

ISSN 972-33315

jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

**The Relevance of St Paul
Indian Reading of His Letters**



Volume 12 No. 1 & 2

Jan & June 2009

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Jnanadeepa ("Light of Wisdom" pronounced as *Jñānādēpa*) is a biannual interdisciplinary journal of religious studies from an Indian Christian perspective. It is closely associated with Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune 411014, India.

Jnanadeepa is published biannually, in January and July. Views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the editors. Manuscripts submitted for publication should be original and cannot be returned (writers' style sheet is available on request); they could be sent (preferably as a text or RTF file) in a computer diskette or through E-mail as file attachment.

All **correspondence** (requests for subscription, manuscripts, books for review – two copies, please – exchange copies of journals, advertisements, etc.) to:

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Subscriptions could be sent from India either by Money Order or Demand Draft. From foreign countries International Money Order or Crossed Cheque is preferred. From Commonwealth countries British Postal Order is preferred. All payments are to be made in the name of *Jnanadeepa Journal*.

Typeset & print: JDV Computer Centre

Publisher: Kurien Kunnumpuram for Jnana Deepa Publications.

ISSN: 0972-3331

Subscription Rates

Country	One Year	Three Years
India	Ind. Rs. 100	Ind. Rs. 250
SAARC Countries	Ind. Rs. 140	Ind. Rs. 400
Other Countries (Surface Mail)	\$ 20 (Euro 16)	US \$ 55 (Euro 45)
Other Countries (Air Mail)	\$ 25 (Euro 20)	US \$ 65 (Euro 55)
Institutional Rate	\$ 45 (Euro 40)	\$ 120 (Euro 110)
Personal Life Subscription	Rs 3,000 (India)	\$ 400 (Euro 350)

Editorial

In 1998, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth began publishing the journal *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*. We have just completed ten years of publishing it. To mark this important occasion we organized a National Seminar which was held in Pune on 17-20 October 2008. The choice of the theme for the Seminar: *The Relevance of St Paul* was inspired by the announcement of Pope Benedict XVI that a special Jubilee Year dedicated to the Apostle Paul would begin on 28 June 2008. The Seminar attempted an Indian Reading of the Letters of Paul. It sought to interpret Paul in the socio-economic, political, religious and cultural context of India and find out how relevant his teaching is for us today.

In this double issue (January and July 2009) of *Jnanadeepa*, we are publishing the papers presented at the Seminar.

The nineteen papers included in this issue can be grouped under four headings. The first group of four papers is in a sense introductory. The first paper clarifies the main thrust of the seminar. It discusses the task of contextualizing Theology in India today. The main thesis of the paper is this: Whatever is really relevant to us has somehow to be communicated to our neighbours of other traditions who are part of our context. It has to make sense also to them. The self-understanding of the Christian tradition has to be in the context of the world in which it finds itself. Self-understanding is characterized by continuity and change, which are occasioned by two interrelated phenomena: temporal distance and cultural distance. The second paper deals with Paul as a pastor-theologian in the early Church. The paper contends that the most important theological and pastoral role Paul played was the strong stand he took for establishing the true identity of the religious movement inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth over against the sectarian approach that developed in the Jerusalem church. Paul also developed new theological and pastoral perspectives while dealing with the concrete problems faced by the early Christians (see 1 Cor.) A third paper seeks to understand Paul's theology in the context of early Christian pluralism. Basing themselves on what Paul reports in Gal 2: 11-15, many people think

that Paul was the champion of orthodoxy in the early Church. Actually Paul's radicalism was rather one-sided; Peter and others had good reason to look at things from another angle. The light Paul received on the way to Damascus did not define a dogmatic position. It opened the way for an on-going discovery of the mystery of Christ, a way that was followed by Paul in fellowship with other insights of the apostolic Church. What is remarkable about Paul is this: His fidelity to Christ is not slavish mimicry. It is imbued by the creativity and freedom of the Spirit. A fourth article deals with Paul and culture. It contends that Paul was a cross-cultural person who sought to incarnate the Gospel into the culture of the people to whom he proclaimed it. Inculturation of the Gospel involves several steps: Affirmation of culture, relativization of culture, confrontation and transformation of culture. Paul's letters bear witness to the fact that he really inculturated the Gospel he preached.

The key to Paul's theology is arguably Christocentric soteriology. A group of four articles deal with Jesus Christ, his saving work and its effects. The first article deals with Jesus Christ and his role in salvation. It asserts that Pauline theology is predominantly a Christology. However, Paul is not very much concerned with the inner constitution of Christ but his saving activity. After pointing out that salvation is a gratuitous gift of God received through faith, the paper discusses the dimensions of salvation: salvation as a past event, salvation as a present experience and salvation as a future hope. Closely related to this is the second paper on Paul and justification. After a brief discussion of the Indian context from which the paper is reading Paul, it deals with justification through faith in Jesus Christ. Then it explores the meaning of expressions like the righteousness of God and redemption in Christ. By way of conclusion, the paper discusses the significance of justification by faith for Christian women and its relevance in the context of religious pluralism. Closely related to justification is baptism. The third paper discusses Paul's understanding of baptism. For him baptism is one of the two moments by which a person is transformed into a child of God. Justifying faith begins the process and it is fully realized in baptism. The paper also deals with the other effects of baptism such as incorporation into Christ and their implications. The fourth article discusses Paul's thoughts on the Eucharist. It contends that for Paul

the eucharistic celebration is a fellowship in charity. For him, the Eucharistic celebration originates in and takes place in an atmosphere of charity manifested in the sharing of a meal.

A third group of four papers deal with life in the Christian community. The first one discusses Paul's theology of the Church. For him the local gathering of Christians is the focus of his mission. He often uses *ekklesia* for the community in a particular place. Paul also speaks of the universal Church. By analyzing Paul's letters to the Corinthian Church and the Churches of Galatia, the paper clarifies the main elements of Paul's ecclesiology. Another paper examines Paul's ways of community building. Pastoral presence and availability, adaptability, a Word-centred ministry, Christ-centred spirituality, participatory leadership, team ministry are some of the steps Paul took to build communities. The third paper discusses Paul's understanding and praxis of ministries in the Church. The paper begins by a careful analysis of the conflict situation in India caused by the tension between the universal and the particular, between institutional authority and charismatic authority, and between the tendency to accumulate power and tendency to decentralise it. In Paul's approach to ministries there is a creative dialogue between the universal and the particular, a pluralistic blend of charism and institution, and a democratisation of power and a delegation of authority. The fourth article deals with Paul's understanding of women's place in the Church. Both the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Paul show that Paul had many women collaborators in his apostolate whom he respected and loved. Besides, Paul stood for an egalitarian Church. In his view, the Christians' transformed life in Christ implies the abolition of discrimination on the basis of racial, social and gender differences. The paper finally examines some texts in Paul's letters which are often thought to be against women and finds that Paul was in no way opposed to the equality of women.

Finally, there are two related articles. The first one deals with our embodied selves. Our culture teaches us to ignore our bodies. In India, we seek *moksha*, which is conceived as liberation from the bondage to the body. Bodies are real and have materiality but at the same time they are socially constructed. As a result, it is difficult to get a satisfactory answer to the question: what is a body? Modern

thinkers have expressed a variety of views on the body. Some of them are very confusing. There is also a politics of body. In this situation Paul can be of great help. Paul lays stress on the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – all of which imply an affirmation of the body. Paul also addressed many problems in the early Christian church like divisions in the community, the abuse of the body, the position of the weak and the strong, disorder in the worshipping assembly, with his teaching on the Eucharistic body of Christ. All this can help us to develop a healthy attitude to our embodied selves.

The final paper deals with the dynamics of evil and could be related to the previous issue of *Jnanadeepa*. It traces the dynamics of evil in our human attempt to fight against death and to become divine. In attempting to have total control over life and thus to become god, humans inadvertently fosters the very evil we are trying to eliminate. Basing himself on two of the contemporary philosophers - Paul Ricoeur and Earnest Becker - the author traced the phenomenology of evil in human's desire to deny death and thus become divine.

Ricoeur's understanding of the disproportion that characterizes human beings was insufficient to account for occurrences of actual will. No direct, unmediated inspection of the cogito, as Descartes and Husserl had proposed, could show why these evils, contingent as each of them is, in fact came to be. Recognizing the opacity of the cogito in this respect confirmed his suspicion that all self-understanding comes about only through "signs deposited in memory and imagination by the great literary traditions." The progress from *bios* to *logos* has enabled us greatly and also made evil possible. Thus we have arrived at an antinomy and this is where philosophy has to stop.

By refusing to accept mortality as part of their very nature, humans deny their animality and attempt to be angelic. In this very process of denial of death and anxiety, the humans join the "immortality projects" and disrespects the disproportion that is intrinsic to the human condition, enabling evil to emerge.

As a continuation of the philosophical analysis, Becker showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt at eliminating it. Though both the thinkers trace the existence of evil to the disproportion or in-betweenness in the human condition, it has not been our aim to give any account of the origin of evil.

It is our fond hope that the papers published in this double issue of our Journal will help the readers to gain a deeper understanding of Paul's thought and its relevance to us in India today.

Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ
Editor