

Paul and Justification: The Relevance of Paul's Doctrine of Justification for Today

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Abstract: Here the author deals with the contemporary relevance of Pauline doctrine of justification/righteousness/salvation. This paper intends to study the Pauline concept of justification and related ideas in the Indian context characterised by rich religiosity and spirituality on the one hand, and the increasing polarisation on the basis of ideology, religion, sex-gender stereotypes, class and caste on the other. Towards this purpose we begin the paper with a brief analysis of the Indian situation with special reference to its socio-cultural and religious aspects.

The paper is divided into two parts. Part I will analyse the meaning of justification/salvation and related ideas. In the process of investigation we shall delineate the salient features of Paul's theology of justification. Part II will deal with the implications of Pauline theology for today. Owing to constraints of space, our study shall be restricted to issues pertaining to women and religious pluralism.

Thus moving away from the legalistic and fundamentalist notion of justification, the fact of being saved by the faith *of* and *in* Christ (Rom 3:21-26) enables us to live humbly (example of Abraham) before God in a spirit of gratitude to God's gracious gift. It urges us to move towards the realisation of Paul's egalitarian vision (Gal 3:26-29). Our identity as human beings created in God's image and likeness and our 'oneness' in Christ shall not to be obscured by divisive forces. Our personal experience of the justifying act of God manifested in Jesus' love and poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) empowers us to be committed to the liberative mission of Jesus in today's Church and Society.

Keywords: Justification/righteousness/salvation, Indian context, religious pluralism, women, liberative mission of Christ.

Pauline notion of justification/righteousness/salvation (Rom 3:21-4:25; Gal 2:16-20; 3:21-4:25) has been a subject matter of intense exploration and debate in Christian churches. Ancient and contemporary scholars alike have grappled with the phrases “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:22) and “a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom 3:28). As Pathrapankal observes, almost every influential Christian thinker has dwelt with the letter to the Romans that has contributed significantly to the history of Christian doctrine.[1]

This paper intends to study the Pauline concept of justification and related ideas in the Indian context characterised by rich religiosity and spirituality on the one hand, and the increasing polarisation on the basis of ideology, religion, sex-gender stereotypes, class and caste on the other. Towards this purpose we begin the paper with a brief analysis of the Indian situation with special reference to its socio-cultural and religious aspects.

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The Indian Context

Religion: Indian Society is distinguished for its diversity of cultures, languages and religions. This pluralistic feature has been woven in to the very fabric of our nation from time immemorial. We regard the diversity of religions and mutual interaction of religious traditions as a special blessing of our times that can contribute to the building up of an egalitarian society capable of overcoming the caste, creed, class, sex and gender based divisive forces.

Despite many positive signs and events, the present Indian scenario is rather bleak. Clashes between religions, conflict, hatred and mass killings have become the order of the day. The recent brutal

activities by religious fanatics in Orissa and other parts of the country are an example of this phenomenon.[2] Particularly disturbing is the trend towards politicisation of religion and fostering of an aggressive fundamentalism for political and economic ends.

Socio-cultural and economic: Indian society with its culture, predominantly rooted in Hindu ethos that is strongly entrenched in the caste system, is diametrically opposed to God's design for a dignified and just social order. It has not only caused deep divisions among the people, but also is "mainly responsible for keeping a large section of the Indian populace backward, socially, economically and educationally." [3] Sadly the 'casteist mentality' is deeply ingrained also in the psyche of most sections of the Indian Church. [4] Equally shocking is the economic system that has widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

Another feature of the Indian reality is the **discrimination against women**. Like most communities across the globe, Indian society too is highly patriarchal. Women are victims of multiple inequalities, which are the by-products of centuries-long socio-cultural, religious, economic and political discriminatory practices. In the laws of Manu, their social mobility, economic freedom and personal liberty are almost fully curtailed and brought under the control of the men folk in the family. [5] No wonder then that Manu, the greatest lawgiver of the Hindus, assigned to women "perpetual legal minority, making them subject to fathers in childhood, husbands in youth and sons in old age." [6] Despite its declarations affirming the dignity and vocation of women, the Church too operates on patriarchal lines.

Nevertheless, today women from all walks of life are forging ahead to reclaim their rightful place in society and religion. The various women's movements and organisations bear witness to women's vision of a society/religion free from sexism, casteism, classism, communalism and all dehumanising praxis. In a spirit of sisterhood among themselves and solidarity with like-minded groups, women have begun to demand leadership positions in public and private arena.

Against this paradoxical context of our society and church, we shall delve into the Pauline concept of justification/righteousness/salvation and examine the relevance of Paul's teachings for us today.

Part I

Justification through Faith in Jesus (Rom 3: 21-4:25; Gal 3: 1-4:31)

1. Preliminary remarks

The Pauline notion of justification through faith (3:21-31), the dominant theme in Romans, is a key category in Paul's thought. Scholars unanimously agree that Romans (c. 56-57) enjoys primacy over all the other Letters of Paul. For instance, Kizhakkeyil considers it the first well-developed theological statement that has come down to us and has exercised immense influence on the formulation of Christian theology ever since.[7] Translating Kuss, Thekkekara writes, "The theological and architectural summit of the letter to the Romans is represented by the pericope 3: 21-31, more precisely, by the verses 21-26." [8] In the words of Cranfield, it is indeed "the centre and heart" [9] of Paul's theology of justification, righteousness, salvation and faith. Montague is of the view that "justification is not the centre of Pauline doctrine. Rather it is an application of his 'in Christ' theology to the question raised in forensic terms by his adversaries." [10]

There exists a close thematic affinity between Romans and Galatians. Although the context and purpose of the Letters differ, the theme "Justification through faith in Christ" is common to both. They complement each other and must be read together to comprehend the full implications of Paul's teachings. [11] While the tone of Galatians is angry and hurried as Paul is reacting to the Judaizers over the circumcision controversy, Romans is reflective and systematic. According to Smith, "Romans is Galatians remembered in tranquility." [12] In all probability, Romans was written from Corinth between 56-57 AD during Paul's three-month stay there (Acts 19:21; 20:3; Rom 15: 22-33; 16:1), prior to his departure for Jerusalem with the alms for the poor (Rom 15:25-26).

The 'why' for writing a letter to the Christians at Rome is a matter of deliberation. To use the expression of Ellis, "One has to wonder why he wrote his most deeply theological letter to a church that he

had not founded and did not even know except by hearsay.”[13] Considering Paul’s personality, his passionate love for Christ and his mission, we can perceive Paul’s ‘hidden agenda’ for writing to the Romans. In his enthusiasm to preach the Gospel in Spain (Rom 15:28), Paul needed the support and understanding of the influential Roman church.

2. Exploring the meaning of righteousness (*dikaïosyn*–) of God

The doctrine of justification is spelt out in Paul’s letter to the Romans as follows:

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness....; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteousness and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus....For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law (Rom 3: 21-26, 28).

In the biblical tradition, as described by Newman, “the noun *righteousness* and the adjective *righteous* denote the character, behaviour and status appropriate to the covenant relationship God formed through Israel.”[14] God’s righteousness is demonstrated through God’s fidelity to Israel that evokes obedience and loyalty from the people. According to Pereira, “The expression *dikaïosyn*– of God in the LXX is most often the translation of the Hebrew word *sedāqah* (righteousness).”[15] Translating the word ‘righteousness’ as “virtue,” “justice,” “justification,” “uprightness,” Ellis draws our attention to ‘covenant theology,’ which denotes fidelity of covenant partners – God and Israel to each other.[16]

Now “the covenant relationship was prior to all law and to all demands of the law.”[17] Yahweh’s choice of Israel and Israel’s conviction of being the elect of Yahweh constituted the basic fact of its existence. God’s choice of Israel did not depend on its merits,

but on God's gracious and unconditional love: "It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you....It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand ..." (Dt 7:7-9; 9:4-5; Ex 19: 4). Far from being righteous, the Israelites were a stubborn people (v. 6). Thus the notion of righteousness excludes legalistic claims and attitudes in the Old Testament and fosters a relationship based "on the grace of the covenant." [18]

Closely related to the idea of righteousness (*sedaqah*) is the notion of salvation. The occurrences of *sedaqah* in the Old Testament is often associated with salvation / deliverance: "There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour" (Is 45:21); "I bring near my deliverance, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry. I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory" (Is 46:13). The Psalms further illustrate the close association of *sedaqah* with salvation (e.g., Ps 40:10; 62:2).

Another point to be underscored is the association of *dikaïosyn*– with *hesed*, translated as 'steadfast love' or 'loving kindness' and *emeth*, i.e., God's fidelity to God's promises. In fact, as Schrenk points out, "In the LXX the use of *sedaqah* for God's dispensation of salvation is carried to such a point that *dikaïosyn*– can even be used for *hesed* (Gen 19:19; 20:13; 24:27; 32:10; Ex 15:13; 34:7; etc.), when *eleos* is the more usual rendering. We also find *dikaïosyn*– used to render '*emeth*' (Gen 24:49; Is 38:19; 39:8; etc.)." [19]

The Hebrew word for compassion, *rahamim* expresses the feminine aspect of God. According to Semitic thought, *rahamim* conveys the "instinctive attachment of one being for another," thus indicating that it has "its seat in the maternal bosom, *raham*: 1 Kings 3:26." [20] God's motherly love readily translates itself into tenderness and act of compassion/mercy as seen in the life of Israel (Ps 106:45; cf. 2Cor 1:3).

Scholars are of the view that the *dikaïosyn*– of God in the Old Testament is not used to denote God's punishment of the chosen people for their sins of infidelity, even though they are often reminded of their unfaithfulness and the need for repentance. Moreover, as Pereira observes, the *dikaïosyn*– of God is never equated with the

‘wrath’ (*orge*) of God; instead, frequently it is expressly contrasted with it (Ex 15:7, 13).[21]

Thus the salvific nature of the *dikaïosyn*- of God or God’s righteousness is explicit in the biblical texts. It may be described as God’s saving love and mercy (*karuna*) in action, whereby the faithful God, in accordance with God’s promises, liberates God’s people from slavery to sin and brings them back to Godself. God takes initiative to put them in right relationship with Godself. The Exodus story powerfully illustrates this: “In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode” (Ex 15:13).

Salvation in the Indian tradition and religion is perceived in varied forms and shades. Indians understand salvation as “*loka-samgraha* (welfare of the society and the cosmos) and also as *moksa* (individual liberation) from the *samsara* (the cycle of birth and death).”[22] Constraints of space do not permit us to develop these notions at this point. A lucid understanding of the various shades of salvation in Indian traditions and religions has been provided by the scholars of Indian Theological Association (ITA).[23]

3. Meaning of Righteousness / Salvation in Paul

Paul’s arguments about “righteousness through faith in Jesus and not through the law” have been transformed into a “timeless theological principle.”[24] Paul sees righteousness as God’s saving activity wrought through the crucified and risen Christ. Jesus on the cross becomes the manifestation of God’s righteousness, God’s activity of “putting right” and humans’ state of “being put right” with God. In other words, “righteousness” is God’s gift to sinful man/woman to be received through faith. A person then becomes righteous, ‘justified’ or holy, before God as God’s son/daughter in Christ. At four distinct points in Romans, Paul speaks of “the righteousness of God”:

- (i) Rom 1: 16-17 emphasises the faithfulness of God in terms of the “righteousness of God,” denoting God’s saving power.
- (ii) Rom 3: 1-8 relates the truth and faithfulness of God to “the righteousness of God.”

- (iii) Rom 3: 21-26 speaks of “the righteousness of God” as the self-expression of God, that is, God’s salvific action.
- (iv) Rom 10: 1-4 sees “the righteousness of God” as God’s power at work unto salvation.[25] Obviously, Paul’s focus in each of these instances is on the saving-power character of God.

Beginning with “the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1), which is God’s power of salvation (1:16), Paul emphatically states that this gospel in which God’s righteousness is revealed (1:17) comes as a gift to humanity, estranged from God because of its disobedience. Paul’s expression ‘the gospel of God,’ understood as a *subjective genitive* focuses on God’s own good news proclaimed and accomplished in Christ. The fact that Paul also speaks about “the gospel of his Son” (1:9) and the “gospel of Christ” (15:19) suggests that God is the subject and Christ is the object of the gospel.[26] Taken as an *objective genitive*, *dikaïosynē theou* “refers to the righteousness that God graciously confers upon the ungodly. This is certainly the sense of the expression in 2 Cor 5:21 and Phil 3:9, but here and in Rom. 3:5, 21, 22 and 10:3 the righteousness of God is best construed as a subjective genitive that points to God’s own uprightness...God’s covenant faithfulness in the face of human infidelity.”[27]

Paul insists that human beings have nothing to boast about. Justification is not the achievement of humans through the observance of the law, but God’s gratuitous gift in virtue of the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24). Fitzmyer expresses this idea in terms of “vindication and acquittal of sinful human beings” by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[28] He also lists ten different images in Pauline writings which the apostle uses to explain this reality: justification, salvation, reconciliation, expiation, redemption, freedom, sanctification, transformation, new creation and glorification.[29] Each of these highlights a distinctive aspect of the mystery of Christ and his redemptive work.

Redemption in Christ

Having dealt with the deplorable situation of humankind in Rom 1:18-3:20, Paul sets out to elaborate his theological treatise on the righteousness of God (*dikaïosynē tou Theou*) apart from law (3:21), through the redemption in Christ (v.24) and faith in Jesus Christ

(v.22). He maintains that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23); they are under the power of sin and incapable of justifying themselves on the basis of legal observance. Hence they are justified through Christ Jesus, “whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith” (3:25).

To get a clear grasp of the word ‘redemption’ we turn to the Old Testament once again. The frequent use of the verb ‘to redeem’ (*lytrousthai*) in the LXX denotes the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (Ex 6:6; 15:13; Deut 7:8; 9:26). It is Yahweh who takes the initiative to liberate them from bondage in order to make them Yahweh’s own “possession” (Ex 6:7; Deut 7:6). This fact is reiterated in Ex 19:4-5 and Deut 7:8, which proclaim God’s tender compassion, God’s maternal and paternal love.

The verb ‘to redeem’ is also used to indicate Israel’s deliverance from their sins solely because of God’s merciful love. God is so rich in mercy (*hesed or eleos* in the LXX) that God’s compassionate love not only forgives Israel’s iniquities, but also revives their hope of salvation/redemption. The accent is on plenteous redemption (Ps 130:7-8) offered by God: “You shall be redeemed without money” (Is 52:3); “For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem” (Ps 130:7).

Paul’s vocabulary of justice and justification discloses his legal frame of mind. The concept of redemption (*apolytrōsis*, 3:24) in the Graeco-Roman world referred to the buying back of slaves or prisoners. By applying this notion to humanity’s sinful situation, Paul “suggests that Christ’s death ransomed and rescued humanity from the power of sin that enslaved and held it captive.”[30] Paul’s usage of the term takes us back to his polemic situation. Montague aptly puts it: “He (Paul) was combating the extreme Pharisaism which had a totally legalistic concept of the righteous life, reducing the ‘gift’ and interpersonal aspect of man’s (humans’) religious life to an innocuous residue.”[31].

The Pharisees regarded Judaism as a religion centered upon the observance of the Torah. Their proud exclusiveness (Mt 9: 9-13; Mk 2: 13-17; Lk 5:27-32; Jn 7: 49) made them believe that they could find favour with God by their meticulous practice of even the most minor precepts. They understood salvation and sanctification

in terms of their own merits, and not as a gift of God. Against this mindset Paul reacts violently, insisting that justice is not acquired by keeping the prescriptions of the law (Gal 3:11; Rom 3:21; 5:1; 9:30; 10:6), but by faith in Jesus as discussed above. It is the justice of God that justifies the believer. It is the faith of Christ Jesus “who humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8) that restores the strained relation between God and humans and among human beings themselves.

Paul’s reference to “redemption through his blood” (Eph 1:7) and his reminder “you were bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23) may convey the notion that “Jesus has bought us back by paying the price of his blood.”[32] Paul seems to project a God who can be appeased only by blood sacrifice. Sinful humans are incapable of restoring the broken relationship between them and God. The only device to re-establish the lost friendship with God (Rom 5: 12-17; cf. Gen 3: 1-19) is Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. However crude may be Paul’s expressions and metaphors, his purpose transcends legalistic concepts.

Drawing on the cultic imagery of the day of atonement (Lev 16:14-16), Paul writes that “God put forward Christ as a *hilast-ri-ōn* (Rom 3:25), the new mercy seat sprinkled with Christ’s own blood, thereby atoning for the sins of humanity”.[33] In other words, Jesus is the meeting-place for humans and God, the place where humans experience the ‘atoning love’ of God. Jesus is depicted as the new ‘mercy seat,’ the compassionate and forgiving God, whose mercy does not evoke the idea of chastisement. Pereira categorically states that it is “totally unbiblical” to consider the shedding of blood in the death of Christ on the cross as a punishment for our sins.[34] On the contrary, it is Jesus’ supreme act of love for us: “He loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20; cf. Eph 5:2, 25; Jn 10:11, 15, 27; 15:13; 1Jn 3:16).

Keeping in mind the significance of the doctrine of justification in ecumenical perspective, we do well to highlight the theological position of some of the Protestant scholars. Karl Barth is regarded as the most explicit of the leading theologians on the subject of justification. Montague observes that Lutheran Hofer’s survey of Protestant research on the theology of justification in 1940 indicated

the contemporary trend “toward a more mystical interpretation consonant with the entire life of salvation,” thus moving away “from a purely juridical and imputative meaning.”[35] Similar views highlighting the renewed understanding of protestant theologians are found in recent articles by Pathil and Keerankeri.[36] Thus, “justification in Paul is not only the forgiveness of sin but also a vocation, transformation, mobilization, a ‘new’ life and activity.”[37]

Need for Faith (Rom 3:22)

At the heart of Paul’s gospel stands his deep rooted conviction, “A person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith of Jesus Christ (*dia pisteMs Iesoun Christou*)...we have believed in Christ Jesus (*eis Christon Iesoun episteusamen*) that we might be justified by faith of Christ and not by the works of the law” (Gal 2:16; cf. Gal 2:20; 3:22; Phil 3:9).[38] Jesus on the Cross is the greatest demonstration of his faith in God, who justified and reconciled humanity apart from the law (Rom 3:28).

For Paul, faith is always faith in a person, the person of Jesus Christ in whom the righteousness of God has been revealed (Rom 3:21-22). Pauline faith cannot be reduced to a mere intellectual acceptance of a body of doctrines. It is a firm belief in God and in God’s promises as exemplified in the life Abraham (Rom 4:1-25; cf. Gen 12:1), who believed God and God reckoned it to him as righteousness (Rom 4:22; Gal 3:6; Gen 15:6). Just as the promise made to Abraham was realised through faith in God (Rom 4:13; Gal 3:15-18) and not through the law (Rom 4:11; Gal 3:17-18), so too, Christian faith should rest on the person of Jesus. Paul thus underscores the unmerited nature of faith: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

Because faith is central to Paul’s preaching, the purpose of his ministry is “to bring about the obedience of faith (*hypako-n pisteMs*) among all the Gentiles” (Rom 1:5). Faith comes from hearing. If the gospel is not proclaimed, it will neither be heard nor believed. When the gospel is proclaimed, “the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith” (Rom 1:17), that is “it begins and ends with

faith.”[39] Paul is so convinced that “the one who is righteous will live by faith” (Rom 1:17b).

At this juncture it must be noted that Paul is speaking of a very different kind of faith from that of James, who criticises those whose faith is dead and hence does not result in doing good works (Jas 2:14-26). Paul thus assumes that there are works which follow justification by faith. In Gal 5:1-6 Paul speaks of “faith working through love” (v.6). In fact in all his letters, Paul exhorts his people to live up to their faith in Christ by sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:1-11). Ultimately, both Paul and James expect the Christians to have a living, genuine faith.

In short, Pauline conception of faith requires personal belief in and surrender to Jesus through whom God has justified us. To use the expression of Barclay, “Christianity is not a system; it is a faith.”[40] To borrow Paul’s vocabulary, “righteousness is by faith unto all that believe” (Rom 3:22). Faith, then, is the response that Paul expects from his people.

Part II

1. Justification by Faith and Women

In the context of a patriarchal society of Paul’s time and of today, the declaration “justification through faith in Christ, not through the works of the law” assumes special significance for Christian women. In exploring the meaning of ‘justification’ (righteousness), we underlined the emergence of this term from **covenant theology**. The sign of the covenant in Jewish community was male circumcision (Gen 17:10-14). Consequently males were regarded as full members of the covenant, i.e., those belonging to God’s own family with Torah as their guide. As Tatha Wiley, drawing on the scholarship of Ross S. Kramar observes, references to the “People” Israel referred to a community of males: “So Moses went down from the mountain to the people...and he said to the people, ‘Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman’ (Ex 19:14-15).[41] Women shared in the covenant through the circumcised males. In other words, women were considered part of Israel through relations of dependence on their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons.

It must be noted that “the function of the law is inescapably bound up with gender... the law is gender-specific.”[42] Formulated from a male perspective, the law fosters patriarchal ideology and claims divine legitimacy for women’s subordination and victimisation in the social and religious spheres. We have ample examples of this in biblical texts (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:17-21; Gen 18:12; Num 27:1-11; 30:4-9; Deut 24:1; Sir 23:22-26; Lev 12:1-5, etc.) and in Manu, who provided a legal framework for the support and continuation of the institution of patriarchy.[43]

Undoubtedly, the hallmark of Judaism is its “emphasis on correct action in every sphere of life, technically called ‘orthopraxy’...”[44] The Torah creates and maintains a separate and unequal spheres for women and men by its divisive strategy of allowing or restricting its full observance. As Phyllis Bird points out, religious law is addressed only to men and only men were required to obey “the whole law”. [45] A study by Jeremias reveals that schools were only meant for boys. A woman was educated merely in household tasks that would enable her to serve man’s needs.[46]

Against this patriarchal background with its portrayal of women as minors, dependent and inferior, Paul’s assertion that “a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom 3:28) is of great significance. The sign of the covenant membership is no more circumcision but faith in Christ Jesus. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul gives us an emotionally charged illustration of his thesis, which throws further light on our discussion.

In the context of the Galatian controversy over the law of circumcision (Gal chs. 1-3), Paul’s emphasis is on justification by faith (Gal 3:24) and not by the law (3:11). The clause “that we might be justified by faith” (*hina ek pisteMs dikaiMthMmen*) expresses the ultimate purpose of the law in its function as disciplinarian (*paidagogos*, cf. v. 19). The justifying act of God in Christ obliterates the partition erected by the law between Jews and Gentiles, men and women. They have become *one* in Christ; they have “put on Christ,” the underlying reality of Christian existence (3:26-27). Justification (*dikaïosun-*) comes through the faith *of* and *in* Christ, i.e., Jesus’ self-surrender to God and faith of the believer, who joins Jesus in his act of faith (cf. Rom 6:1-11). Paul reiterates that in

Christ Jesus “the only thing that counts is faith working through love” and not circumcision or uncircumcision (Gal 5:6).

Because of its liberative thrust, Gal 3:28, especially 28c has aroused ‘feminist consciousness’ among women and men scholars. Considered to be a baptismal formula,[47] v. 28 forms part of the pericope (3:26-29) in which Paul defines the status of the baptised before God: “For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (v.26). There is a thematic link between v. 26 and v. 28d. As a result of our sonship and daughterhood, we are all *one* in Christ Jesus (v. 28d).[48] The parallelism between v.26 and v.28d shows that the phrase “in Christ Jesus” determines the phrase “you are all sons and daughters of God” in v.26 and “you are all one” in v.28d.

Paul’s contention that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but faith working through love (Gal 5:6, 13-15; 1 Cor 7:9) is of utmost importance, especially for women whose covenant partnership was realised only through the circumcised male. By his emphatic statement that baptism provides all that circumcision offers in order to enter into a covenant relationship with God (cf. Gen 17:1-27; Ex 4:24-26), Paul introduces a revolutionary idea.

Having been baptised into Christ, both woman and man become a new creation (Gal 6:15). A person’s state before her/his call makes no difference since the circumcised and the uncircumcised are justified by faith. God is the God of all (Rom 3:29); Christ is all in all (Col 3:11). Therefore, the woman enters into the covenant relation of God’s people through her own faith and baptism; she is a full-fledged member of God’s family. Paul’s statement in Gal 3:29 “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” is applicable also to the woman.

Within the overall scheme of Galatians, Paul’s proclamation of the overcoming of the male-female division reflects the optimism of the early Christians that in their community the new age had dawned. They have entered into a world of new relationships based on faith and baptism common to all. The significance attached to ethnic, legal and sexual status has been dissolved in the “all-embracing corporate existence in Christ.”[49] The formula “no male and female” (Gal

3:28c in the neuter) does not mean abolition of sex differences in the biological sense. It points to the quality of the “new creation in Christ” (Gal 5:6; Col 3:10). It is also an assertion of the fact that both woman and man are created in God’s image and likeness and are entrusted with a common mission (Gen 1:26-28).

In our Indian situation with its deplorable caste system and sex-gender stereotypes and atrocities against women, Paul’s egalitarian vision paves the way for the creation of a society built on the principles of human dignity, love and forgiveness, justice and peace, equality and liberty, partnership and participatory decision-making. The male-female relationship which has become one of subordination and domination can no longer be maintained in Christ.

Although the teaching Church has long upheld, in principle, the biblical revelation enshrined in Gal 3: 26-29, the Church’s practice contradicts its belief. In spite of its pronouncements on equality and co-responsibility in its official documents,[50] for all practical purposes the Church still remains a hierarchically structured institution firmly established on the rock of patriarchy. It perpetuates gender discrimination through its androcentric theology, biblical interpretation and an all-male Church leadership.[51] It must now recapture the original vision of Jesus and move towards the establishment of the Messianic community of what Schussler Fiorenza terms “discipleship of equals.”[52]

The fact that women and men are equal sharers of a common human nature signifies equality of rights, mutual respect of each other’s personhood, a common vocation to image God and to take on responsibility for the rest of creation so that all may attain the fulfilment willed by the Creator. Going a step further, as believers in Christ we ought to affirm the fact that having “put on Christ” and become “one” with him through baptism, women and men are equal in grace, despite their God-given biological differences. A radical following of Jesus, the Liberator/Saviour, entails individual and collective criticism with a view to exploring possibilities to overcome the social, cultural and religious hurdles standing in the way of discipleship of equals.

2. Justification by Faith and Religious Pluralism

In my search for an apt beginning of this section, I found the questions formulated by Pathrapankal relevant and loaded with theological insights.

- How are we to understand the role and significance of Jesus Christ in the context of the recognition of other religions also as ways of salvation?
- Is Jesus Christ one among those who are called saviours?
- Is he one who is superior to all others? Or is Jesus Christ unique in such a way that all are saved only through him?[53]

In their attempt to develop a relevant Christology in a religiously pluralistic world, theologians of both the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches have introduced new terms such as *exclusivism*, *inclusivism* and *pluralism*. [54] It is beyond the scope of this section to engage in a discussion about the merits and demerits of these terms. The paper will limit itself to highlighting some key issues for today.

The Universal Thrust of Jesus' Teaching

Because of our faith in Jesus and commitment to his mission, Jesus of Nazareth remains the model and inspiration for theological discourse. Despite his Jewish upbringing, Jesus tried to transcend the narrow boundaries of Judaism. That he refused to be a conformist is beyond doubt (see Mk 2:23-26; 3:1-6; Lk 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Jn chs. 5 & 6). He proclaimed the good news of liberation to all (Lk 4:18-21) irrespective of social and religious status. Poor and rich, women and men, sinners and saints, Jews and Gentiles – all received a warm welcome in his kingdom.

The basic content of Jesus' mission was the inauguration of Kingdom (Reign) of God, characterised by God's motherly and fatherly love and care for all people and the whole creation. Commenting on the content of Jesus' preaching and the frequent occurrences of the expression 'Kingdom of God' in the Gospels, Pathrapankal says, "The Kingdom of God meant not a territory but rather a situation, a state and quality of being..."[55]

Although the original message of Jesus was theocentric, in the latter part of the Gospels we see Jesus demanding commitment to and confession of his unique identity (Mt 10:32-33).[56] Thus the focus is shifted to the person of Jesus. Knitter observes: "If the original message of Jesus was theocentric, the pervasive message of the New Testament is undeniably Christocentric..., the original message of Jesus was transformed, not lost." [57]

This Christocentrism of the early Church is revealed in 1 Jn 1:1-4; Jn 1:1-18; 14:6; Acts 4:12 and other passages in the New Testament. In Part I of this paper we noted the radicality with which Paul explains the unique role of Jesus as Saviour of the Jews and the Gentiles, men and women alike. Leaving aside all theological debates on the universal significance of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5), we shall try to respond briefly to issues related to the salvific role of Jesus in our multi-religious context.

How do we interpret Paul's concept of justification through faith in Jesus in our specific situation of religious pluralism? Should our faith-claims about the crucified and risen Christ make us exclusive and aggressive? What does it mean to be a Christian today?

Paul's statements on the uniqueness of Jesus in God's plan of salvation have to be understood in the context of his Damascus encounter and apostolic experiences in different churches. Having realised the futility of the Torah to make him justified before God, Paul focused on the righteousness of God effective through faith in Jesus Christ. Legrand expresses it succinctly: "Justification by faith and not by the works of the Law was thus implicitly contained in the Damascus vision and the manner in which it subverted Saul's religious outlook. Now was the time when the new Covenant was fulfilled, covenant written in the hearts (Jer 32:31-34; 32:40; Ez 37:26), and universally opened to all peoples" (Zech 2:15; Is 19:19-25).[58]

As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul's approach to people of other faiths in today's society would have to be distinguished by reverence and cordiality. He would emphasise that "God shows no partiality" (Rom 2:11) and that "God will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and uncircumcised through that same faith" (Rom 3:29-30). Paul's Christ-centredness would enable him realise the irrelevance

of an aggressive mission amid religious pluralism. Presumably he would accept the paradigm shift proposed by the ITA scholars: "Christians must proclaim a Jesus: a) who is not a threat to the religions of India; b) who is related to the other ways of salvation present in India not as their fulfillment but as offering them service (kenotic Christ)...; f) who is present through his Spirit in the whole of creation." [59]

Challenges and Tasks Ahead

Religious pluralism being a fact of history, religious belongingness should not be an obstacle to harmonious living and interfaith partnership. One can discover expressions of pluralism in Biblical texts.[60] Describing religion as "a divine-human relationship," Amaladoss accentuates the need for learning from other religions: "...what I am suggesting is that each religion, while believing in its specificity and uniqueness, can - and does - accept the legitimacy of other religions as facilitating divine-human encounter. Each religion will explain this in accordance with its own faith-vision." [61] Critiquing the people who brand pluralistic approach as "relativization strategy," Pathrapankal stresses: "It is to be forcefully maintained that when we speak of a pluralistic approach, it is not a relativization of one's own faith in Christ that is proposed, but rather an objective approach to the reality of religions in God's plan of salvation." [62]

In the present socio-economic, religio-cultural and political context of India, Christians should be encouraged to work with all people of good will in furthering the Reign of God. Theologians have a great responsibility to educate the laity about the teachings of Vatican II that express openness to the riches of other religions and cultures (*Gaudium et Spes* 86, 59; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37; *Ad Gentes* 11) and recognise that they contain the seeds of the Word (*Ad Gentes* 11; *Lumen Gentium* 17). Soares-Prabhu has pointed out that the aggressive mission of the colonial period and mission exclusively understood as "Church growth" based on the great commission (Mt 28:16-20) has to be balanced and corrected by mission as witness based on the text of Matthew 5:13-16.[63]

Dialogue with people of other religions provides a platform to learn from one another's religious traditions and values, combining deep commitment to one's faith and openness to others' experience. Genuine dialogue presupposes equality, freedom and mutual respect. It fosters communication and makes each other's faith intelligible. In the process we learn to respect diversity, recognise unity and celebrate the presence of the Spirit in all religions. As Samarth says, "faith cannot be imposed from outside; it emerges out of a long experience." [64]

The negative role of religions as witnessed in contemporary India does not negate the positive role religions can play in building a better nation and a better world. Examples abound in this regard, [65] including my own experience in interreligious ministry. There are liberative streams or prophetic voices in every religion. There are ample opportunities for networking with all people of good will. What is important is the quality of our involvement, the humility to work *with* and not merely *for* people. "Involvement in the struggles of people has to become the source of theology and liturgy; a faith commitment born of this will lead to a spirituality ..., of solidarity with and liberation of the poor and the oppressed." [66]

Conclusion

In the course of our study on Paul and Justification, undertaken in the socio-cultural and religious context of India, we have made a modest attempt to explore the meaning of justification/righteousness and related terms, and underscored their theological impact and implications. The doctrine of justification by faith "removes all grounds of human boasting and human hubris, as both justification and sanctification are God's gift." [67] The fundamental thrust of Romans is that God's salvation is offered to all (3:29) and "Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith..." (1:16). In other words, "the contents of Romans are a development of the theme of God's righteousness." [68]

Having established that it is faith *of* and faith *in* Jesus that makes us righteous, we dealt with the significance of justification by faith for women. Reflecting from a feminist perspective, we have affirmed that in Christ Jesus we are all daughters and sons of God through

faith. Because **all** are made **one** in Christ, and have equal status before God, discrimination of any sort is incompatible with the Christian spirit. It goes against the plan of God to liberate and unite all people in Christ. It also obstructs our mission of inter-faith partnership in furthering the Reign of God.

On the issue of justification and religious pluralism, we have highlighted the need for cultivating healthy attitudes towards followers of other religions (*Nostra Aetate* 2) and fostering interreligious partnership. Every Christian is called to emulate the example of Jesus, who abolished distinctions on the basis of ethnic (Jew & Greek), legal (slave & free), and sexual (male & female) status. The Church's proclamation of the uniqueness of Jesus should not be to the exclusion of other manifestations of the divine. On the contrary, it must challenge us to follow the path of Jesus, who acknowledged and appreciated the faith found in others (Mt 8:10-12; 15:28; Lk 10:25-37; 17:17-18; Mk 9:38; Jn 4).

Thus moving away from the legalistic and fundamentalist notion of justification, the fact of being saved by the faith *of* and *in* Christ (Rom 3:21-26) enables us to live humbly (example of Abraham) before God in a spirit of gratitude to God's gracious gift. It urges us to move towards the realisation of Paul's egalitarian vision (Gal 3:26-29). Our identity as human beings created in God's image and likeness and our 'oneness' in Christ shall not to be obscured by divisive forces. Our personal experience of the justifying act of God manifested in Jesus' love and poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) empowers us to be committed to the liberative mission of Jesus in today's Church and Society.

Notes

- [1] In his introduction to the Letter of Paul to the Romans, Joseph Pathrapankal has reviewed the scholars from Patristic period till the last century. See *The New Community Bible* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2008), p. 2012. See also Reginald White, *Meet St. Paul* (London: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1989).
- [2] See Francis Gonsalves, "Listen to the Spirit: Paul Crucified with Christ – Paul's Master Motif," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 72/3, March 2008, p. 217.
- [3] Kurien Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity – Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005, p. 11.

- [4] Leslie J. Almeida, "The Indian Church and the Invincible Virus of Casteism," in Sebasti L. Raj and G.F. Xavier Raj, eds., *Caste Culture in Indian Church*, New Delhi: ISI, 1993, p. 31.
- [5] Ravi Tiwari, "Women in Manu," in Prasanna Kumari, ed., *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis*, Chennai: Gurukul L.T.C. & Research Centre, 1999, p. 132.
- [6] Vera Agustus, "Women in Indian Society," in Prasanna Kumari, ed., *Feminist Theology*, p. 41. See also Felix Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope – At the Dawn of the Millennium*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, pp. 145-177.
- [7] Sebastian Kizhakkeyil, *The Pauline Epistles: An Exegetical Study*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2006, p. 159.
- [8] Otto Kuss as cited in M. Thekkekara, *The Face of Early Christianity – A Study of the Pauline Letters*, Bangalore: KJC Publications, 1988, p. 193.
- [9] C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980, pp. 1, 199.
- [10] George T. Montague, *The Living Thought of St. Paul*, Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966, p. 169.
- [11] George Keerankeri, "Listen to the Spirit: Paul – Justification by Faith," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 72/7, July 2008, p. 539.
- [12] Bernard Smyth, *Paul: The Man and the Missionary*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980, p. 85.
- [13] Peter F. Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters*, Collegeville: Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1982, p. 200. The author has summarized the objectives of the letter on p. 201.
- [14] C.C. Newman, "Righteousness," in Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1997 p. 1053.
- [15] Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God Christ – The Mind and Heart of St Paul*, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1991, p. 84.
- [16] Peter F. Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters*, p. 208.
- [17] Joseph Pathrapankal, *Christian Life – New Testament Perspectives*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1982, p. 37. The word *dharm* could be an appropriate Indian term for the biblical word righteousness. Dating back to the Indo-European root *dher* (*dhar*) (= to support, to hold fast), *dharm* with its diverse meanings and rich nuances can be described as righteousness, justice, religious observance, order, sense of duty, etc. For more information on the various aspects of *dharm*, see pp. 20-21, 42-48.
- [18] Ibid.
- [19] G. Schrenk as cited by Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God Christ*, p. 85.

- [20] Xavier Leon-Dufour, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969, p.309.
- [21] Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God*, p. 85.
- [22] See "Workshop Report," in *What Does Jesus Christ Mean? – The Meaningfulness of Jesus Christ amid Religious Pluralism in India*, Errol D'Lima & Max Gonsalves, (eds.), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001, p. 162.
- [23] Ibid., pp. 163-164.
- [24] Pheme Perkins, *New Testament Introduction*, Bombay: St Paul Publication, 1992, p. 210.
- [25] See Marion L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul: An Introduction to His Writings and Teaching*, New York: Paulist Press, 1987, p. 170. I have paraphrased these points. See also 2 Cor 5: 11-21 and Phil 3: 2-11.
- [26] Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology – Exploring Diversity and Unity*, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007, p. 170.
- [27] Ibid., p. 171.
- [28] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Ab 33; New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 106.
- [29] Fitzmyer as cited by George Keerankeri, "Listen to the Spirit....," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol.72/7, July 2008, p. 538.
- [30] Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology*, p. 181. Although Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were purchased at a price, neither in 1 Cor nor here does he develop the image further, as if a price were paid to the devil in order to release humanity.
- [31] G.T. Montague, *The Living Thought of St. Paul*, p. 169.
- [32] Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ*, p. 88.
- [33] Frank Matera, *New Testament Theology*, p. 181. See also William Barclay's analysis of the word *hilasterion*, *The Mind of St. Paul*, Glasgow: Collins, 1981, pp. 65-68.
- [34] F. Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ*, p. 93. Cf. Frank Matera, pp. 181-182.
- [35] G. T. Montague, *The Living Thought of St. Paul*, p. 171.
- [36] K. Pathil, "Historical Divisions in the Church: A Fresh Look at Old Issues," *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXX VIII, No. 226, July 2008, pp. 285-287; George Keerankeri, "Listen to the Spirit: Paul. Justification by Faith," *Vidyajyothi Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 72/7, July 2008, pp. 544-545.
- [37] Quoted in H. Kung, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, New York: T. Nelson, 1964, p. 284; see also pp. 282-284.
- [38] Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ*, p. 96. For further discussion on faith of Christ and faith in Christ see also pp. 96-98.
- [39] Frank Matera, *New Testament Theology*, p. 187.
- [40] William Barclay, *The Mind of St. Paul*, p. 105. See also pp. 101-116.
- [41] Tatha Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women – Reframing Galatians*, New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2005, p. 81.
- [42] Ibid.

- [43] Ravi Tiwari "Women in Manu" in *Feminist Theology*, Prasanna Kumari, (ed.), , pp. 114 – 134.
- [44] E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63BCE-66 CE*, Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1992, p. 191. On the law and its observance, see pp. 51-57.
- [45] T. Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women*, p. 152.
- [46] J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, translated by F. H. & C. H. Cave, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969, pp. 374, 384. See also J. C. Pallares, *A Poor Man Called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark*, Indore: Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, 1986, p. 54.
- [47] Scholars are of the view that Gal 3:28 is not an original composition of Paul, but baptismal formula acknowledged by the Galatian community, which has been quoted by him. It is a reflection of the lived social experience of the early Christians.
- [48] For an elaborate discussion, see Pauline Chakkalakal, "No Longer Male and Female: A Feminist Reading of Paul's Liberative Vision in Gal. 3:28," in C.I David Joy, ed., *Biblical Theology: A Reader*, Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2008, pp. 98-115.
- [49] Brendan Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Woman*, Homebush: St. Paul Publications 1988, p. 6.
- [50] For references to official documents, see Pauline Chakkalakal, *Discipleship - A Space for Women's Leadership?*, Mumbai, Pauline Publications, 2004, pp. 1-5; Rita Noronha, "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections*, Vol. 72/6, June 2008, pp. 402-447.
- [51] For a critique of western-oriented male theology with its sexist language, male concepts of God and doctrine, see E. Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Biblical Interpretation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, p. 9ff.
- [52] Ibid, p. xxiv. See also Astrid Lobo – Gajiwala, "Response to the Keynote Address," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections*, Vol. 72/6, June 2008, pp. 448-464.
- [53] Joseph Pathrapankal, "The Significance of Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism: A Biblical Critique," in *What Does Jesus Christ Mean? The Meaningfulness of Jesus Christ amid Religious Pluralism in India*, Errol D'Lima and Max Gonsalves, (eds.), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001, p. 121.
- [54] Ibid. Such efforts have resulted in the publication of several documents from Catholic Church (mainly from 1965) and from the World Council of Churches (from 1971) articulating their conviction that religious pluralism belongs to the very plan of God. For further details, see Endnotes 4, 5 and 6 on p. 148. See also Michael Amaladoss, *Making Harmony-Living in a Pluralistic World*, Delhi: IDCR & ISPCCK, 2003, pp. 134-137.
- [55] J. Pathrapankal, "The Significance of Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism," p. 124. For an elaborate view, see pp.123-129.
- [56] Ibid., p. 129.
- [57] Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (London: SCM, 1985), pp. 173-174. See also James R. Edwards, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, Michigan: Wm.B.E. Publishing Company, 2005.

- [58] L. Legrand, "St. Paul the Missionary," *Vaiharai*, Vol. 12, No. 2, July-December 2007, p. 4.
- [59] See "Workshop Report" in *What Does Jesus Christ Mean?*, p.177.
- [60] See Prema Vakayil, "Biblical Pluralism: Its Expressions," *Bible Bhashyam*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4, December 2006, pp. 257-271. See also other articles in this issue dealing with Pluralism.
- [61] M. Amaladoss, *Making Harmony*, p. 138.
- [62] J. Pathrapankal, "The Significance of Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism," p. 140.
- [63] George Soares-Prabhu, "The Church as Mission: A Reflection on Mt 5:13-16," *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXIV, No. 142, July 1994, pp. 271-281.
- [64] S. J. Samartha, "Dialogue in a Religiously Plural Society," in Israel Selvanayagam, ed., *The Multi-faith Context of India*, Bangalore: BTTBPSA, 1993, p.8. See also Samartha's *One Christ – Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology*, Bangalore: SATHRI, 1994.
- [65] See *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 221, September 2007. The whole issue deals with dialogue initiatives in India.
- [66] Joseph Mattam, "Inculturated Evangelization and Conversion," *Voices from the Third World*, Vol. XXVI, No.1, June 2003, p. 80.
- [67] George Keerankeri, "Listen to the Spirit...", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol.72/7, p. 547.
- [68] K. Luke, *The TPI Companion to the Bible*, Vol. II, Bangalore: TPI, 1994), p. 78.

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