establishment of institutions and organisations with less acquaintance in the social lives of people damages the mission of God. The social concern of various missionaries had brought reformation to Indian society. Their existence and engagement in Indian heritage have an enormous impact.

An analysis of the social dimension of Christian mission, the contribution of Christian mission in various fields, and the role of the church in social mission in history have been dealt with in this writing. There is also an evaluation of mission efforts, the concept of social reformatory thinkers, and an attempt at a holistic approach to the mission. Finally, it appeals to the continuity of the social dimension in the church's mission in India.

Meaning of Social Mission

The social mission of the church is to serve society. This is for the benefit of all classes of people. It means caring for society in every aspect. It deals with issues, measures development, and knows weaknesses and strengths. Social concern is highlighted in the scripture and well demonstrated in the Nazareth manifesto of Jesus (Lk 4:18–19).

A social mission is a practical outworking through social transformation and individual conversion. The social task of the church involves human dignity, equality and rights, love, and justice.^[7] The church is committed to serving the poor and showing solidarity with them. It is through the inclusion of ecological concern, political involvement, and participation. Social mission stands for social transformation, when people struggle with various issues. Christians, when being citizens of a country, work for the social welfare of the people, which is the social mission of the church.^[8]

Definition of Social Mission

From the ecclesial mission point of view, Peter Susai Manickam says there are three dimensions of the church: the kingly dimension, the priestly dimension, and the prophetic dimension. The prophetic dimension of the church has to deal with corruption, discrimination by caste, economic oppression, fundamentalism of every type, gender discrimination, the silence of the media, and ecological concerns.^[9] The missiologist David Bosch defined: “the Church is called to be a community of those who glorify God by showing forth this nature and works and by making manifest the reconciliation and redemption God has wrought through the death, resurrection and reign of Christ.”^[10]

However, all these dimensions of the church involve social dimensions. In other words, the mission of the church is equal to the Christian mission, and social concern must be an integral part of the Christian mission.

SOCIAL IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN MISSION: A HISTORIC PANORAMA

Christian missions have a great social impact on Indian society. But many things are not even acknowledged in history. Caring for the poor, standing for justice, bringing about social transformation, education,

medication, and administration are the major areas of contribution. The researcher has divided the history of the Christian mission into three main divisions to draw out the church's social mission in India. They are the early ages, colonial reign, and modern period.

Social Influence in Early Ages

The history of Indian missions goes back to the earliest period of church history. Traditionally, it has been believed that Saint Thomas came to India in AD 52, though different theories have been brought into discussion about it. Eusebius, in his church history, says Pantenus has done missionary labour in India. Jerome's remark: Bartholomew has preached the gospel of Matthew in India. To trade and establish Christianity, another Jerusalem merchant, Thomas, a bishop from Edessa, came to Kranganur. That was the beginning of the Syro-Malabar Church.[\[11\]](#) The relationship between India and the West had never been very extensive.

Arab conquest and the great Muhamadan Empire began in 632 AD. It was then, during the time of Jahengiz Khan, that the two great missionary orders—the Franciscans and Dominicans—arrived in India. European travellers like Marcopolo, Odoric, and Sir John Mandeville also came to India. Christians were persecuted by Muslims. During this time, Christian activities were less visible. However, there were Christians at Milapur, a small number of Nestorian Christians, and a few converts. There are not many details regarding social mission, but the existence of social stigma is vivid. There were challenges to socialisation for Christians because of Vaishnavism in 1449.[\[12\]](#)

Social Effect during Colonial Reign

The colonial mission started with the arrival of Vasco da Gama and Padro de Covilhas, the head of the Portuguese fleet, in 1497. It was because of the enterprising king of Portugal, Joao II, in 1487. There was an effort of colonial conquest and exploitation to plant Christianity. Even on board, the second Portuguese fleet for India sailed under Cabral with 1500 monks destined for missionary service.[\[13\]](#) Goa became at once the centre of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Portuguese encouraged intermarriage between their soldiers and sailors with native women. They baptised their illegitimate offspring without inquiry in every possible way, embracing Christianity the natives. The Rajah of Tanjore had a mysterious baptism.[\[14\]](#) The Christian mission had great influence, especially among the Catholics.

Francisco Xavier, the famous Jesuit, was the friend of Joao III, banned palm wine, and helped poor Christians and fishermen. Earlier, he appealed to the Portuguese king to appoint him as chief of India. He was challenged by the king of Jafna. He lost the courage to continue in India. Again, in his return to India, his mission continued in Romish style. There was enforcement to accept Christianity in the social life style of Parangis and Indian mispronunciation of Portuguese. Many natives have been baptized. The missionary operation in Goa and its neighbourhood was typically conducted by the Jesuits during this period.[\[15\]](#)

Robert De Nobili had separated himself to adopt an Indian way of Christianizing India rather than a Romish style. He learned Tamil and adopted a Brahmin lifestyle. People had opposed him because that was opposite to the missionary style of Francisco Xavier. Though the rule from the pope had been implemented, nothing could stop his way of convincing Christ to be Indian. His introduction of the caste system into the social method of Christian mission was not appreciable, though many became Christians. With initial favour toward missionaries, several persecutions of Christians occurred during the Moghul Empire.[\[16\]](#) There was a period of schism among the Thomasites, Syrian Christians, and Portuguese missionaries. In the ceasing movement of Portuguese and Romish church operations in India, there was a change with the rise of Holland, England, France, and Denmark as colonial powers.

It was under the king of Denmark, Fredrick IV, that the East India Company regarded the plan of sending

out the missionaries. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau arrived at Tranquebar. This was the birth of protestant missions in India. Ziegenbalg continued his missionary activity; his friend went back. Danish authority did not allow for mission activity; however, he did not give up. He learned Tamil, preached the gospel, and raised a congregation of teachers, uniting them with the universities of Germany, Denmark, and Holland to accomplish great work.[\[17\]](#) His colleagues had gone through the opposition but continued the mission.

After the death of Ziegenbalg, three fresh missionaries had arrived. Among them, Benjamin Schwartz could contribute to Tamil education. He gathered people and preached in Tamil and English. Upon the death of King Usurp Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sahib, Schwartz, as a political agent, got an influential position in Tanjore. He sanctioned provincial schools, though the caste system was in place in society. Many people received Christianity. Missionaries and churches were practically independent to extend Christianity in society.[\[18\]](#)

Social Impact in Modern Era

With the establishment of the Anglo-Indian empire by the East India Company in the nineteenth century, a protestant mission developed. Settlement of Tranquebar is substantially identified with the English colonies in south India. But English colonisation did not help Indian missions. The English East India Company gave no helping hand to missionary work; it had been simply a commercial undertaking established by trading ports and factories in 1757.[\[19\]](#) The company was less interested in the spiritual welfare of the Hindus and struggled to appoint a chaplain in the factories who knew the vernacular language. A Swedish missionary, John Kiernander, had been allowed by Governor Clive. He preached in Tamil and English by administering a congregation of Portuguese. At the same time, Moravian brethren also worked.

Modern missionary work started on the day William Carey landed in 1793. There was no preaching of the gospel allowed. After a long time of struggle, Carey could survive at Serampore. He had the languages and, with his friends, could pioneer mission work. His contribution to the social world is great and praiseworthy.[\[20\]](#) He has been identified as the “purifier of society, the watchful philanthropist, the saviour of the widow and fatherless, of the downtrodden and oppressed.”[\[21\]](#) His team was working for social upliftment. The trio’s concern was to fight against the structural evils of Indian society. “Carey and the Serampore missionaries threw themselves into social reform activities precisely because their commitment to Jesus Christ compelled them to do so.”[\[22\]](#) To understand the social dimension and its emphasis in the church, one must consider the impact of the World Council of Churches upon all the Christian denominations of the world.

SOCIAL REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN MISSION

The neglect of the social dimension in Christian mission was debated in various Christian councils, assemblies, and conferences of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which began its journey in Edinburgh in 1910 as the International Missionary Council (IMC).[\[23\]](#) The traditional approaches of mission were reviewed for the appropriate Christian mission acts. The World Council of Churches has reformed the approaches of mission in various times and social concerns in mission were emphasized as per the biblical teaching.

International Missionary Council

The International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) took many years to state a clear-cut stand on mission and evangelism. In fact, both missed many opportunities to enrich and guide churches and mission societies to get involved in Christian missions. The Ecumenical Movement had an impact on evangelicals regarding social involvement. It has been observed that evangelicals are lacking

in social concern. The Iguassu consultant identifies the importance of social responsibility and social action. In a world of global economics, Christians must be aware of poverty and ethnocentrism. It is the responsibility of the church in each place to affirm the meaning and value of people, especially where indigenous cultures face extinction.[\[24\]](#)

The International Missionary Council was founded in 1921. It made important contributions in three areas: leadership, national Christian councils, and the World Council of Churches. Finally, the International Missionary Council (IMC) merged into the World Council of Churches (WCC).[\[25\]](#) The IMC recognized the identity of Asian Christianity. The joint committee of the IMC and WCC took Asian demand seriously at the Tambaram conference in 1938. There was an inauguration of the WCC in 1948.

And in 1956, the National Christian Council of India and the Christian Institute for the Study of Society launched the study of rapid social change in India. John Mathai, who was sometimes finance minister during Nehru's government, highlighted social work, justice, and humanity according to Psalm 144 to the government. And in the fourth assembly of Uppsala in 1968, there was an important event for the Indian churches and Asian Christians. Dr. M.M. Thomas was appointed as the moderator. In 1972, he focused on humanization and socialisation in the Christian mission.[\[26\]](#)

Geneva Council and Social Concern

In 1930, the council at Geneva mainly dealt with social problems like trade in narcotics, general welfare of children, problems of migrants, or forced labour in human societies. This council emphasized the social implications of the Christian mission, like the Jerusalem meeting, which was held in 1928. The goal of the Jerusalem meeting was social. They positively aimed for evangelism, transformation of individuals and communities, and seeing Christ in the world. The International Missionary Council focused on the social gospel, salvation as socialization, and social gospel ideology.[\[27\]](#)

The Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work (UCCLW) came out of church leaders' long and continued search for Christian service. The life and work movement established an office in Geneva. It was for understanding the causes of social problems and bringing peace. In this way, many organizations, like the home missions and ministries of service, joined in the 19th century. The constitutional objective was to perpetuate and strengthen fellowship among various churches and solve social and economic problems of modern life because, in 1925, many countries in the world went through several kinds of unrest, ill-treatment, unemployment, economic fall, and financial crisis.[\[28\]](#) There was ongoing political tyranny, social injustice, disharmony, and dissension. The conference in Geneva paid attention to the 'work' aspect of Christianity.

Statement in Lausanne Committee

In 1974, the Lausanne Committee announced social responsibilities in evangelism for Christians.[\[29\]](#) The social concerns were things like relieving human need, philanthropic activity, seeking to minister to individuals and families, and works of mercy. It stands as a model. The transformation of the culture is essential. Christ is the transformer. As the term evangelism was first defined by Anglican archbishops in England in 1919, it was updated in the Lausanne committee.[\[30\]](#) Those evangelists who limit their mission in the world to evangelism misinterpret the wholeness of scripture. Salvation is understood only in terms of the spirit or soul going to heaven. Salvation embraces both body and soul, because God created humankind in his own image (Gen 1:27).[\[31\]](#)

Social Concern at Tambaram Council

The International Missionary Council (IMC) moved to the World Mission of the Church in 1938. The

Tambaram, Chennai, conference has placed importance on the church's mission. Most subjects were related to the church. There was the formation of national Christian councils. John R. Mott formed the National Missionary Council of India in 1914. Since the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC), as per the name suggested by an ecumenist, S. MacreaCavert from the USA, in 1954, the World Council of Churches (WCC) introduced four departments: studies, ecumenical action, interchurch aid, and information. [32] It encourages churches to actively help in promoting the general welfare of the marginalised in society through social development programmes.

The church and the social department look after social issues from the local level up to the international level. Its concern was more as a Christian response to nuclearization, environmental degradation, science and technology, several forms of ethical issues, the struggle for liberation, racial justice, and so on. The International Missionary Council has also joined the World Council of Churches (WCC). Even Roman Catholic Churches responded to having relations with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1969. [33] The social engagement of the Christian mission has been strengthened and reinforced everywhere. The council in India recognised itself as the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) in 1979. [34] Then, the social dimension of Christian mission has been given more emphasis in India. However, the greater social contribution of early missionaries must be acknowledged in the history of Christian missions in India.

SOCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF MISSIONARIES

The social contribution of missionaries is so great. Missionaries have brought about transformation in various fields of society. The missionaries engaged themselves in awakening the minds of the people through the gospel of Christ. They not only proclaimed the gospel but were also involved in reviving indigenous culture and language. They set up boarding schools, colleges, and healthcare centres, constructed churches, built Christian communities, translated scripture, printed, and published spiritual books, and preached in vernacular languages. [35]

With regards to status of women and prevailing casteism of Indian society in 19th century, Aleyamma Zecharias described that women were allowed no freedom at any stage of life. There were many childwidows and youthful widows who had to live without remarriage. Children were kidnapped and slaughtered before the altar for meritorious sacrifice. Sudras were treated as slaves and untouchable. In such a social state of India, Christian missionaries have worked for the equal status of women, widow remarriage, raising voices against infanticide, and human sacrifice for social harmony and peace in India. [36]

Eradication of Social Evils

The protestant missionary presence was active among the subaltern identity to Indian Christians. It empowered them to assert their rights and undertake struggles to do away with certain unmeaning social evils of that time. Eradication of social evils is evident during the time of Serampore trio's mission. Their association with other non-existing educated friends has ignited for the social reform. Among them is Sati, caste system, neglect of girl child, Devadasi system dowry system etc. The Mukti mission of Pandita Ramabai stood for the transformation of young girls. [37]

Abolishment of Inhuman Practice

The well-known inhuman practices were human sacrifice, the Devadasi system, and female infanticide. Missionaries were shocked by the different practices. Among them are Sati (the immolation of widows on their husband's funeral pyres), the killing of lepers, and sacrificing children. William Carey promulgates a rule against all of these atrocities and submits a report to the governor, Lord Wellseley. With the help of Raja Ramohan Roy, sati was abolished. Carey, along with others, promoted education as a means of

others, promoted education as a means of reforming these practices.[\[38\]](#)

People had traditional beliefs in Ayurveda, home remedies, and healing through exorcisms. When Europeans arrived in India, education was not that prioritized; people were under local heads. There was a practice of the caste system. It was because of missionaries' influence that a radical change occurred in the past.

Reformation in Social System

Bringing social reformation by the missionaries into different areas of social life is very clear in the history of India. The Portuguese, Dutch, Scottish, and English missionaries had raised medical awareness by serving in rural areas. The women missionaries and physicians have cared for females in society. They promote women's education. Alexander Duff was against caste-based segregation in his schools. Christian missionaries changed the Dalits in fundamental ways. Dalits and low castes become aware of their social and economic plight, realising inequalities in the ritual hierarchy of Hindus. Conversion helped them reject lowly places and impose social identities. The falsehood of being untouchable was not upheld by missionaries.[\[39\]](#)

Standardization of Language

There was no script in many of the Indian languages. Primarily, it was in the form of dialects with no proper accents or grammar. With the arrival of orientalist and missionaries, standardisation and publication in Indian languages took place.[\[40\]](#) The missionary work of Jesuits in the Moghul Empire helped them get familiar with Hindustani, i.e., Hindi or Devanagiri, and Urdu or Persian script. Father Corsi was outstanding in his mastery of the language.[\[41\]](#) Lucknow Christian College was the first institution in India to teach shorthand in English, Urdu, and Hindi. Their efforts included writing scripts, words, grammar, and literature. "American missionaries compiled and published the earliest grammars and dictionaries of Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, and Marathi."[\[42\]](#)

During the time of William Carey, the Baptist Missionary Society in general was able to profit others in areas such as literature production, arrangement processes, stewardship theology, mission promotion, and partnership efforts. The trio and their associates, by seeing the countrymen, stated that they were translating scripture, printing, producing paper, engaging in oriental studies, learning Indian languages, working with pandits, setting up schools, and engaging in agricultural and horticultural experiments. They respected Indian culture. William Word even requested a society to be formed for improving the knowledge of history, literature, and mythology among Hindus and a museum to receive all the curiosities of India. Such a liberal project was suggested to the leader of the Baptist missionary society.[\[43\]](#)

Towards Identity of Tribal and Dalit

Most tribals and Dalits are identified as Hindus, whereas they are considered non-Hindus. They were neglected as a lower and weaker section of society. They live in mountains in an uncivilized and uneducated way of life. They were not able to build identity among the so-called high-caste people of India.[\[44\]](#) However, the arrival of missionaries and their acquaintance with them have had an enormous impact in the areas of education, medication, social awareness, civilization, and purpose of life.

Social Structure and Administration

Christian missionaries have mobilised thought power in India. There is an effect of transformation in the inner and outer lives of the nation. Educated Hindus have a greater impact on Christianity through their schools and colleges.[\[45\]](#) The democratic government has been structured through the British Raj. European

colonialists and mission agencies have paved the way for structure and administration for the well-being of the people.

In the 18th century, the British East India Company was gradually transformed into a government. The company had to take over the administration of the country. It was for the common good of the people of India. The men behind it was Clive, Hastings, and Cornwallis. Through peaceful treaties, native princes came under the British Empire. Due to missionaries' good work, the British Parliament granted missionaries full freedom to settle and work in India. Missionaries from Britain, America, and Europe had entered India and started working. The westerners were highly disciplined; they had skills in organization. People in India were doing things in a haphazard way. The western spirit of nationalism and belief in democratic principles taught that all are equal before the law.[\[46\]](#) Gandhi conceived the plan of the non-cooperation movement while staying in the house of S. K. Rudra, an Indian Christian leader and the principal of St. Stephen's College in Delhi. K.T. Paul and V.S. Azariah are good representative thinkers for their active engagement with the life of the Christian community and outspokenness on national issues.[\[47\]](#) The voice of Christian missionaries and Indian Christians was not only for good governing from the very beginning, with the participation of the Indian National Congress, but also for the improvement of the social state of India.

MISSIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL STATE

Societal contribution by Christian missions is ever appreciable, even in their weakness of understanding and negligence. As far as the contribution of the Christian community to nation-building is concerned, Christians have contributed significantly in the areas of social concern and social action. The social state of Indians is one of poverty, malnutrition, the gap between rich and poor, neglect of human rights and dignity, religious conflict, and a lot of other issues. Christians in general and the church in particular have been shy about political socialisation and public participation, despite their immense contribution to the service sector and spiritual area.[\[48\]](#) Some of the missional contributions to the social state of Indian society have been discussed in further sections of this article.

Upliftment of the Poor

Missionaries had an active involvement with those at the bottom of Indian society. High-caste society was not responding deeply to the ideas of Europeans and their institutions. They wanted to stay within the councils of Hinduism. But there was discrimination between the rich and the poor. Riches were taking advantage of economic exploitation. The poor were not given the right wages. Many jobless, poor communities were under the pressure of the land lord. Some Dalit communities, like Naya and Pariya in Tamil Nadu, received Christianity. The opportunity offered by the missionaries to find an escape and attain upward social mobility was eagerly grasped.[\[49\]](#) Missionaries provided jobs to the poor for their rightful economic gain and better sustenance with land rights and identity.

In 1889, the term "Sardar" was used for the first time in the mission magazine of the Gossner Mission. Sardars were often educated Christians who collated funds in the villages to pay lawyers who fought for the land in court. Sardars joined the general conference of the missionaries. They wanted tribals to have their own land. Like Birsa Munda, a tribal Christian under Chottangpur fought with the British. If there were no Christian ideas behind it, there would be acute danger.[\[50\]](#) Missionaries brought social awareness to the poor.

Social Justice

Missionaries are interested in seeing the world experience as much peace, care, and justice. There must not be any inequalities, social discrimination, corruption, or conflict. The biblical ethical exhibition in social living has been attempted by missionaries. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God was not a political one. But he was prophetically engrossed in the process of social and political change. He attacked the

sacrificial system and defied the Jewish priesthood. He also rebuked scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, blind guides, serpents, and fools. He wanted to have social change by promoting justice in the midst of opposition.

His mission to bring good news to the poor and proclaim liberty to captives had tremendous effect on society. Jesus' mission was profoundly critical, not isolated from society, and brought social justice. Christian institutions and seminaries should prepare Christians to participate efficiently in sociopolitical activities as conscious citizens and skilled activists for peace, justice, and freedom.[\[51\]](#)

Humanization

The mission mandate of Jesus for humanity is the 'Nazareth manifesto' which Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his ministry at the synagogue in Nazareth. The manifesto is a manifestation of humanization that envisages and promises justice, equality, and liberation for marginalised people. Change is needed in the social system, customs, cultural values, and laws of the state to facilitate the process of humanization. The Christian mission has done social reform through humanization.[\[52\]](#) This change needs to start in the church, which is the nucleus of God's new community. The church should not be based on caste or class but on love and compassion for one another and the acceptance of each other because all have become brothers and sisters through Christ, who liberated and saved mankind.

Humanization restores human dignity and freedom. The Christian responsibility is to ensure human dignity. This was one of the major subjects of discussion in Indian Christian social thought during the time of M. M. Thomas. Vatican II and the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches define the church as the sacramental sign of the unity of all humanity and the presence of the paschal mystery among all people. Christ is the source and hope of the new humanity.[\[53\]](#) To see social change in society, evangelism is relevant. The evangelist must see himself as involved in directing change. Social transformation is related to the transformation of individuals. The church needs to concentrate on the dignity of the individuals.[\[54\]](#)

Equality of Mankind

The church needs to help in the resurgence of the Dalit quest for equality and community. The Hindutva forces are hiding primordial caste contradiction in society by misdirecting religion as the source of contradiction in order to create a religious enemy for the political mobilisation of the social elites. Efforts are being made to appoint Dalits to the Hindu project. Today's Dalit recognises that social unity is more important than political unity. The church needs to respond to rising Dalit consciousness. Caste divides, discriminates, and dominates, and its practice in the church is a betrayal of the gospel of Christ. Every form of discrimination is to be overcome and eradicated in the life of the church. It is to create a new community, manifest values, and promote equality in wider society through its service and mission efforts.[\[55\]](#) The means of doing Christian missions further clarify societal development.

SOCIETAL VIABILITY IN CHRISTIAN MISSION

The Christian mission has touched every stratum of society. Early missionaries worked hard to lift the poor, downtrodden, outcasts, and marginalized.[\[56\]](#) The main reason for the missionaries' success in gaining the hearts of the converts was their emphasis on the values of individualism and equality of all human beings by attempting to socially uplift them through programmes related to education, health care, and economic development.[\[57\]](#)

Education

The Christian mission has made a great contribution in the field of education. Despite local beliefs and

pessimism, the missionaries believed that the girls could be educated and transformed. Schools are used as instruments for civilising local people. Many schools are established where future citizens are shaped, and non-formal education is given for social change. Y. Vincent Kumardoss says Scottish missionary Robert Caldwell and his wife Eliza contributed to the field of education. It was towards quality education, anglo-vernacular schools, boarding schools, and the promotion of female education. He formed a church-building society and various associations in 1844. Local funds are trained for the sustainability and well-being of society.[\[58\]](#)

Rajendran notes the work of Ida Scudder. She was a missionary to south India who founded Vellore Christian Medical College in 1900 to train women as doctors and nurses. Many missionaries believed women were equal to men and should have the opportunity to learn and made an effort to educate Indian women.[\[59\]](#) Education is expected to create an atmosphere of social consciousness and solidarity. Even though it has become a commercial transaction, most schools and colleges run by the church benefit only the rich. It is difficult for the poor to afford the English education rendered by Christian institutions. More awareness should be given to the people through education by the church.

Health Care

Health care has been known in India for centuries. Sanitation was part of the Indus Valley civilization. The arrival of allopathic medicine by the British was preceded by the systems of Ayurveda, Unnani, and Sidha. Social systems in India confined these benefits to the urban elites, leaving behind the vast majority to their traditions and beliefs that depended on local healers and herbalists to take care of health. Health care was not a priority for the poor; regular employment, food, and water were their main concerns. Much of the undernutrition among women and children is due to chronic starvation related to poverty and the low status of women. Village people had more interest in the health of their animals than in the health of their people. The Christian mission in India has built up a considerable infrastructure of significant institutions in the areas of help and support for the underprivileged.[\[60\]](#)

Christian missions contributed much to health care in India. The settled missionaries are requested for medicine by the sick people. Irrespective of caste, colour, and creed, missionaries have served the physical health of the country. Modern medicines were made available to all, and people were released from superstitious faith. Missionaries have pioneered and established dispensaries, medical colleges, and health centres in different backward regions of the country. Earlier, men did not allow female patients to consult physicians. They were treating the old-fashioned herb doctors and the charm mixture of the bazars. It was women missionary physicians and associates from English, Scottish, and German Lutheran missions scattered all over India, healing the wounded and curing the sick.[\[61\]](#) Even in recent days, as COVID-19 sweeps across the nations, destroying lives, families, communities, and nations, the call is for the church to continue to fight against this fatal disease by serving the affected and awakening others about the dangers of it. In order to care for the people, inter-church collaboration is required to combat the pandemic.

Charity

Charity is a very practical way of pursuing a Christian mission. It has to do with giving and helping the poor and needy, whether it is to non-Christians or Christians. However, this has also been misunderstood by many non-Christians. They blame it; it is the means of converting people into Christianity through materialism. Otto Wack, a missionary to Odisha, believed that when missionaries financially assisted needy Christians, even in small ways, it eventually became an obstacle for people. Mother Teresa stands as a notable missionary of charity.[\[62\]](#)

Despite the objection, the work of charity must continue as per the biblical teaching of Christian mission. Let others know that the mission of Christ is social charity, love, compassion, care, concern, mercy, and

justice.^[63] It is more than virtuous deeds that glorify the creator if they are practised in the right way.

Social Reformation

Development, though social, has been an integral part of the Christian mission from the very beginning in Indian society. The saving work of God is shown through love and action. Social action and evangelism should go hand in hand, either social action followed by evangelism or evangelism followed by social action.^[64] Early in 1904, American missionaries provided direct famine relief and supported orphans. They provide clothing for the naked and work at reasonable wages for the starving. They brought seed for farmers and assisted them in hiring help to put it in the ground. The rule of expense of money was not to impress people but to help and require return in the same form for every penny that was given. The gift was charity, but the system was business.^[65] The Serampore trio's mission is an explicit example of social change.

Carey and his colleagues fought against all forms of injustice done to women, children, old people, lepers, the poor and the destitute and by their ministry brought social transformation to a good degree. The mission of the Serampore missionaries was holistic since they not only developed the social disciplines by teaching the subjects such as Botany, Geology, Chemistry, Anatomy and Astronomy but also authored text books in these subjects.^[66] The entrusted mission of Christ to the church must reflect in society. So the I elucidate the social mission of the church in India.

SOCIAL MISSION OF CHURCH IN INDIA

The church needs to make conscious efforts to engage with the culture of the people in order to throw away the stigma of foreigners. The church should promote creative acts cutting across various identities through programmes of art, sport, music, ecology, people's struggles, etc. There is a need for greater awareness of Christian participation in politics. Christ's followers must be involved in the process of transforming the world and leading towards the goal of the kingdom of God. Christians should denounce any expression of Christian fundamental tendencies in word or deed that undermines the dignity of people of other faiths. The church is placed in the world to live a life of dependence on God and transformation.^[67]

Churches that encourage holistic missions often focus their efforts on service projects and humanitarian aid. Various projects allow mission workers to make a positive impact in settings where language and cultural barriers exist. Humanitarian projects allow people to use specific skills like medicine, construction, disaster, etc., for the sake of God's kingdom and provide for needs.^[68]

Hospitality and Socialization

Hospitality is an opportunity for mission. It is a gift.^[69] One should not feel guilty and look at other so-called hospitable cultures; all good people from wherever and whenever have practised hospitality, of course according to different patterns. Jesus was invited as a guest by several people; the same happened in the early church. The first century missionaries were invited by people wherever they went.^[70] Peter stayed sometime with a leather tanner called Simon (Acts 9:43; 10:18), Peter at Cornelius (Acts 10:48), and Paul was received in Malta on his missionary travel (Acts 28:1-10). Several texts invite Christians to practice hospitality (Gen. 18). These texts appeal to the communities to be hospitable to each other.

Hospitality in biblical tradition was very different from today's social structure. If in their times there were no motels in the desert, now there are hotels and motels in cities and along the highways. The passing traveller can choose. No culture has ever accepted just anybody who comes along. The host invites, and no guest imposes. Basically, hospitality is still offering food, drink, and shelter.

Peace and Social Harmony

How could Christianity truly be a promoter of peace in India today? First, no social harmony is possible without recognition of the dignity and rights of people. By defending human rights, Christianity will effectively champion the course of peace in Indian society. Secondly, Christianity could become an active force in developing the values and attitudes required for the creation of peace. Thirdly, the contribution Christian could make is to instil the spirit of dialogue as an effective method for the promotion of peace.[\[71\]](#)

Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is equivalent to true business entrepreneurship, but it operates in the social, non-profit sector, building something from nothing and seeking new and innovative solutions to social problems. Social entrepreneurship is the process of recognising and resourcefully pursuing opportunities to create social value and craft innovative approaches to addressing critical social needs. S. Rengsamy stated:

Mother Theresa was one of the greatest entrepreneurs in India. She started with an angel investment of five rupees in 1948 from arch bishop of Calcutta. By the turn of the century her missionary of charity had 602 homes in 125 countries and her band of 4000 sisters from as many as 40 different national origins marched to the same mission, vision and core values.[\[72\]](#)

Social philanthropy has to do with philanthropic, non-profit, social work, and charitable, and it provides benefits to society. It brings about a change among those who are in need of help. Social entrepreneurs are creative, provide value, and are self-sustainable. The church must work for the welfare of society. The church needs to help build social capital for those who are in need, like microfinance, agriculture, and create jobs for the benefit of compatriots. It has to do with environmental and societal concerns.[\[73\]](#)

The church has lost interest in entrepreneurial approaches to social needs and problems. Faith based communities led the way in innovative approaches in sectors such as education, health, housing and food. but lost interest in social entrepreneurship. Church needs to take interest in social entrepreneurship to maintain the story of God's love and redemption.[\[74\]](#)

Diakonia

Diakonia is mainly social ministries that are associated with service, ministry and any kind of calling exercised by a specialised ministerial function as designated. The church is called to speak Christ to the nations so that the kingdom of God will come. All services are not diakonia. It is diakonia, which makes the transcendent word imminent.[\[75\]](#) Jesus came to serve so that all might be one. Christian mission must serve dialogue as diakonia because the church is in and with the world. *Diakoinia* must be taken as a ministry of gifts. All gifts of God are bestowed on believers for the sake of diakonia. Christian medical agencies must remain flexible enough to search out and discover the areas that are being neglected by the government. Christian medical diaconia should give priority to programmes and projects that address people in the totality of their existence. Other areas of diaconia are refugee help, aid to victims of injustice, help for political prisoners and their families, help for farmers, animal breeders, small businessmen, industrial artists, manual laborers, and others.[\[76\]](#)

Godson Jacob, in his extensive study of Jurgen Moltmann's theological reflection, says the church is a community. It is the community to serve society. The church is trinitarian, a community of friendship and fellowship, and a messianic community. The church grew out of Christ's fellowship. There must be a voluntary association of members, mutual friendship, common worship, forming the spiritual life, and common concentration on special Christian tasks in society; whether be it in the field of evangelization, or

the liberation of the underprivileged. There must be a deliberate return to a simple devotional life and a reflection of new Christian practice in common gatherings.[\[77\]](#)

Liberation of Social Stigma

Christian mission includes the effort to spread to the entire world the good news of the kingdom of God, which is characterised by love, justice, and transformation. A biblical example of the work of holistic missionaries is seen in Paul's letter to Philemon. He pleaded not for the release of Onesimus from slavery but to treat him in love and justice as a brother, and he urged Onesimus to submit to his master in love as a brother. Liberation from incorrect relationships paves the way for a more just structure in society, furthering the possibility of social and gender liberation and equality of opportunity. This transforms a society as it becomes characterised by freedom in Christ. The biblical mission is a call to people to turn to God, to one another, and to the creation of love. This conversion is in a holistic manner.[\[78\]](#)

Resolving the Societal Issues

Societal issues are an ongoing factor in pluralistic India. Christian evangelism and social involvement continue to challenge the caste system. Religious fundamentalism has continued to increase among all sections of society.[\[79\]](#) Terrorism is very active in all the regions of the country. The lack of a charismatic national leader in the main national party has given rise to coalition politics. Corruption continues to spread all over the country. Youth are becoming jobless. They have been at the forefront of many struggles in India. Women are the agents of social change. Poor people are becoming poorer, and Dalits and tribal people face oppression. The identity crisis has increased.[\[80\]](#)

There is a struggle for social harmony, peace, and unity in society. The people of God, being light, must work for the welfare of society. With the rise of globalization, the immigrant rate has increased. There is a growth in business organizations. With foreign lifestyles, urbanization has ruined the traditional lives of villagers. Refugees have become another global problem common to India. Christians are not able to reach all sections of people due to the emergence of various cultures. There is a change in food, dress codes, and social life. Techno-generation has changed without any difference in urban and rural areas. In this age of information, social networking becomes the platform to serve others.[\[81\]](#) However, how far Christian mission has been able to utilize it, there is a question. The church must play an essential role in the improvement of society by dealing with all these societal issues.

Stand against Social Crisis

Numerous ongoing social pollutions have really incited the educated class of society to stand against them. Social pollution is like prostitution, human trafficking, inhuman practice, violence, and so on. The Christian mission needs to take a firm step to raise the voice of Christ for social renewal and the kingdom of God. But there is an ongoing practice of corruption, bribery, showing partiality in the fields of education, politics, employment, and riots for personal gain in Indian society.[\[82\]](#) In such a crisis, the mission of Christ must be to bring sanctity, changes in the power of the Holy Spirit, peace, unity, and glory to the social system.[\[83\]](#) The Christian mission must attempt to create a standard society.

Demonstration of Christ Centered Ethics

The ethics of Christ are to love one's neighbour as himself. Love is an essential element that demonstrates one's concern for others. The compassion towards the poor, rejected, and no one must be a Christian concern. The caring aspect of the image of God in man is commanded in the mission of Jesus. Loving one's enemy is another Christian virtue to have in front of Christian living. The church is an example of Christ's moral ethics. It must be practiced by Christian believers to ultimately reach society. Various Christian

virtues—love, justice, integrity, faithfulness, forgiveness, and equality—are practicable phenomena in the life of the church.[\[84\]](#)

Renovation of Global Civil Society

Globalization has highly affected the Indian social system. There is a growth in migration, multi-ethnicity, and hybridity. The primary culture of India has been assimilating into a global civil society with the increase of global villages, economies, international commerce, diaspora, and settlements.[\[85\]](#) In this, postcolonial societal living and the emergence of a global lifestyle The Christian mission is not able to concentrate on a particular social system because there is an ongoing shift and changes are taking place. The convergence and amalgamation of different social systems and cultural life styles create postmodern living without a particular social identity.[\[86\]](#)

To comprehend an overall assessment of the social dimension of the Christian mission of India, researchers in a socio-missional perspective evaluate the efforts of ecumenical and evangelical thinkers, the views of social reformative thinkers, social ecology, and the present attempt at a holistic mission of the church in a pluralistic context.

A SOCIO-MISSIONAL EVALUATION

The consideration of social dimensions in the Christian mission has brought reformation in various fields of Indian society. However, along with many positive achievements, the Christian mission also has limitations. Earlier, missionaries had less access to information, anthropological knowledge, communication, technologies, culture, tribe, and Varnashrama dharma. There was disunity and competition among them. That damaged the offer of Christ to Indians, who were already in divergence. The report of Christian missionaries to their constituency was exaggerated or caustic. Convert Christians suffer from host cultures. Missionaries seldom identify with local cultures. Reaching the high-caste Hindus was an utter failure. Indian workers have worked as agents for European masters. Christians' staying separate from Indian culture made non-Christians think of them as traitors. Many missionaries and converts stayed at the mission stations.

There was pressure from the high castes to continue the caste system. It is misunderstood that Christians are low castes and Dalits. Christianity is the religious side of the propagation of colonial power. There is no patriotism in them. Missionaries were misunderstood by Indians when they helped the poor. Indian non-Christians think missionaries are converting people with materialism. But social action is a Christian response to needs. Missionaries were viewed as business-minded colonialists by Indians.[\[87\]](#)

Ecumenical Social Resurgence

The ecumenical movement began to explore the challenges of the gospel in terms of world-wide concerns for the church's mission; it took rapid social change. During the Sixties, church and society became the emphasis, and socio-economic concerns as well as religious pluralism were taken seriously in the World Council of Churches studies and conferences. The rights of women, exploitation, the eco-crisis, and other such topics led the ecumenical movement to expand its mission perspective. There was a period of polarisation between the economic and evangelical emphases in mission. Ecumenicals have concerned themselves with evangelization, leading to church growth. But then came a turn: post-Lausanne ecumenicals grew empathetic to the concern for evangelism and began to listen to the voice of evangelicals. Post-Lausanne evangelicals grew in their social consciousness. By the Nineties, there was a mutual recognition that both were committed to a wholistic mission, and a common search began to be promoted by leaders of the church movement.[\[88\]](#) According to Jacques Matthey:

There are three positions regarding mission and evangelism among ecumenical in today's context. First, for

some mission and evangelism are inter-changeable, and one or the other is chosen depending on the context. Second, the position is based on the Roman Catholic documents stating that evangelization is Church's holistic mission. Third, evangelism includes proclamation of gospel, invitation to personal conversion, new life in Christ and discipling.[\[89\]](#)

The ecumenical unity movement of churches and leaders during the independence period has been overwhelmed. Social politics take centre stage, leaving little time for spirituality. Denominational affinity is very strong. The ecumenical movement itself has become a denomination. The divide between the liberal, evangelical, ecumenical, and episcopal has sharply increased. The mainline church's involvement in missions is very high. The church is confused about its role in society. Though social service gained acceptance, attacks against Christians were seen. Most Christian schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, and rehabilitation centres have become employment opportunities for Christians. The community's involvement has decreased. The church's position in society as the answer to all issues has been usurped by private enterprises.[\[90\]](#)

Social Contribution of Evangelicals

When one considers the relationship between evangelism and social action, then social action is a means to evangelism. In social action in any form, whether food, medicine, or education, the smell of hypocrisy hangs around philanthropy. The mission attempt of Christians was called "Rice Evangelists." Social action is not a means to evangelism but a manifestation of evangelism; in this sense, philanthropy is not attached to evangelism but rather artificially from the outside as its natural expression. In Jesus' mission, he did what he preached (John 14:11). Love must be reciprocal in the mission. Social action is a partner of evangelism and compassionate service that belong together in the mission of God.[\[91\]](#)

Evangelicals thought of mission only in terms of a vertical relationship with God and neglected horizontal relations, i.e., social responsibility. Both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith are important because, in the great commandment, Jesus responded to the lawyer's query by stating, "Love God and love your neighbor" (Matt 22:35-40). The church's engagement in Christ's mission is always a spiral movement. In the 1980s, evangelicals debated the relationship between evangelism and social action at the Grand Rapids Conference of 1982 with the theme 'evangelism and social responsibility'. It insisted on responsible care of the environment and dependence on confidence in the Holy Spirit to lead into all truth (Jn 16:13).[\[92\]](#)

Social and Reformative Thinkers of Christian Mission

The mission of God is to serve humankind. Man is created in the image of God. Negligence to this very fact in the Christian mission has caused people to think about the importance of social aspects. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the social sciences began to establish themselves in universities throughout Europe. Sociologists included Herbert Spencer (1829-1903), Karl Marx (1818-1893), Max Weber (1864-1920), and others. The sociological approach deals with the social dimensions of biblical studies. This is essential to contemporary religious and secular life.[\[93\]](#)

A social scientist gives a clear picture of society. They want to bring reformation to society through various movements. For the social reformation in India, many movements were raised to fight against the social stigma, for women's empowerment, anti-Brahmanism, tribal identity, Dalit awareness, land reform, and others. The anti-Brahmin movement was under the leadership of Mahatma JotiraoPhooley, B.R.Ambedkar, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, and Annadurai. For women's empowerment, leaders were Sarojini Naidu, Pandita Ramabai, Annie Besant, and others. Jeyaraj Rajaiah cited J. N. Faquhar:

The Indian social movement is a direct outcome of Christian missions and western influences; and all communities have felt the impact in a greater or less degree. The primal impulse was communicated by

Serampore missionaries to Ram Mohan Roy and by him to the Hindu community; and, throughout the whole history, Christian's teaching, effort and examples has done more than anything else to quicken the movement.[\[94\]](#)

This means the impact of Christian missionaries in the area of reforming the social system since the arrival of Christian missionaries is active in India. Now, many Indian social thinkers have come up with the idea of restructuring the pattern of Christian mission from a biblical point of view. Among such, a few have been discussed below in terms of their social and reformatory thinking in Christian mission.

Arvind P. Normal

Nirmal thought, wrote, and stood for the cause of the downtrodden and Dalits. He affirms that they are real people. His liberative ideologies for Dalit identities stand as unique social works. The mission of the church is to serve the weak, broken, and marginalized. God's saving power must manifest as brokenness, which belongs to the very being of God.[\[95\]](#) He proposed doing Dalit theology in Christian missions. The church needs to wake up from its dalitness. Christians must have Dalit consciousness.

Felix Wilfred

Christians, instead of thinking of themselves as minorities, must have a broader perspective of nation-building with horizontal relationships with others. It is a crisis that they are not involved in government service and civil society. But efforts are made to create a better civil society where many social struggles exist, like Dalit, tribal, women, gender equity, and the environment. Strengthening democracy in the country requires all segments of society, including religions and the church, to be at the forefront of this venture of the nation. Even false models, Naxalites, Maoists, and other wings have taken steps to welfare the poor and Dalits. The church needs to address those movements and stand for the contribution of non-violent society. A corruption-free India is a better India. The greed and corruption of the corporate world and state with private interests have been exposed in these times. The church must establish mechanisms to check abuse of power and erosion of the common good. The church could promote transparency and accountability among all those in charge of governance.

In a society of hierarchy, family business, caste, and dynastic policies, the church contributes by bringing to people at all levels, from grassroots to higher, the message of the Indian Constitution. The Church works with a closer reading of constitutional morality in India. An imbalance in economic growth has caused migration. Poor sections of society suffer in labor. Farming and agriculture have been far from the concern of the church. The policies of liberalisation have favoured the cities to the neglect of rural India, where food is produced and supplied. Farm lands are being used for industrialization and urbanization. The church must realize and work for such a crisis. Protection of the poor is another concern. The degradation of the environment must not be neglected. The construction of dams, nuclear plants, highways, and mining in the tribal areas poses a serious threat to the environment and the livelihoods of the poor and marginalized. Bettering the cause of women and the plight of children need to be taken into consideration in church missions.[\[96\]](#)

Consumerism is another problem where the middle class accumulates wealth. The church needs to fellowship with appropriate strategies and plans to intervene in society by creating opportunities for the poor, marginalized, Dalit, and tribal in the increasing social and cultural capital. Churches are to work as avenues of advocacy on issues such as social justice, human rights, communalism, education, emancipation of women, and environmental development. Effective, nurturing leaders with vision and dedication are needed. Christians must involve themselves in the world of media to highlight and bring people to awareness at local, regional, and national levels.[\[97\]](#)

James Massey

Indian Christians are a community of the poor because more than 90 percent of its membership consists of Dalits, tribals, Adivasis, and women. But despite this, the church in India continues to present an elitist image. The church of the Poor does not mean a church exclusively for them. It means a church for all the people of God. It serves society. The Indian church must give sincere priority to the cause of liberation.[\[98\]](#) Massey has proposed Dalits to obtain legal status and restore self-respect in society despite caste oppression. He also suggested Dalits for the reformation through unity and solidarity.[\[99\]](#) He brings awareness through Dalit consciousness and reformation from a liberating perspective, contributing to the Indian Christian mission.

Eco-Mission of Christian Theology

Ecological concern has been raised among Christians. Now churches have been made aware of Christians' responsibility to God's creation.[\[100\]](#) How does the church continue the ecological dimension of its mission? The church must participate and promote awareness of the ecological crisis facing the contemporary world today.[\[101\]](#) Each local church must care for God's earth. Missionary education must include the study of ecology and encourage families to practice taking care of the environment. The Christian mission must bring awareness to the following: segregation of garbage at the source, cleaning of the environment, planting trees and having a kitchen garden, greening the environment, economic consumption of water and power, and non-use of plastic materials. God has placed the responsibility on his people to care for his creation.

Ecological problems are rooted in social problems.[\[102\]](#) Fanai Hrangkhuma offers a holistic model for a mission that includes not just redemption and liberation but also ecological concerns. He suggests the church must actively engage in public policy formation to bring ecology into public debate and the agenda. The Christian mission also needs to bring awareness of ecological concerns and theological mandates to the people, especially the church.[\[103\]](#) In the protection of the eco-system, the church has not done much, though it has altogether been present. K.C. Abraham said:

Although Christianity was born in a different cultural ethos where holistic view of reality was in vogue, the Indian church's theology and practices have been, with some notable exceptions, heavily influenced by western missionaries. With the result, at least in our protestant churches, little thought was given to link faith with ecology. We are all inclined to view with suspicion any talk of nature in theology. Church practices sometimes adopted symbols and customs that arose out of natural environment but seldom were they integrated with the mainstream thinking or practice.[\[104\]](#)

Ecological concern is also taken as a social dimension in Christian mission. Citing Pope Francis' word on social teaching in Christian mission, X.D. Selvaraj stated, "today however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach, it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment so as to hear both the cry of the earth and cry of the poor."[\[105\]](#) The study of ecology and environment science must be integrated into the field of theology so that the Christian mission will focus on a holistic approach to mission.

Towards a Holistic Approach in Christian Mission

The holistic approach of Christian mission concerns all areas of human beings. This mission includes evangelism, social concern, ecological concern, and others. Appropriate hermeneutics is needed in interpreting the Bible to put kingdom values into the cultural, social, economic, educational, religious, and political aspects of the people. This is for holistic transformation. The social gospel is one of various

mission models such as contextualization, liberation, philanthropic, salvation, etc. It is the responsibility of the Christian mission to incorporate the holistic mission approach. [\[106\]](#)

Mission activity ought to be witnessing to the fullness of the promise of God's reign and participating in the struggle of mankind. Mission, being God's activity, is holistic, and the goal is transformation or bringing about the kingdom of God to bear in the lives of the people being ministered to. [\[107\]](#) The church must have a holistic approach to its Christian mission. This approach is widely used in the secular world. It concentrates on the physical needs of the total person and the image of God in men. The whole church must take the whole gospel to the whole world, as the Lausanne Covenant stated. A holistic mission is meant for the development of all areas of human beings. It is spiritual, social, emotional, economic, etc. The entirety of humankind in all its aspects is the key concern of the heart of God, and it needs God's transformation. Even according to the determined effort of the WCC, the new noun 'mission' in the Great Commission has been redefined with humanization and social gospel. [\[108\]](#)

The Bible says in Genesis 1:28-31 that the entrusted task of God is to man. God loves his creation. It must be taken care of by the most enlightened people, thus the church. This aspect has been shown in the life of Jesus and commanded to the church of the New Testament. Jesus' holistic ministry is to incarnate in the multi-context of humankind. The purpose was to meet the need, reconcile, redeem, and unite the people with God. It was done with the demonstration of love, including all and kingdom-centeredness. The church must have this approach in its mission today in India. [\[109\]](#) Vinoth Ramachandra says:

The *Missio-Dei* point to God's reaching out in redeeming and reconciling have to all the creation. The *Missio-Dei* embraces both the church and the world, and the church is called to the privilege of participation in this divine mission. Indeed, correlation of 1:18 with 1:20 (Colossians) implies that the church is the focus and primary means towards this cosmic reconciliation. [\[110\]](#)

CONCLUSION

The social dimension is an integral part of the Christian mission. Without this Christian mission, the true mission of God as stated in the Bible is obscured. Churches in the past missed the consistency of carrying out the social mission in society. However, mission agencies, institutions, missionaries, and churches have been reminded by the word of God.

The social mandate of mission (Gen 1:28, c.f. Matt 22:37-40; 28:18-20) has various aspects. It includes the overall development of human society, the social struggles, issues, identities, situations, pollution, reformation, etc. that human beings live in. The church is comprised of people. It must concern the people of the world. Failure to serve them is failure to fulfil the entrusted task of God. The church needs to attempt to serve mankind irrespective of gender, caste, colour, creed, or culture. The ecological concern of the church must be one of the important missions of the church.

Early missionaries in India have made enormous efforts to bring about social reformation through various means like education, health care, literature, environmental awareness, eradication of social evils, forming administration and structure, and so on. They also have failed to understand the social, cultural, political, and religious aspects of compatriots in India. Because of colonialism and the effect of the British Raj, the Christian mission is misunderstood by Indians. However, social mission is reinforced by the World Christian Council, the International Missionary Council, the Geneva Council, the Lausanne Committee, and the Tambaram Council. The church, not only in India but in other places, needs to serve with sincerity for social causes.

Albeit effort of the Roman Catholic Church is appreciable in terms of its uplifting of the poor and vulnerable. But the focus of the social gospel is to seek not only the physical benefits of human beings for

temporal but even for the everlasting sense, and it introduces the aspect of transformational living not a Christianization. This is the responsibility of the church. The spiritual, physical, moral, and all other aspects must be seen by the churches through various actions and words.

Just as the existence of a church would not meet the needs of the people, The mere proclamation of the word by evangelical churches in and around needs an attempt at social deeds. One of the saddest parts of misunderstandings by religious fanatics is a lack of proper understanding of the actions and deeds of the church. This brings disapproval when there is persecution. Mostly, it is because of presumptions about losing members of the community. It needs to be taken into consideration in a developed society in the areas of moral, ethical, spiritual, and physical value rather than just identity, authority, freedom, etc. Moreover, the principles of the kingdom of God are to be visible with love, peace, justice, harmony, coexistence, and truth.

As the critique of the social thinkers also in view of the social dimension of Christian mission stands for the welfare of society, The church must implement social action. Various social dimensions need to be focused on to see the progress of all humanity, rather than one ethnic group or sect for a single purpose. A wider range of poly-perspectival understanding in the social sphere will importantly integrate and highlight the ideas of serving all people since the whole community of earth is one family in the recent age of globalization.

Even if others devalue the teaching of the Bible, the social diakonia of the church will remain tranquil for the betterment of humanity and God's glory. When it seems obvious that the impact of the Christian mission is less acknowledged by the intellect, the church needs not to stop its social mission but to continue to carry out her true message of the gospel in words and deeds. It is also evident from the prospects and appeals of social reformers to the church for engaging in missional awareness with a focus on the social dimension. So, the church is responsible for the overall development of Indian society while witnessing the gospel in its context.

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