

Introduction

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“Jesus Christ – the life of the world” is the World Council of Churches Assembly theme when it meets in Vancouver, Canada, in July, 1983. But all over the world, churches, theological faculties and special study groups will be reflecting on this theme in the next year and will be making their contribution from their own perspective. The booklet *Images of Life*¹ with seven Bible studies on the images found in the Bible – the way of life, birth, the house of living stones, the bread of life, the treasure of life, the crown of life and the water of life – and *The Feast of Life: A Theological Reflection on the Theme – Jesus Christ – the Life of the World*² are the two important resource materials supplied from the WCC office to help in such reflection.

In India the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College and the Ecumenical Christian Centre jointly organized a Consultation for theological teachers along with a few church leaders and leaders of Christian organisations to reflect on the theme of the Assembly in India from June 30 to July 2, 1982, at the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore.

In India the subject of “life” cannot be discussed without reference to the struggle of the majority of the people for a decent living. So the following theme was selected for this Indian Consultation—“Confessing Christ in the struggle for life in India.” This overall theme was dealt with in the papers presented and the discussions that followed from the following three angles: (i) The concrete struggle for life in India, (ii) the hopes and aspirations for life portrayed in present day art and (iii) the understanding of life in other faiths and ideologies.

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¹ Indian edition published by CLS, Madras, 1982 (Price: Re. 1).

² By John Poulton, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982.

Some of the papers presented at this Consultation along with the findings are published in this issue of *The Indian Journal of Theology*.

Since in India we live in a pluralistic religious situation, in the Consultation we had presentations from a Hindu religious teacher and a Muslim educator—"Understanding of life in India: A Hindu view" and "Understanding of life in India: An Islamic view." These speakers shared with us as to how they understood this theme of "life" from their religious background in present day India.

In general all the religions of the world teach that the whole universe is created by God and life, in whatever form, is a gift from God. On this premise we can say that any force that destroys and diminishes life is against God's plan for the entire creation. As a consequence of our individual and collective sins we have brought disharmony, disunity, disorder and discrimination into the world. So today we have to live in a divided world, divided because of differing political and economic systems and discrimination because of differences in caste, creed, colour, race and sex. The biggest tragedy is that the majority of people in the world is forced to live in misery because of the style of operation and selfishness of the powerful minority groups found in all the countries of the world, controlling the resources of the world.

Most of the religions and political ideologies condemn the present situation of the world and suggest ways to change it. Since today's misery is our own creation, through collective effort, we should be able to overcome the hurdles which hinder life in its fulness for the majority. That means we have to try to explore and identify the forces and structures in our society which deny fuller life to people or which bring death to people.

As Christians we confess that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have been given a new vision as to how human life should be for individuals and for all human beings here on earth. Jesus Christ by liberating and restoring new life to people during His earthly ministry exposed the forces that dehumanized people, and by challenging them He demonstrated to His disciples what "life in its fulness" should mean. This he did not only through His teaching but through His involvement in the day-to-day life of the people and

finally through dying on the cross and rising from the dead, symbolising the continued involvement and hope His disciples should have in the struggle for bringing a dignified life for all.

Therefore to be a Christian today means to be involved in the ministry of Jesus Christ—that is in the day-to-day struggle of people for a decent, dignified and fuller life as God wishes them to have. This calls all of us to a right understanding of the ministry of Jesus Christ and of the reading of the Scriptures. Often Christians have preached and understood new life promised to people in Jesus Christ strictly in personal terms. But Christ's ministry has not only an individual but also a social dimension. Bishop Julio Labayen of the Philippines has explained this as follows: "We cannot evangelize individuals without evangelizing their environment." If we Christians have to continue in the ministry of Jesus for fullness of life for all, we have to be exposed and committed to the wider dimension of Christianity.

Even though there is no one pattern of ministry, the goal of ministry is the same—new life for all, promised in Jesus Christ. This could be carried out by a small group through its study and involvement in a limited area. Or it may show itself in a big resistance movement. Or it could express itself in forming new communities for working and sharing together. Whatever be the kind of involvement as Christian groups, our faith today tells us that we have to join forces that are striving for restoring new life to people regardless of whether they are related to us as Christians or as Church, if the new life we are envisaging is to be brought to all people soon. That means in a pluralistic religious, cultural, social and political world, if we are to remain faithful to our calling as Christians, we need new eyes and new ears of faith to see and hear God's liberating work being carried out everywhere and courage to join with it. This is done through various ways of dialogue, involvement, joint study and action and so on.

Some of these issues were discussed in the Consultation and are also elaborated in the papers published in this *Journal*. The reflection on the theme "Jesus Christ—the life of the world" will go on this year and even following the Assembly next year. It is our hope that the papers and findings published here will contribute to this reflection that is going on all over the world.