

PREFERENCIAL COMMITMENT TO THE POOR

Dr M.D. Thomas

The newly installed UPA government stated its commitment to ‘aam aadme’, the general public. The new government has also affirmed its targeted schemes for the first 100 days. The new mandate, the consecutively second time mandate as well, received from the citizens of the country underlines the possibility of success in good governance, at least better than before. As a matter of fact, the governance is showing signs of better prospects. But it has miles and miles to go before it can make any claim that can correspond to any achievement worth being celebrated. All the same, the aspiration, plans and efforts in themselves could no doubt be considered meritorious.

The fundamental vision of Jesus categorically reiterates his special consideration of the poor and the deprived sections of the society. ‘Attending to the least and to the lost’ was the first point in his missionary agenda. He dared to leave the well-heeled and the flourishing alone, in favour of the lowly and the marginalized and proceeded even to make friendship with them. He was convinced that the kingdom of God is for them, in its first place. Jesus stands out as a singular person in the entire history of humankind in his deep love for and devotion to the subjugated and the demoralized. Obviously, his exceptional human quality and height were firmly rooted in a deep spiritual experience and the detailed knowledge of what the divine really is.

The Catholic Church has been pursuing several schemes ever since its inception for the uplift of the under-privileged human beings. The unique character of Jesus and the specificity of Christianity are inbuilt in the above concern. The recent centuries, especially the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, are witnessing the furtherance of this commitment of Jesus on a war footing. The contribution the Catholic Church in particular and the Christian community in general have done for feeding, housing, clothing, educating, employing and dignifying the human lives in India and the world over is worthy of being commended in lofty words, especially by the specially chosen and committed group of women and men across the world. The newer and newer dimensions of this mission seem to emerge as per the exigencies of the times and situations.

The biggest problem of this country is lack of equitable justice in the distribution of the common resources. Ten to twenty percent of the people of this country are almost gravely sick with material riches. It is said that the richest person in the world also hails from India. On the other hand, thirty to forty percent of the people are below poverty line and are struggling to make both ends meet. The disparity between the

higher and lower classes is immeasurably high. The affluent section of the society seems to be unsympathetic in their attitude towards the needy sections. Is it possible that one end of the society is totally unaware of the harsh realities of the other end? How could the humans have a 'humane' life in this country without giving everyone his or her due?

The sad plight of this country is that much of what happens in the name of 'religion or faith' amounts to be sheer 'superstition' or 'self-seeking' or 'irreligion'. Although religion is intended to inject the spiritual value of 'sharing with others', much of it doesn't seem to produce any fruit in this regard. It has not succeeded on the whole in striking a balance between the haves and the have-nots of the country. The irony of the story is that the religious sector itself amasses wealth to the point of being very filthy. Tirupati temple is known to be the abode of the richest god in India. Temples, gurudwaras, churches, mosques and other places of worship seem to mint money by exploiting the devotion of the devotees of the respective community. The unreasonably posh architectural centres of worship make it uncomfortable for even the gods to dwell there! What is the fate of the money and the riches of these so called sacred places? How much the poor and the struggling lot benefit from the riches of the religious institutions as well as of the affluent society? India is notoriously 'irreligious' and 'unspiritual' on this issue. The Indian society needs to taken inspiration from the noble ways of the European Christian community that stands a super model in this matter.

The religious communities of all traditions have to come forward to individually and collectively make their centres and places of worship moderate. They have to take the lead in investing the money for the support and wellbeing of the marginalized of the society. 'Extraordinary concern for the poor and the needy' is the real *raison de'tre* of the religious sector. 'Physician, heal yourself' is a dictum from the Bible that shows the way in this regard. The religious heads have to set an example in simplifying their infrastructure and cost of living and practice the spirit of sharing with the unfortunate sisters and brothers who live on the margins of the society in an unbecoming way. 'The spirit of sharing' makes the religious traditions spiritual with integrity.

The Christian community, especially its social organizations like Caritas, has to take the lead anew and all the more with a 'master plan' for helping all its members stand on their feet as regards basic amenities of food, clothing and shelter. It has also to conceive schemes for providing opportunities for education and employment for all the members. It has to empower other religious communities and the affluent civil society to live the universal spiritual value of sharing with the have-nots and to enable them to live a life worthy of a human being. The Christian community, along with

other faith-based organizations and NGOs, has to invent measures for strengthening the government and the administration for effectively pursuing the programmes for ensuring the citizens better education, medical facilities, equal opportunities and harmonious living. ‘Preferential commitment to the poor and the deprived’ is the ‘one-point programme’ that is key to a dignified human life for all citizens in the country and for facilitating a progressive nation.

Dr M.D. Thomas

Founder Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies
Floor 1, A 128, Sector 19, Dwarka, New Delhi 110075

Tel.: 09810535378 (p), 08847925378 (p), 011-45575378 (o)
Email: mdthomas53@gmail.com (p), ihps2014@gmail.com (o)
Website: www.mdthomas.in (p), www.ihpsindia.org (o)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mdthomas53>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mdthomas53>
Academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/MDTHOMAS>