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A table of contents for *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ijt_01.php

Voices of The City

- Voice A:** Of 30,000 children born in 10 years in Hiroshima, 470 were born dead, 1,046 were cripples, 423 were without ears and noses, 313 had mouth deformities, 243 had deficient internal organs, 25 had no brain and 8 no eyes.
- Voice B:** That is horrible but men have been ashamed of that deed and have confessed it. Why bring it up now?
- Voice A:** Three hundred million children alive now will grow up deformed in body or mind or both not through atomic—radiation but for another reason—*mal-nutrition*. And many of them are our neighbours, in Calcutta bustees.
- Voice C:** I don't want to hear this any more. I am tired of being told the problems of Calcutta, especially as there is so little that I can do.
- Voice D:** Despair has poisoned us. You often hear businessmen or the unemployed or government officers, even social workers, saying 'There is no hope'. But this is not true—much is being done through the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority and other Government and Voluntary agencies like the Cathedral Relief Services and CASA and CARITAS and CUSCON to name a few, but above all the people themselves who go on struggling to live, who go on in spite of every adversity to love and be human—this should fill us with hope.
- Voice E:** This is all very well, but be a bit more specific. We are told that hope has come alive in the city but I don't see it. What about housing or unemployment or sewage?
- Voice D:** Right—the facts are frightening. 70,000 new housing units are needed each year but only 10,000 are being built. But low cost housing *is* being built by CMDA and the Calcutta Improvement Trust. Nationalised Banks are giving loans without security to encourage self employment. Miles of sewerage *is* being laid. Two years ago unemptied filth from laterines in bustees flowed into the huts in the rains *but* not now—thousands of modern latrines have been built.

Voice B: It makes you think. You know, hope is not only in this massive physical development. When you realise that so many folk in Calcutta live below the poverty line, it makes you wonder how they and their families manage on 60 or 100 rupees a month. In my rounds with Operation Twilight meeting the pavement dwellers who have so little I am always struck by their gentleness and friendliness and, yes, their humour. I don't think that I could do it.

Voice A: I get the same feeling of wonder when I talk to the social workers who actually work in the slums. They are always cheerful and very sensitives. I think we need to come in living contact with the poor of Calcutta. They have a dignity which is unclothed. We need them to teach us to live. I think God is speaking to us through them.

Voice A: But where is God in all this? How does he fit into it?

Voice C: I saw Him when a blind man refused to take food saying 'I have had my dinner tonight, give it to someone else who needs it more than I do'.

Voice D: Where patience is, God is.

Voice E: I saw Him when an old woman bent with age walked three miles to the van of the Cathedral Mobile Medical Unit for medicines and then walked back again.

Voice B: Where suffering is, God is.

Voice A: I saw Him in the twisted hands and feet of the 400 paralysed people of Dum Dum—paralysed by the greed of their fellow men.

Voice D: Where employment is, God is.

Voice C: I saw Him in the faces of the unemployed young men trained by CYSEC and helped by the Banks to make a new start with self-employment.

Voice B: Where knowledge is God is.

Voice A: I saw Him in the eager faces of the slum children sitting under a tree in Hastings, taught by a girl with love.

Voice B: Where Hope is, God is.

Voice E: I saw Him in the face of a young man who wanted to commit suicide but found new hope in the Samaritans.

Voice C: Where beauty is, God is.

Voice D: I saw Him in the handicrafts of bustee women and children in Kasibagan.

Voice A: Where selfgiving is, God is.

Voice B: I saw Him in the face of a little child being taken to Khe-laghar Orphanage in the lap of a woman who started it.

Voice A: I think I see where God is. Where love is God is—but where love is not?

Voice C: Where love is NOT, God is.

The garbage dumps of Calcutta are created by our day to day life. People live in Dhapa—lorry loads of our filth rumble by all day to the dumping grounds and the rains make it a filthy stinking morass. People, not animals, bend down in that garbage with their children to scrape through every handful of refuse picking out wire, bottle caps, rubber rings, dirty bandages. Flies settle in the milk we go to distribute—it is hell—but God is in hell.

Voice B: Where love is not, God is.

I saw Him in the drenched misery of families living in little shacks under Alipore bridge over which I pass in my car without a glance.

Voice E: Where there is misery, is God there?

Voice D: I saw Him when an old lady came with her Khalai to the dry street tap, attached her own rubber tube and began to suck and suck in vain. Then she sat down panting.

Voice A: I thirst.

Voice C: Where the conscience of man is dead, is God there?

Voice B: Yes He is there but He never gives up. He goes on suffering and caring and loving and hoping. He goes on working His miracles of love.

Today the Church celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is the creator spirit who urges all of us on—who asks us to be a neighbour.

Voice A: Who is my neighbour?

Voice E: Jesus said: A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho . . .