

To

**His Holiness POPE FRANCIS
VATICAN
ROME, ITALY.**

Your Holiness,

Sub: Mission of the Church and Dalit Catholic Empowerment

Greetings from Dalit Catholic Community form India

We praise and thank Our Lord for having blessed Holy Church with Holy Father His Holiness POPE FRANCIS. The Catholic Church found a Pope, committed to the liberation of the oppressed from Argentina; the land of Marginalized Communities. It has brought in a new source of energy and hope to the oppressed people of the world. U.S. President Barak Obama said in a statement “As a Champion of the poor and most vulnerable among us, he carries forth the message of love and compassion then inspired the world more than 2000 Years than in each other, we see the face of God”. We consider His Holiness is our Liberator.

In choosing the name Francis, in association with Little Brother St. Francis of Assisi, a symbol of poverty, simplicity and peace, your image brings us confidence of regaining our lost divine Image. We, the Dalit Catholics, who suffer disabilities and discriminations in the Society as well as in the Church place before your kind self our prayers for appropriate action.

Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity (Dalits) in India are thrice discriminated community. They were treated as untouchables in the society and after conversion, they suffer discrimination in the Church on the basis of Caste. The Government of India also denies Scheduled Caste rights and constitutional privileges to Dalit Christians due to their conversion to Christianity. They continue to live in deep faith and witness for values for gospel even after the denial of rights in the church. The racism on the basis of color in the world was abolished and Africans achieved freedom and equal rights but Dalits in India suffer all the disabilities due to the traditional practice of untouchability. This discrimination on the basis of Caste is existing in all the religions and it is inseparable from Indian beings.

In India all the communities practice Caste but the victims are Dalit community. The Caste people consider that it is their religious duty “Darma” to oppress the Casteless and outcaste untouchable communities. Therefore, when the power is given to dominant Caste leaders they always suppress the emerging leadership of the marginalized community. The powerful Catholic leaders will not have the sense of sharing the leadership with downtrodden. Therefore, His Holiness is requested to promote Dalit ecclesiastical and hierarchical leadership as a sign of compassion and concern towards the oppressed people.

A memorandum of Dalit Catholic community to His Holiness on mission of Church and empowerment of Dalit Catholic community is enclosed with this letter to describe about the plight and the need of the target people. Let your virtue of poverty and love for the poor inspire the Church leaders in Vatican and in India to be at the service of the poor and Dalit community. May the heads of the congregation in Vatican, Apostolic Nuncio in India and other Church leaders understand the sufferings of the oppressed people and assist them to attain empowerment.

In this year of faith, we pray that the appropriate action of your Holiness shall bring the liberation to the oppressed and empowerment to the powerless community in India.

Your faithful and oppressed Children,

Dalit Bishops, Priests, Religious and laity.

Most. Rev. A.M. Chinnappa SDB

Most. Rev. Antonysamy Neethinathan

Most. Rev. Soundarajan Periyamayagam.SDB

Rev. Fr. S. Lourduswamy.

Copy to:

1.His Eminence Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone Secretary of State, Vatican – Rome

2. His Eminence Cardinal Fernando Filoni Prefect, Congregation for evangelization of people.

**Memorandum of Dalit Catholic Community to Holy Father
His Holiness Pope FRANCIS
MISSION OF THE CHURCH AND EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT**

The caste system survived for centuries in India because the Aryans and Hindu religious leaders attributed the caste system to divine ordinance. Any violation of this system individually or collectively was declared as crime by the divine law. The caste system has been sanctified by Hindu Scriptures and it was accepted even by the outcastes themselves.

I. CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Caste in India is a social institution and social stratification deriving sanction from Hindu Religion. Caste system has survived in India more than 3500 years. The word Caste comes from Portuguese word 'Casta' signifying 'breed or race'. Ketkar defines Caste in his book "*History of Caste in India*"(p.15) as "membership confined to those who are born of members and include all members so born". The members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside group. Each group has a special name by which it is called. Several of such small aggregates are again grouped together under one common name.

Caste system was introduced to the Indian history by Aryans who invaded India in BC 1500. The Hierarchical Caste System was attributed to God's creation. In the traditional understanding the Caste system is derived from Varna system, which has the foundation in Rig-Veda. X 90.12 Mandala describes the creation of different groups from Purusha, the primordial being. *Purushasukta (Hymn of Man in Rig-Veda)* speaks about Varna as the origin of the Caste system. "The Brahmana was his mouth; both of his arms were Ranjanya (Kshaktriya); his thighs became the Vaishya and from his feet the Shudra was produced. (Griffith Ralph, The Hymns of Rig-Veda, p.603) The people outside of Chatur Varna were called outcastes. Aryans called them Dasas (Dark people), *Punchama* (fifth order or outcastes) *Avarna*, *Chandala*, *Antayas*, *Shvapaka*, *Meda* etc.

The term *Dalit* in Sanskrit is both a noun and an adjective. As a noun, Dalit may be used for all three genders, masculine, feminine and neuter. It has been derived from the root *dal*, which means to crack, open, split, and so on. When used as noun or adjective, it means burst, split, downtrodden, scattered,

crushed, destroyed. The present usage of the term Dalit goes back to the nineteenth century when Marathi social reformer and revolutionary Mahatma Jotirao Phule used it to describe the outcastes and untouchables as the oppressed and broken victims of the Indian caste-ridden society.

Dalits have their history and roots. They are the descendents of the early settlers of India and could be called the indigenous people of Indus Valley. Archeological evidences and literary sources are available to prove the historical roots of Dalits. The famous Harappa & Mohenjodaro excavations between 1920-1951 and early Vedic literature like Rig-Veda Hymns bring out the history of Dalits. Evidences from early literature and Archeological findings prove conclusively that the civilized people who lived in the Great Indus Valley were subjugated and made untouchable by the conquerors. In 1919 Govt. of India Act calls them Exterior Caste. In 1931 they were named Untouchables. Gandhiji gave them the name *Harijan* which was not accepted by Dalit people themselves. Govt. of India Act 1935 declared them as Scheduled Caste and they were included as beneficiaries of Political Reservation in the Govt. of India Scheduled Caste Act 1936. Today Dalit people are proud of declaring themselves as Dalits.

A. OPPRESSION

The Caste system survived for centuries because the religious leaders transmitted the Hindu scriptures to the common people attributing the Caste system to divine ordinance. Any violation of this system, individually or collectively, was tantamount to breaking the divine law (Manu code). Painstakingly, every dimension of the divine ordinance of Caste was included in the scriptures. The Caste system having thus been sanctioned by scriptures came to be accepted even by the outcastes themselves.

Untouchability is being practiced in the Hindu society now for almost 3 millennia. Various reasons are given justifying the practice. The main causes were the obsession of the Brahmins to maintain purity and to avoid pollution. Purity is the essence of the Caste system. The Brahmins used name of God and the scriptures to establish this Caste system (Varna Dharma), In order to maintain the hegemony of the society.

B. ASSERTION

The History of Caste system in India is a record of a perpetual social tension and revolts against prevailing social code. Though the Caste system is a rigid stratification of social groups, today due to modernization and westernization there can be seen mobility among the castes. The process of social change has started. Education has brought socio-economic and cultural mobility in several areas. Constitutional safeguards, legal protection like SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act are shielding them. Reservation privileges are paving way for their development. Dalits are conscious of their rights and identity and assert their human dignity and equality. They are determined to regain their lost identity and make attempts to become a powerful community.

In India of today, Ambedkar movements, Dalit liberation movements, SC/ST employees unions and various other associations reject the unjust Brahminical order and assert their rights for liberation and empowerment.

In the Church, also Dalit Christian Liberation Movement (DCLM), Christian Dalit Liberation Movement (CDLM) of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka Dalit Christians Federation, Kerala Dalit Christian Mahasabha, United Christians Movements of Equal Rights of Andhra Pradesh, National co-ordination committee for Dalit Christians and other movements in North India also demand equal rights. They struggle to restore the image of God in them and others.

II. Plight of Dalit Scheduled Caste Christians

Dalit includes all Scheduled Castes with its sub-Caste groups. All Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity are called Dalit Christians.

A) Multiple Disabilities and Discriminations:

1) Social Disability:

Dalit Christians continue to live in the same segregated place, in the same “Cheri, colony or slum”, even two generations after becoming Christians. A Dalit is not given the luxury of a new environment. The Dalit continue to work in the villages for low wages for their masters, enduring tyranny, abuse, beatings and killings. Their wives and daughters face molestation, rape and burning of huts and killing of their children during atrocities. Dalit remains a Dalit in every sense of the word ethnically, lineally, racially, socially,

economically, culturally, geographically, relationally, contextually, and emotionally. They are equally victims of atrocities but they cannot protect themselves by SC/ST pretensions of atrocities law because they are not deemed to be Scheduled Caste.

The victims of atrocities against Dalits are Dalit Christians in Neerukonda Saukarankulam, Ap (July 1976), Villupuram, TN (11th December 1980), Karamchedu, AP (March 1985), T. Sundur (1993), Koldiangulam (October 1995), Sankaralingpuram (2001) and in hundreds of other Dalit Villages. These are irrefutable evidences.

Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi made statements that Dalit remains a Dalit which ever religion he embraces. The backward class commissions like Kaka Kalekar Commission (1951), Kumar pillai Commission (1965), Elayaperumal Commission (1969), Sattanathan Commission (1970), Chidambaram Commission (1975), Mandal Commission (1982), and Mandal Case Judgment (1992) proved that the disabilities of Dalit Christians in the society and Church. National sample survey of ISI (1986) Indian Social Institute, conducted by Dr. Jose Kananaikil, the Director of Institute prove that SC convert Christianity suffer more socio-educational and economic disabilities than the non-convert Dalits.

2) Educational Disability: The lack of economic resources for Dalits Christians is one of the main reasons for their poor literacy. The upper caste attitude towards the Dalit Christians and the low self image of themselves are also reasons for poor education. While there may be progress in the field of elementary education, the converts have not made much progress in the field of high school or college education as their Hindu brothers. The same spirit or renaissance which animates the Hindu Scheduled castes has not spread to the Christian sections.

Dalit Christians students dropout from school due to lack of motivation and poverty. They don't have access to the English Education and Computer studies. Many Church Bodies also refuse to admit Dalit Children in order to keep up merit and prestige of Institution.

All India Association forum for Christian Higher Education (AIACHE) made the survey of the number of SC students in the Church run Colleges of India (2001) and found out the percentage students is 7.8% and that of ST students is 5.22% in the total number of 271 Colleges in India.

3. Economic Backwardness: Majority of Dalit Christians are landless labourers, finding it difficult to maintain their family with the limited income. They borrowed loans to meet their needs. Migrant worker in big cities, child labourers, low class workers, are generally found to be dalits. According to the survey made by Rev. Fr. Antony Raj, SJ (Discrimination against Dalit Christians in Tamilnadu, 1989), 45% of the community are living below the poverty line and not able to meet the basic needs.

B) Discrimination in the Church.

Caste system is inherent in Indian Society and Ingrained in Indian psyche. Caste discrimination and hatred are found in the Christian Community in all the spheres because it is perpetuated in the Society. Dalits are victimized and deprived of their due participation in the administration of the Church. CBCI made repeated appeals for development of Dalit Community. However discrimination is practiced in the liturgical worship, graveyard, celebration of patron's feast, parish administration and vocations for priests and religious etc. **Though Dalit Catholics form 65% of Indian Catholic population only 5% representations is found in clergy, religious and hierarchy of Indian Church. This is clear evidence of discrimination.** Inter dining and intermarriages are still not possible between Dalits and Caste people in the Christian Community.

In the message during Adlimina visit of Indian Bishops on 17th November 2003 at Rome Holy Father **Pope John Paul II made very sharp observations on Dalit realities in India:**

“The unjust system of caste division denies the human dignity if entire group of people. You must continue to make certain and special attention to Dalit Christians. They should never be segregated from other members of society. Any semblance of a caste-based prejudice in relations between Christians is a countersign to authentic human solidarity, a threat to genuine spirituality and a serious hindrance to the Church's mission of evangelization. It is the Church's obligation to change hearts helping all people to see every human being as a Child of God, a brother or sister of Christ, and therefore a member of our family”. Holy Fathers call and caution regarding abolishing discrimination should be followed by Church.

C) Discrimination by the Government:

All the Backward class commission, including ShriMisra Commission proved the fact that Christians of Scheduled Caste origin suffers the same socio-educational and economic disabilities on par with their counterparts in other religions due to traditional practice of untouchability and the change of religion does not change the social, educational and economic status. Therefore the Government was asked to confer S.C. Status to S.C. Converts to Christianity. But presidential Order 1950 (para 3) denies Scheduled caste Rights to the S.C. converts to Christianity on the basis of religion. It is gross violation of Articles 14, 15/4, 16/4, 25, 46, 330, 341 of the Indian Constitution and Art. 18 of Universal Declaration on Human Rights by UNO.

1) Denial of Scheduled Caste Rights:

The president was empowered by the Article 341 (1) to enlist the Scheduled Castes only for the purpose of statutory benefits but he brought religion as criteria to define Scheduled Caste. Whereas constitution extends privileges of S.C on the basis of Caste only. In contradiction to Article 341, he promulgated Constitution (Schedule Caste) Order 1950 stating in para 3 *“Notwithstanding anything contained in para 2, no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of scheduled Caste”*. It discrimination Dalit Citizens of India on the basis of religion and denies fundamental Right of freedom of Religion and Conscience to Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam. Therefore this order is communal and violation of Art 25.

The Parliament has rectified this lacuna arising out of the para 3 of the order by amending the Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order 1950 and included Sikh religion, in 1956 and Buddhism in 1990. However, Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin were not included. This discrimination deprives the Christian Dalits to seek civil protection and safeguards provided for all Dalits under Protection of Civil Rights Act 1976, Untouchability (Offenses) Act 1955 and SC/ST (prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. This is a blatant violation and denial of Human Rights constitutional rights of a citizen under Indian Constitution.

2) A Demand for Scheduled Caste Rights to Christian Dalits:

In the past 60 years the Christian Community in India made efforts for obtaining equal Rights to Dalit Christian. Dalit Christian (Scheduled Caste Converts to Christianity) is denied their Constitutional Rights, Human Rights, Fundamental Rights and Social Justice by the Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order 1950 on the basis of religion. The Scheduled Caste rights such as (a) the provision for Reservation in Education, Employment, (b) Reservation in Parliament and assembly (c) Statutory and non-statutory benefits, (d) socio-educational and economic benefits, (e) The privilege of protection during atrocities that are enjoyed by Dalits in Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism are denied to Scheduled Caste (Dalit) Converts to Christianity. Though Dalit Christians suffer the same socio-educational and economic disabilities on par with their counterparts in other religions, they are not recognized as the member of Scheduled Caste. Hence the Scheduled Caste Order 1950 should be amended either deleted or suitably amended in order to confer SC Status to Dalit Christians. The Demand of the Church through various demonstrations and programmes for Justice has been justified by Commissions appointed by Government, Judiciary, Legislature and successive Government but justice is being delayed due to craze for political will is lacking. This Human Rights issue has been converted into a political issue by the Government.

II. THE CHURCH AND DALITS

1. Rejection of Caste by Religious/secular leaders.

Indeed, the rejection of caste by other religious communities and leaders preceded that of the Christian church, even by centuries. The Buddha, himself born into the ksatriya caste, rejected ritual purity, which is the essential marker of caste, as the path to liberation and enlightenment. He made his “Middle Way” available to everyone and admitted all, even women and the outcastes, in to his monastic community (sangha).

Bhakti Hinduism produced numerous saints and poets, both male and female, such as Kabir, Nanak, Ramanand, and Ravidas, who delivered strong messages about the equal access to God and the evils of the Caste system. Such teachings were further disseminated when Bhakti Hinduism received the patronage of the Gupta dynasty (A.D. 320-540), often called the classical age of India. Other Indian religions that combat the caste system include Jainism, which insists on radical ascetism as the way to liberation from the bondage of Karma, and

Sikhism, which explicitly advocates the abolition of castes. in general, it must be said however the main efforts of these religious movements and leaders were to reform Hinduism from within and not to change the socio- political and economic structures that oppressed the Dalits.

Among non-Christian leaders who have sought to destroy the caste system, the names of Shree NarayanaGuru (1854-1948), PeriyarE.V.Ramaswamy (1879-1948), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), and BabasahebBhimraoAmbedkkar(1891-1956) deserve special mention.

2. Prevalence of Caste Practice in Christianity.

The Caste practice is tolerated and accepted by all the groups in the Church.

The Diocese of Goa was established in 1534. The Portuguese missionaries focused on upper caste conversions believing that inferior castes would follow later. Jesuit Francis Xavier arrived in Goa 1542 and preached in the coastal area. Mass conversions occurred on Coromoundel coast. This was opening for Dalit Conversions. Jesuit priest Robert De Nobili came to India in 1602 and established Roman Catholic Madurai Mission and he was followed by the great Missionaries John De Britto and Joseph Constantine'sBeshi who contributed a lot for growth of Church in seventeen and eighteenth Century in India. Jesuit Missionary Robert De Nobili changed this Missionary policy and followed Malabar rite, Hindu upper Caste symbols. It included acceptance of the smearing of ash or sandal wood paste on forehead and use of Brahmin cal sacred thread etc. He restricted his evangelization only to Brahmins and believed in top to bottom conversion. He was the cause for entry of caste system into the Church. He accepted caste system of upper caste converts. He not only introduced Dalit distinction between high caste and low caste but also separate churches. He went to the extent of dividing missionaries into Brahmins Sanyasis who ministered high caste and Pandaraga swamis to minister the Dalits. They were following the policy of accommodation of caste system in Christianity. Caste system was considered as social factor and it is compatible with Christianity identity.

The Bull of Pope Gregory XV, "Bulla RomanaeSedisAntistetes", dated 31st January 1623, accedes to the requests of the missionaries to accommodate themselves to certain caste practices and customs of the new converts. The Pope

was granting this permission only as a provisional and conditional measure. It was given to Madurai Mission as response to the demand of Rebot De Nobili.

2. Agitation against Caste oppression

Dalit Christian community agitated against discrimination in Catholic Church. Toleration of Caste practice in the Course of history grows into Caste discrimination in all the levels; therefore, oppressed people agitated against oppression in many places in India. Synod of Pondicherry was conducted in the year 1844 itself to foster harmony between Dalit Christians and Caste Christians. Scheduled Caste (Dalit) Christian welfare association sent a memorandum on 15 Jan 1925 to then Vicar Apostolic to India Bishop Alexius Maria Henry Lapier regarding the discriminations of dominant Caste. Dalit Christians Liberation movement (DCLM) has been fighting against the Caste practices from 1980 onwards and demanded Equality and Justice. Hence, the Church was pressurized to declare programmes and action plan for the integral development of Dalit Christians.

3. Statements of National and Regional Bishops Conferences.

In response to various demands of people the Indian bishops issued a forceful statement condemning the caste system at their meeting at Tiruchirapalli in **1982**: “we state categorically that caste, with its consequent effects of discrimination and “caste mentality” has no place in Christianity. It is in fact a denial of Christianity because it is inhuman. It violates the God-given dignity and equality of the human person. God created man in his own image. Thus, human dignity and respect are due to every person and any denial of this is a sin against God and man. it is an outright denial of the fatherhood of God which in practice renders meaningless the brotherhood of man”.

Again, in **1988**, the Indian Bishops declared at their CBCI general meeting in Kottayam: “Most Christians of S.C origins are still are deprived of economic opportunities, access to adequate educational facilities, leadership roles and participation in decision making. Therefore integration of Christians of S.C origin is the mainstream will be for us a top priority”. In **1992**, the Indian Bishops noted in Pune CBCI declaration that the demands of the Dalits could be classified in to three categories and must be met: those regarding socio-

economic benefits, jobs, education, and housing; empowerment of the Dalits within the Church; and personal respect. The statement of CBCI general body meeting at Varanasi, March 1998 says, “The discrimination against anybody on the basis of Casts is a sin against God and Humanity. this needs to be proclaimed from the housetops so that caste system will be removed from Christian community totally as part of our preparation for yesuKristuJayanti 2000.” it is also proposed six important action plans to be implemented for empowerment of Dalit Christians.

In 1990, the Tamilnadu, bishops Council launched a Ten-point program, a sort of a magna carta for the empowerment of Dalit Catholics. it aimed at removing discrimination against the Dalits in all areas of life. it called for the elimination of Discrimination against the Dalits in places of worship and burial grounds, recruitment of priestly and religious vocations among the Dalits, participation of the Dalits in the decision-making process at both the diocesan and parish levels, admission of more Dalits to schools and vocational training centers, special assistance to Dalit students, preferential appointment of Dalits in Church-sponsored institutions and organizations, special projects for the social developments of Dalits, special scholarship funds for Dalits, establishment of a committee for Dalit affairs in every Diocese, and vindication of human rights for the Dalits. The years 1990-2000 was considered the Dalit decade. Unfortunately, by 2004, it was acknowledged that much of the ten-point program had not been achieved, and in 2004, it was re-launched, this time with concrete and specific initiatives, designated persons and organizations to implement them, and periodic monitoring and evaluation of ongoing progress.

IV. MANDATE OF GOD AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

1. Jesus, the Liberator

Church in India has been tolerating prevalence of discrimination in the Church and it is not engaging in concerted and continuous actions for Dalit liberation because of wrong understanding of Bible teaches. Therefore re-reading of the Bible for Dalit liberation is very necessary. This Biblical hermeneutics should lead into a genuine theology for Dalit liberation.

Jesus' solidarity with the victims of oppression and exploitation was born out of his compassion and genuine concern for them. This is in accordance with the mission. Priority of Jesus, as it is made clear in the Nazareth Manifesto: **“Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring good news to**

the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the Captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the Synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:18-21).

Jesus' way of liberating the marginalized and the oppressed is by identifying with them in their existing situation through his friendship and fellowship with them and enabling them to affirm their identity and rights. Thus the touch of Jesus and the fellowship of Jesus empowered the. Dehumanized sections of the community. Jesus' solidarity with the marginalized and the oppressed reminds one of the corporate Christology Judgment of God in **Mt.25:31-46**, where the Son of Man identifies with the sick, the prisoner, the stranger and the hungry. Christ's presence in the midst of the suffering masses, sharing their pain and sorrows, motivates every follower of Christ to identify this Christ and work for the liberation and empowerment of the poor and the marginalized.

Jesus accused his opponents of hypocrisy when they questioned his healing on the Sabbath. In all the three episodes we find that the reason for Jesus' confrontation with the oppressors is their role in the discrimination, oppression and exploitation of the marginalized and the underprivileged in the society. The non-Dalits attribute hereditary impurity' to the Dalits by calling them 'avarnas', 'antyajas', 'panchamas', 'exterior castes', 'outcastes', 'depressed classes', 'scheduled castes', 'harijans' and 'untouchables'. The Dalits prefer to define themselves as 'dalit', since the word connotes the consciousness of their own unfree existence and outcaste experience. They are persecuted as 'no-people' and sub-humans by the upper strata. This reality of Dalit oppression must be exposed along with all the forces and institutions that are responsible for it. It is high time the Dalit liberation struggle shifts its focus to those who oppress them, exposing them and challenging them in all possible ways. The way Jesus confronted the oppressors of his time provides a model for Dalit liberation.

The conversation between the Dalit world and the Biblical world provides us some insights for the Dalit liberation struggle. It challenges the non-Dalit followers of Christ to show solidarity with the Dalits in their struggle for justice and freedom. It empowers the Dalits to affirm their self-identity and right to self-determination on the one hand and challenges them to work for the transformation of the oppressors and abolition of the dehumanizing laws.

The encounter between the Dalit world and the Biblical world presents before us a portrait of a confronting, angry Christ, who is corporally and corporately present among the suffering humanity. The dialogue between the Dalit world and the Biblical world must lead to the creation of an inclusive, non-oppressive, non-exploitative, non hierarchical community, based on justice, equality, freedom and well-being of all.

2. Kingdom of God

God's kingdom is a vision of Jesus Christ and the church must fulfill it by its mission. The Beatitudes LK 6:20 "Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God". Jesus promised kingdom to the poor and oppressed. So that Casteless and classless society is made possible. The poor (Dalit/marginalized) people should have the fruits of kingdom, Equality, peace and Justice. But today's context the dominant Caste groups are enjoying the fruits of kingdom. The poor and oppressed are found in agony and suffering.

The community must first of all be a community that struggles against any form of injustice and oppression. This fact is well expressed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's strategy of "Educate, Agitate, Organize", and this was put into practice by various political groups.

In addition to socio, economic, political activities of the Church also worships and sacraments. Here the Church must strive to be all inclusive community and credible sign of kingdom of God. The Catholic are called to reflect on whether they meaningfully participate in **Eucharist** which is the symbol of **unity, love and brotherhood**. Without making any effort to root out Caste in and outside of the Church.

3. Christian fellowship.

It can be said that Jesus was crucified because of how he ate. He enjoyed the company of the poor and the marginalized and the sinners: He was accused of eating and drinking with the publicans and the sinners (Lk 5:30, Mk 2:16) and his invitation is precisely to share one's provisions with others here on earth as the generous little boy who was instrumental in feeding the five-thousand hungry followers of Jesus in the desert (Jn 6:9) and then to 'eat and drink at my table in my kingdom' (Lk 22:29). Table-fellowship not only recognizes the existence of the other but also accepts the other as the equal.

Jesus invites his followers in steps to i. Social table; ii. Family/Companion table; iii. Eucharistic table; and iv. Intellectual/Empowering table. The ultimate goal is that human beings have been created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27; Gen 5:1) but due to structural sin of exploitation and discrimination and marginalization the humankind became fragmented as the oppressor and the oppressed. Then God came to redeem and eventually has invited all to come together where there will be no distinction based on caste nor creed nor nationality nor gender- The broken humankind is to be made whole in and through the table-fellowship. Table-fellowship here on earth is essential and a pre-condition for the Table-fellowship in heaven.

4. Mission and Ministry of the Church:

Change in attitude towards the marginalized, culminating in conviction that all are created in God's image and all would be saved together without any discrimination. This would lead us to concrete actions with time limit to empower the marginalized. When Jesus asked Peter, 'Do you love me?' (Jn 20:15-17), he entrusted the mission of feeding the sheep to Peter. The same mission, bequeathed to the Church, is to create a conducive atmosphere for the sheep to grow without any partiality and discrimination in order to find fullness of life first here on earth before finding unity with God. Thus it is the primary mission of the Church to guarantee integral growth of the people - Integral growth implies affirmative action for the marginalized and the neglected and the discriminated as Jesus said that physician is needed for the affected (Mt 9:12).

The process begins with reflection on 'what is happening in the Church' and 'what is happening to the Church'. **Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes integral development in his encyclical 'Caritas in veritate'**. Within the Church, the marginalized are getting disillusioned and getting ready for an exodus (which had already started to trickle out) and the secular powers are creeping into the Church and soon there is danger of Church going secular. The Church should not underestimate the power of the poor and the marginalized. A silent revolution is brewing up. In the beginning the Church was poor but as the power-game came in the discrimination also came in and the poor and the marginalized who were the centre of the Church were driven to the edge of the society already in the first century – That is why Paul and James have to warn against discrimination of the poor and the marginalized in breaking of bread which is the symbol of unity in Jesus. Therefore today's church must imitate the

first Christians ideal community and exercise the ministry of sharing everything with poor, marginalized and Dalits.

VI. Catholic Data reveal Discrimination in the Church – 2013 Statistics.

Population	Total Number	Dalit Catholics	Percentage
Total Indian Population	1200 Millions		
Total Christians	25 Millions		
Total Dalit Christians		20 Millions	(65%)
Total Catholics	18 Millions		
Total Dalit Catholics		12 Millions	(65%)
Catholic Dioceses	166		
Catholic Bishops	180		
Dalit Bishops		07	(4%)
Catholic Diocesan Priests	15420		
Dalit Catholic Priests		754	(5%)
Religious Priests	7031		
Dalit Religious Priests		310	(4%)
Religious sisters	65,000		
Dalit Religious sisters		3200	(5%)
Cardinals	06		
Dalit Cardinals		Nil	

Tamil Nadu Catholic Statistic

Bishops	19		
Dalit Bishops		02	(2%)
Diocesan Priests	2005		
Diocesan Dalit Priests		0,275	(7%)
Religious Priests	0654		
Religious sisters	65,000		
Dalit Religious sisters		3200	(5%)
Total Catholics	36,33,000		
Dalit Catholics		25,43,000	(70%)

Present Dalit Bishops in India – 2013

S.No	Name	Diocese	State
1	Most.Rev.Antony samy Neethinathan.	Chinglepet	Tamil Nadu
2	Most. Rev. Soundararaju Periyannayagam	Vellore	Tamil Nadu
3	Most. Rev. Prasad Gallela	Cuddapah	Andrapradesh
4	Most. Rev. Antony Poola	Kurnool	Andrapradesh
5	Most. Rev. D. Prakasam	Nellore	Andrapradesh
6	Most. Rev. Thomas Ignatius Macwan	Ahmedabad	Utrapradesh
7	Most. Rev. Sarath Chandra Nayak	Berhampur	Orisa

75% Catholics are living in South-India the largest Dalit Catholic community reside in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, states in South-India. In North India and except Tribal and Adivasi Communities all the Catholics belong to Dalit Community. Tribals/Adivasi People are not affected by Caste system and untouchability. They continue to get all the reservation facilities even after conversion to Christianity.

Tribal Catholics may be **2 Millions in the total Catholic population**. They are given around 20 Bishops and one Cardinal (Cardinal Telesphero Toppo of Ranchi). Very thin catholic population of 4,20,000 of Syro-malankara Church have the leadership of 8 Bishops and one Cardinal (Cardinal Moran Basileios Cleemis of Trivandram). The majority 65% Dalit Catholic Community's are given only 7 Bishops only. This faithful and sacrificing community are denied the right of having Arch Bishop and Cardinal. At present their representation in Hierarchy, priests, Religious is less than 5% only. The same injustice in sharing leadership is found in other structures of the Church, such as a Religious Congregation generally Provincials, Rectors, Superiors, Principals, Secretaries of National and Regional Commissions etc. Therefore, there is urgent need to take immediate action to eradicate discrimination and oppressions on the basis of Caste and gender Justice for the transformation of the oppressed people. Dalits are out of Castes, means Outside of Caste system, not practicing any discrimination. In short they have no Caste system and not caught within the Caste system. They do not approve and accept Caste system privileges are given

to annihilate Caste system. Participation in the Church administration is demanded on the basis size of Dalit population in order to make from bottom to the mainstream.

This great task can be fulfilled only by appointing Heads of Vatican Congregations, Apostolic Nuncio in India, Arch Bishops and Bishops who understand Dalit realities and sufferings. The Church leaders must identify themselves with marginalized and weaker sections to transform the life of the struggling community. Some action plane are proposed below for the integral development of Dalit and Marginalized Communities in India. These plans of action could be implemented with conviction and compassion. May Holy Father appoint special committees to study this age-old problem of Dalit Catholic and appropriate actions could be taken by His Holiness immediate intervention for peaceful solution for extension of Catholic Church in India and all over Asia.

VII. PROPOSALS FOR EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT CATHOLICS:

- 1. As the Government of India extents reservation to Dalits according to the percentage of Scheduled Caste population in the country, Dalit Catholics could be given reservation in all structures of the Church in proportion to the population in the diocese and region.**
- 2. Appropriate actions should be taken to eradicate untouchability in all the levels of the Church, In order to build up equality and brotherhood.**
- 3. The Educational powers and resources of the Church should be made available to poor Dalit Catholics to empower themselves through Education.**
- 4. A Catholic University in India is very necessary for socio, educational and economic mobility of our Catholic Community.**
- 5. Social Service Societies and other Organs of the Church must have special programmes with sufficient financial support for the integral development of target people.**
- 6. Establishment of the institutions for the promotion of the Dalit studies, Theology, Culture, Literature and Subaltern Theology must be part of syllabus in all the Priestly and religious formation houses.**
- 7. Well defined policies and regulations in all the levels of the Church to provide leadership in the administration of the Church.**

8. The whole Christian Community should make concerted efforts for the extension of the Scheduled Caste Rights to all Scheduled Caste converts Christianity.

9. All the Diocesan, regional and national commissions must adopt the policy of empowerment to Dalit Christians.

10. A monitoring Committee in each dioceses and congregation for the facilitation of effective implementation of all the programmes, declared by the Church for the empowerment of Dalits.

Conclusion

In this year of faith, we place before His Holiness our needful prayers with great hope of achieving liberation and integral Development. May His Holiness make immediate intervention inspire the heads of the Church to empower Dalit Catholic Community as a sign of accomplishing Mission of Christ.

Your Beloved Oppressed Children in Jesus Christ.

Arch Bishop, Bishops, Priest, Religious and Laity

1. Most. Rev. A. M. Chinnappa SDB

Emeritus Arch Bishop

Madras – Mylapor.

2. Most. Rev. Antonysamy Needinathan

Bishop of Chinglepet, Chairman, National, Regional

Bishops Council for SC/ST.

3. Most. Rev. Soundararaju Periyannayagam SDB

Bishop of Vellore, Chairman Tamil Nadu Bishops Council

Commission for Youth.

4. Rev. Dr. Fr. S. Lourduswamy

Former Secretary

National CBCI committee for SC/ST