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Hebrew Laws and Indian Christians – A Contextual Reflection

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The Background

The immediate context of this reflection was the 30th German *Kirchentag* ('Church Day') held in Hanover from 25 to 29 May 2005. This was perhaps the greatest Christian gathering in Europe with more than one hundred thousand people attending including topmost ecclesiastical and political leaders of Germany and several guests from the world church. Several halls with hundreds of stalls and events made people on the move, often trotting to go to the next. The theme of this celebration was based on the following biblical verse: *When in time to come your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the precepts, statutes, and laws which the Lord our God gave you?'* (Deuteronomy 6:20). Obviously it gave room for undefined avenues for reflection. The main focus of the public speeches was on what we do and leave for the future generations touching upon the popular topics such as war, pollution and poverty. There were Bible studies and sharing of stories too.

With a view to coincide with the above event so that participants can attend both, the 15th consultation of Third World Personnel Working in Europe met in Hildesheim, a small town south of Hanover, from 23 to 25 May. Being one of the few Indian participants in this consultation, I was asked to present a paper entitled 'An Indian Answer to a Hebrew Question!' Not unexpectedly, participants from other parts of the world found it informative of the distinctive Indian situation in which Christians as a small minority live. This is not simply a biblical reflection but a critical review of the channels with complex twists in history that brought the Hebrew story and the laws to India for the meaning and relevance of which the Indian Christians have been grappling with.

Indian Christians were introduced to the Hebrew-Jewish heritage as part of the Christian message brought by the western Christian missionaries who had a mistaken view about that heritage. They shared the dominant theological view of their times that the Hebrew tradition and Judaism represented nothing more than a preparation for the coming of the Messiah and a promise of the fulfilment in Christ. Although they profusely used the resources of the

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Hebrew scripture with particular reference to the story of creation, ethical teachings, wisdom and devotional poetry, the central story of salvation for them had a decisive break in the event of Jesus Christ. This was in spite of the fact that Jesus understood his place as part of the continuum, claimed that salvation was from Jews, stated that he came 'not to destroy but to fulfil' the law and summarised the Jewish law in the words of the twin commandment of loving God with one's whole being and loving the other as oneself, again a commandment that had come from the Hebrew tradition.

It is difficult to say that the missionaries were untainted by the anti-Jewish moorings of the West that culminated in the most horrible experience of the holocaust during the Second World War. In any case, the Indian response to their view of the Hebrew scripture as not only old but also obsolete, was unexpected. Some Indian Christian theologians asked the question whether the God of the Hebrew ancestors was absent in India. For them, if God was universal God could not have left India and other nations without God's witness. The discussion and debate was carried to the startling conclusion that some Hindu scriptures could replace that Hebrew scripture, called the Old Testament. The result of these deliberations was that the central story of God's choice of the Hebrew slaves to be God's instruments to humanize the whole world was not given adequate importance by both the camps.

Recognition of Original Vision and Deviation

The responsibility involved in the covenant that God made with the Israelites found expression in a set of commandments. The purpose of the commandments was not to preach to others and convert them into their religion but to establish a model community based on justice, love and peace that would inspire their neighbours. Thus it is said:

Observe them carefully, for thereby you will display your wisdom and understanding to other peoples. When they hear about all these statutes, they will say, 'What a wise and understanding people this nation is!' What great nation has a God close at hand as the Lord our God is close to us whenever we call to Him? What great nation is there whose statute and laws are just, as is all this code of laws, which I am setting before you today? (Deut. 4:6-8).

Obviously the original purpose was forgotten and the complex development of their history complicated their obligation to implement them. For example, the celebrated scheme of jubilee was never implemented mainly because of monarchy, which, was influenced by practices in other countries, never allowed its vested interest to fade away. Moreover, the complex Jewish legal system appeared to eclipse the original vision and demands of the law. Jesus' life and teachings, including a revision of some of the commandments, revived the original vision, broadened the horizon of God's reign and sent out a call for a new orientation in life.

But in due course, the significance of the life and teachings of Jesus was transposed into a new key. Accordingly God reconciled to Himself the whole humankind in Christ and Paul and his colleagues made an appeal to the gentiles with their core message of justification by faith. The conversion of gentiles raised a new question as to whether the Jewish customs and laws binding on them. The compromise suggested in the first church council in Jerusalem struck a note of flexibility and observance of a core minimum. But there was no change in the

insistence on the greatest commandment of loving God and loving one another. However, in due course of history, the church denigrated the Jewish tradition as a religion of law while Christianity was the religion of grace. The emphasis of the original law on justice and peace and its realisation in the way of establishing a model community was forgotten while orthodoxy developed within the church, which remained dogmatic and inflexible and gained the characteristics of a legal system.

The liturgical context in which the Protestant movement emerged was failing to grasp the meaning of being justified by grace but developing a dominant spirituality of pleading to 'have mercy on us' and struggling to win the favour of the Lord instead of emphasizing celebration and service. 'Scripture alone, grace alone and faith alone' constituted Martin Luther's core message of reformation. In expounding the supreme significance of grace, he undermined the ethical demands of justice and peace as enshrined in the Jewish law. He also failed to recognise divine grace and love as fundamental to the Hebrew religious experience and tradition as well, although later Judaism, which transmitted the tradition to the future generations, failed to keep up the focus and clarity. Hence for Luther the epistle of James that emphasised work for justice was 'the epistle of the straw'. This position of Luther was further hardened when the Jews did not respond to the 'Protestant gospel' as he had expected. This position influenced the missionary movement and the new converts in the non-western world were so brainwashed that they were not able to identify with the Hebrew question about 'precepts, statutes and laws' and the liberation story attached to them. Recently, there have been efforts in the ecumenical movement to present a correction and to talk about Jewish-Christian relationship in terms of 'common roots and new horizons'. The Indian answer to the Hebrew question we try to formulate, therefore, cannot be straightforward because of the limitations we have mentioned above.

The Transformation of the first Protestant Missionary to India

Most western missionaries to India were theologically moulded in the above Protestant understanding of the Jewish tradition and Christian message combined with a mistaken view of identifying the gospel with the western culture. Hence they understood their mandate as taking the gospel of light to the heathenish darkness. But those who encountered the mission field with some openness had a startling experience that helped change their position. Let me illustrate with the experience of the first Protestant missionary to India and it is worth remembering that 2006 is the tercentenary year of his arrival and preparations for celebrations and publications are under way. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1682-1719), who represented the Halle Pietist movement and was sponsored by the Danish King Frederick IV, arrived in the South Indian Malabar coast on 9th July 1706. Unlike most of the Roman Catholic missionaries working in India around this time, he was 'daring in order to know' and his study of the Tamil language and Tamil heritage changed his opinion about the 'heathens' among whom he was working. In his own words:

Most Christians in Europe suppose the Malabarians to be a very barbarous people, but this arises from the Europeans who have been amongst them not understanding their language, so that they have not been able to read their books, but have drawn their conclusions from outward appearances. I must acknowledge that when I first came amongst them I could not imagine that their language had proper rules, or that their life

had the laws of civil order, and took up all sorts of false ideas on their actions as if they had neither a civil nor a moral law, but as soon as I had gained a little acquaintance with their language and could talk to them on various subjects, I began to have a much better opinion of them and when at last I was able to read their own books I found that the Malabarians discussed the same philosophical subjects as the savants of Europe, and that they had a regular written law, wherein all theological subjects were treated of and demonstrated. This *surprised me extremely*, and I was delighted to be thoroughly instructed in their heathenism from their own writings.¹

These writings were not like the Hebrew ones as statutes and laws but stories, poetries and ideas. He observed that the original natural light they had received about the supreme being was distorted by the devil or the Brahmin priests that led to the confusing belief in many gods and the abominable practice of idolatry. In this situation, he insisted, the only way out for the heathens was to accept Christianity as the true religion as it was imported from the West.

Ziegenbalg engaged in dialogue with Hindus through personal encounters and correspondences. Responding to his questions with a negative view about the 'heathens' and their religion, one wrote back to him saying,

'Tis true some things that are in our worship may be reprov'd, and we confess there are many immoralities rife among us; but does it follow that therefore there is no good among us, or no virtue exercised among the heathens? This is not reasonable to conclude. Were we, as you say, worshippers of false gods, we could have no virtuous actions at all among us; but we have...such holy men...as no man could have ever have accused of the least sins. Is it possible that our law can be false, that commands all that is good, and threatens to punish evil, and we can't be happy in the observation of it...(E) very nation has its own manners and fashions which to another nation seem ridiculous; so 'tis with our religion. God is manifold and various in His creatures, and in all His works, and 'tis His will and pleasure to be diversely worshipp'd by diverse nations.²

These words not only echo the poignant and reasoned affirmation of a Hindu but also, to a great extent, are reminiscent of the preamble of the Apostolic preaching in the New Testament (Acts 10:34f; 14, 15-17; 17: 24-28). The texts Ziegenbalg studied included the *Thirukkural* of 1330 couplets of ethics and *Ulaka Neethi* (world justice) and the former is so popular as to gain the name 'the Tamil Scripture'.

To the embarrassment of the first Protestant missionary, some of his correspondents openly pointed out how low was the moral life of the European Christians as evident in their behaviour despite their high ethical principles. For example, one put it, "As for the law of the Christians abstractly considered in itself (i.e. Christian doctrine and commandments?) 'Tis a holy law, but it is not accompanied with good works, like unto ours." Another mentioned as the common opinion of the people of his country about the Christian religion: "That your law is very just and very good, but your lives very bad; and that therefore men should have nothing to do with you, or with your religion." And a third said, in more detail, that the judgment of the lives of the Christians would have to be negative "since Christians have little justice or chastity, take bribes, seldom give alms, are drunk, kill living creatures and eat them, are not clean, despise other men, and are covetous, proud and angry."³ Further, added the

facts of not washing after easing themselves and not doing ceremonial activities at times of wedding and death. Another correspondent.⁴ This reflects an interesting turning of tables although one should be careful about generalization on both sides.

Although a few missionaries like Ziegenbalg tried to engage with the Indian culture in its multi-faceted reality, the majority operated within the framework of the gospel of light wrapped in the super-culture of the west and the heathenish darkness of India. Hence western education and social service were thought to be having civilising effect. God and Christ appeared to be imported from the west, a perception that was visibly represented in the western image of the church in India. The Indian Christians were not encouraged to ask the question what God was doing in India through the ages. If Indians were not simply savage, what was sustaining their spirituality and guiding their sense of morality? What was the source of their intellectual achievements in the area of medicine, art, architecture, literature and systems of justice? Why were the Indian thinkers and reformers attracted to the precepts of Jesus while rejecting the doctrinal formulations of his divinity? These questions are still to be answered by the majority of the minority Christian community living in India. One may even suggest that the reason that the result of centuries of western mission is such a tiny minority had something to do with the failure of asking the above questions long ago and finding answers. Nothing can be more treacherous for a person or community than to deny his/her own worth and forget her own history.

Searching for an Indian Expression of Christian Ethics

In parallel to the struggle for independence, there was a search for an indigenous theology and one aspect of this was reclaiming the Indian tradition and attaching theological significance to it. For example, A.J. Appasamy (1891-1975), one of the major theologians and a bishop in the Church of South India, stated:

There are elements in the ancient scriptures of India, which have to be fearlessly given up. But there are also many doctrines and ideals in them which have to be as zealously assimilated and carried on to their natural culmination in Christ. If Jesus blames His contemporaries for not listening to the voice of Moses, with equal power and vehemence will He condemn us for not listening to Rāmānuja, Māṅṅikavācakar, Tukārām and Chaitanya who have left behind them teaching of such undying value, pointing the way to Christ.⁵

The writings of the figures mentioned became part of the resources of Appasamy's theology. This reinforces the suggestion that Old Testament could be the Hindu scriptures. There have been others taking certain terms and concepts from the Hindu classical traditions and using them as tools to interpret aspects of the Christian message. However, apart from upholding common human values, there was no attempt to explain the relevance or significance of the Hebrew 'precepts, statutes, and laws' for Indian Christian living.

A reading of the ancient Vedic roots of Hindu law codes would suggest that there was a different yet parallel development in India to the Hebrew one. According to the Vedic vision, *Dharma* ('righteous order, law or duty') was connected with *ṛta* ('order'), which was constituted by corresponding and co-efficient realms of ritual, society and the cosmos. Accordingly, in order to maintain the orderly operation of the universe performance of ritual sacrifice following

minute prescriptions and preservation of the four-fold stratification of the society on the basis of four *varnas*, the prototype of the caste system, was indispensable. Loyalty to the order and strict adherence to the rules formed the core of ethics. This system was challenged by the movements of wandering renouces (in 7-6 centuries BCE when the Hebrew prophetic movement was at its height) most notably Buddha and Jaina movements, with their emphasis on personal virtues like truthfulness and common human values like equality and non-violence. Consequently confusion was created, which shattered an age long equilibrium. Buddhist influence on the Mauryan rulers, particularly on the most famous Aśoka of the third century BCE, was most paramount. However, Aśoka's 'edicts' not only propagate ethics of common human values and virtues but also uphold the principle of equal respect for different religious traditions. The Brahmanic response was characterized by both reaffirmation of the Vedic vision and assimilation of the values and virtues emphasized by the Buddhist and Jaina movements. But the process was not without tension. I have detailed this tension elsewhere with reference to "Aśoka and Arjuna as counter figures standing in the field of dharma" taking clues and particulars from the most famous Hindu text Bhagavad-Gita.⁶ I have tried to present the Gita as emerging in the context of a Brahmanic response to challenges for Vedic ritual.

As far as definite law codes are concerned, more than the Gita, important texts were Kautilya's *Arhaśāstra* and *Dharmasāstras* of various lawgivers, particularly Manu, who most probably operated around the turn of the second century BCE along with the author of the Gita. One of their major concerns was the reaffirmation of *svadharma* (one's own duty, of course dictated by one's caste). In this matter, the Gita and *Manudharmaśā* repeatedly mention that 'doing one's own duty even imperfectly is better than doing that of others perfectly.'⁷ Kautilya appears to be more focused on socio-political matters and more liberal reflecting a broader social context. Studies on Hindu ethics in contemporary India trace the historical development of law codes in early sources such as the above.⁸ Despite a variety of local customs over which all caste-groups had rights to adopt and maintain, the lowest in the hierarchy had to suffer some cruel restrictions. This was to the extent of the ears of the Śūdras to be filled with molten lead if they listen intentionally to the recital of the Vedas, their tongues cut out if they recite it and their body split in twain if they preserve it in their memory.⁹ If this was the case of the lowest in a hierarchy one can imagine the lot of those who were still lower as the fifth group, outcaste and untouchable. Though they sustain the life of their community through their menial labour, from planting and weeding out in the paddy field to removing and burying dead bodies and to cleaning toilets and clearing sewage canals, they are excluded from the main stream of life and regarded as pollutants. We will see soon how the Hebrew laws and the story behind them bring into a new light the experience of the Dalits.

Although the Muslim invaders and rulers did not impose the Islamic law on the non-Muslims in India the impact of their polity was considerable. Particularly those who converted to Islam with a view to gain social equality presented a challenge for the Hindu orthodoxy. During the British period, there was tension in applying the British law and the traditional Hindu law simultaneously or alternatively. There are famous stories, which expose the problem.¹⁰ What has survived all such changes is the practice of traditional customs, which include, for example, diverse matrimonial and funeral rites on one hand and untouchables on the other.

Either rejecting or finding inadequate the Sanskrit sources of the Brahmanic Hindu tradition, there emerged in eighties a group of theologians who put forward as the most authentic source for theology the suffering experience of the Dalits. Echoing their plight in comparison with the situation of the ancestors of the Israelites, Arvind Nirmal (1936-1995), a pioneer Dalit theologian gives an interesting exposition of Deuteronomy 26:5-9.¹¹ The following gives the highlights: although the Dalit ancestors did not enjoy the nomadic freedom of the wandering Aramean, just like the Hebrews, the Dalits should become confessional affirming their uniqueness, which deals with the question of roots, identity and consciousness; theirs is a community vision; they have to tell the story of their bondage, the harsh treatment, the toil and tears; reminiscent of terror, wonders and signs, they must protest and agitate to change their lot; their liberation is regaining human dignity and the right to live as free people created in the image of God; they are part of a movement from few to many and from 'no people' to 'God's people'. The Hebrew tradition and experience thus gain a new validity and significance when the Dalits identify with them. Further, Nirmal and other Dalit theologians portray God as servant, find in Jesus a friend in solidarity and see in the early church emergence of a new community of equals led by the Spirit.

The Ethical Imperative

In the discourse on the Brahmanic Hindu tradition and the Dalit reawakening, what is not clear is the nature and appeal of Hebrew laws to Indian Christians, the majority of whom are Dalits. If the Dalits are not to remain pointing out only the negative side of the Brahmanic tradition, truth requires them to acknowledge different visions, traditions and interpretations within the tradition. It is too plain to deny, for example, the sacrificial center of the Vedic vision, oneness of human soul with the supreme soul as emphasized in the Upanishads, God's all-embracing love as experienced in some devotional traditions, common human virtues like truthfulness and non-violence mentioned in the Sanskrit scriptures including the law codes and famous texts like the Bhagavad-Gita. Similarly, on the Hindu side, the denigrating stereotypes about the Dalit culture should be overcome by recognition of their community bond, sense of justice, service and sharing.

One major problem is the words we use as dynamic equivalents of the biblical terms 'precepts, statutes and laws'. While Hindus repeat all common human virtues and values mentioned in their scriptures they do not publicly acknowledge, or even deny, the ritual rules that continue, which have racial connotations as well. For example, a non-Brahmin who consulted Brahmins on Ziegenbalg's queries replied directly and objectively to a question why the Brahmins keep the laws for themselves and do not give them into other people's hands: "Because other castes have not the same purity to handle the holy precepts."¹² Here 'holy precepts' means not so much the moral teachings as the ritual prescriptions, which require careful handling by well-trained experts. Though Hindus normally conceal this fact, there are instances that expose the reality. For example, there is a concern in relation to the emerging immigration law about 'requirement for proficiency in advanced English for priests', which would include those brought for performing ritual worship in Hindu temples in the UK. In the 'Hindu Christian Forum UK' meeting on 16 January 2005 the following resolution was passed:

The Hindu community is gravely concerned at the adverse impact this legislation will

have on their religious practices. It is felt that this legislation should not apply to Hindu pujaris whose sole function is to perform ritual worship at the Hindu temples for which they receive extensive training. All prayers have to be chanted in Sanskrit language. These pujaris have no pastoral duties, they do not visit families or groups in the community for preaching, and they do not provide any counseling services.

A letter was sent on behalf of the forum. The reply from the home office states that consultations with various faith communities have taken place and continue to take place, and that the main concern is integration of the 'ministers of religion' into the civic life of Britain and their ability to communicate with the wider community. Modern secular minds and non-Brahmin Indian communities may find this strange unless they understand the specific nature of Brahmanic Hinduism. At the same time, there should be open explorations by Hindus and others in a spirit of dialogue into areas of social life to expose the exclusive ritual purity as extended to cover racial and gender relations as well.

On the whole, it is difficult to find a set of 'precepts, statutes, and laws' that covers all the people and communities of the sub-continent, which is much vaster than the Israelite community. The equivalent could be traditions of justice in different royal courts, popular stories, proverbs and songs that extol common human virtues and values. Some of them provide insights for all irrespective of their religious adherence. For example, *Thirumanthiram*, a Tamil Saiva canonical text declares that only the ignorant say that God (Śiva) and love are inseparable. One of the couplets of *Thirukkural* puts it that just like scorching sun dries up boneless creatures, love-less persons are crushed by the rule of righteousness. Common people and thinkers; including agnostics and atheists, repeatedly refer to such phrases. Nevertheless, stories, poems, proverbs and slogans about love are not adequate if they are not applied to living situations in a sensible way. Even the biblical dictum of loving God with one's whole being and loving the other as oneself would remain abstract if the particular senses in which they will be realized in a community or country are not explained. Those who are willing to revise the traditional opinion that the Old Testament represents a religion of law will have greater sympathy toward efforts to rehabilitate the Hebrew law codes and Jewish legal system with a view to make sense of visions and ideals. That does not mean that we have to accept everything they say. As disciples of Jesus, we have the freedom to reject, revise, select and interpret. As led by the Spirit, we are asked to live not by law but by the spirit. What does this mean in India today?

Indian Secular Polity and Law

In addition to the above complexity, Christians in India are placed in a unique context having to find their identity and discover the spirit of the Hebrew laws. India today as a sub-continent with over one billion people has its unique diversity and challenges. As noted above Christians form a tiny minority in India and are placed in the midst of many religious traditions. According to the 2001 census, the percentage of Hindus is 80.5, Muslims 13.4, Christians 2.3, Sikhs 1.9, Buddhists 0.8, Jains 0.4 and others, including Parsees, 0.6. India got independence in 1947 from about six centuries of Muslim rule and three centuries of British rule. The newly independent India was declared a 'sovereign socialist secular democratic republic.' With 4635 communities, 'diverse in biological traits, dress, language, forms of worship, occupation, food habits and kinship patterns', 325 languages including 17 official languages and 35

languages spoken by more than a million people, and 25 scripts derived from various linguistic families and hundreds of dialects, for some India as one nation is almost a miracle reflecting an imaginary unity and for others a mere fantasy. The newly developed secular/humanist vision found expression in the preamble of the Constitution according to which the State should secure for all its citizens:

‘Justice, social, economical and political;
Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
Equality of status and of opportunity...;
The dignity of the individual and the integrity of the nation are assured by fraternity.’

However, with the absence of a uniform civil code and with the provision of personal law for each major religious community (relating to marriage and divorce, inheritance and joint family), it is not always easy to avoid tension and to maintain harmony. Distinctive schools and regional variations have made the application of the Hindu law, for example, as irreconcilably diverse. Furthermore, “The Muslims of India are divided into *Sunnīs* and *Shi’as*; the *Sunnīs* into *Hanafīs* and *Shāji’is*; the *Shi’as* into *Ithnā ‘Asharīs* and *Ismā’ilis*; the *Ism ā’ilis* into *Khojas* and *Bohras*; the *Bohras* into *D ā’udis* and *Sulaimānis*; and so on. Each of the groups has its own personal law.”¹³ Age-long customs and interpretations of law courts have made the matter further complex. The South Travancore Christian Act according to which female children could not inherit parental property was repealed about a decade ago with the strenuous efforts of a women’s movement. Citing all such stories the revivalist Hindus have been insisting on the creation of a uniform civil code and the religious minorities feel threatened, although the secular polity and basic constitution provide a safe and creative space for different religious communities to come together for a consensus. Development of a culture of dialogue is a pre-requisite for that to happen.

Along with the above diversity, there is disparity and discrimination in the socio-economic front. About twenty-five percent of the Indian population are illiterate and living below the poverty line. Despite legal bans, practices like untouchability and child labour continue, even child marriage in certain areas. Liberalization of economy and globalization with phenomenal developments in technology, communications, industry and transportation, have projected India in the world scene as an emerging world power. But with many obscured currents of ideology, myths and legal systems, India as a new nation is still in search of its true identity and the right direction towards coherent development.

A Corporate Search for Relevance and Coherence

The foregoing reflections would make clear that there is no straightforward, one word Indian answer to the question about the relevance of the Hebrew laws to India and Indian Christians. The reason is the complicated way in which it has come to the attention of Indian Christians who should realise common roots with Jews, difficulty of applying their ancient laws to the peculiar political situation they are placed in. Christians in Europe and America do not make efforts to understand this peculiar situation. This is not to deny the impact of the Hebrew story, vision and experiments on the polity and social ethos of Indian life affected through Christian missions and the spread of western education and secular-human values. Actually, it is the most unique Hebrew story of liberation around which the whole religious tradition is built, and apart from that there is no dearth of moral teachings on justice, peace and love in the

Indian traditions, both religious and secular.

Even if there is no clear answer for the question of what the God of the Hebrew ancestors was doing in ancient India, if the Jewish roots of Jesus are reaffirmed, the Hebrew story of liberation from slavery has unparalleled significance for the poor and the oppressed in India. As the Dalit theologians have repeatedly pointed out, the victim community of Dalits feel comfortable in identifying with the experience of Hebrews in Egypt, with the liberation wrought by the Yahweh God and with Jesus and his movement. Christians in India are called to take seriously the Hebrew experience and experiment of creating a model society, noting the decisive moments of dilemma, deviation, rapprochement and new direction. While acknowledging their own failures, they could watch what is happening among the Jewish community today. There are Jewish theologians who criticize those religious Jews who belong to the state of Israel and enjoy special privileges with the unstinting support of a superpower but forget their original call to show solidarity with the victim communities around the world.

With regard to 'precepts, statutes and laws', when there is no set of law codes available without ambiguity in their practical application, the Indian Christians are called to show to the world what 'living not by the law but by the spirit' means. When legal interpretations appear to take away the spirit of justice from human relations and interdependence, one may have to state the basics in simple terms just as done by the prophet Micah: what is good and required is, 'only to act justly, to love loyalty, to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8). As we have already noted, Jesus summarized the whole law and commandments in the greatest twin commandment of loving God with one's all being and loving one's neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:30-32). This presents a new axis, which has fascinated several people of other faiths and secular ideologies. Whatever is noble and excellent coming from other religious and secular traditions should be appreciated and appropriated to cohere around this axis. But the most authentic expression of this axis is trying to create a fascinating community and having conscious solidarity with victims of all kinds and in all places.

NOTES

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2. Quoted, Brijraj Singh, *The First Protestant Missionary in India: Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg 1683-1719*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 134
3. Quoted, Brijraj Singh, "Ziegenbalg, Hindus and Hinduism", *Indian Church History Review*, XXX1/1, 1997, p. 43
4. Quoted, H. Grafe, "Hindu Apologetics at the Beginning of the Protestant Mission Era in India", *Indian Church History Review*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1972, p. 51
5. Appasamy, *Christianity as Bhakti Mārga*, Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1930, pp. 165f.
6. I. Selvanayagam, "Açoka and Arjuna as counter figures standing in the Field of Dharma: A Historical-Hermeneutical Perspective." *History of Religions*, August 1992, pp. 59-75
7. See Manu. 1.88ff; 10.97 and Gita 3.35; 18.47
8. See P. Kumar, "The Search for Hindu Ethics in contemporary India vis-à-vis Dharma", *Nidān - Journal for the Study of Hinduism*, Vol. 16, Dec. 2004, pp. 32-52

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9. See I. Selvanayagam, *Vedic Sacrifice: Challenge and Response*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1996, p. 173
10. For details of the legal case of Rukhmabai with regard to 'restoration of conjugal rights' or 'institution of marriage' and the Maharajah libel case questioning the practice of even surrendering one's wife to a guru, see Kumar, *op.cit.*, pp. 44ff
11. See A. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology", in *Frontiers of Asian Christian Theology: Emerging*