

## **Missiological Reflection of the SVD Mission in the Postmodern and Post-Truth Society with a Special Reference to Tribal Mission in INM Province**

*Richard Quadros*

### **INTRODUCTION**

God reaches out to His creations because the very nature of God is love. Therefore, the very identity of God is mission. So, the Church's identity can be defined by the Divine reaching out through mission work. The Church on earth is missionary by her very nature. It is well said that the Church exists by its mission just as a fire exists by burning.

Perhaps one of the most important initiatives by the SVDs in the past nearly 150 years since it came into existence has been its empowerment of the most vulnerable sections of the society. This keeps burning the fire of the SVD mission passionately. True to its vision and mission, the Society of the Divine Word in India and elsewhere has spent a great deal of resources both in terms of finance and of personnel. In doing so the Society has established preferential options for the poor and subaltern groups. In today's parlance as Pope Francis would call it 'going to the peripheries': going to the peripheries for mission work doesn't mean only going to remote, rural villages, but rather going to existential peripheries, 'smelling the sheep'. In a postmodern scenario, the clarion call of Pope Francis is quite revealing and challenging. He states "I am a Mission; You Are a Mission". He doesn't intend to say that 'I *have* a Mission', but rather emphasizes "I *am* a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world". By emphasizing functionality and action, Pope Francis puts the spotlight on ontology (being). Mission infuses our genes; it's our self-defining DNA. Incidentally, the SVDs' 18<sup>th</sup> General Chapter documents says 'Our Name is our Mission'.

Why does the mission give preference to the poor? What type of new mission methodologies need to be adopted upon studying the transformations of the time? This paper is an attempt to glimpse the salient features of post-modernity and post truth, as well as note the influences of postmodernity and mission of the Church. I explore a way forward in the backdrop of postmodern and post-truth induced challenges, in the hope to further discussion on important innovative mission methodologies with a special reference to the SVDs' tribal mission in the INM province. What strategies, activities, methodologies and ethno-methodologies must be employed to address the issues of our time? How can challenges be translated as opportunities? What is the way forward?

## **1. A GLIMPSE OF POSTMODERNITY**

To understand the meaning of post-modernity, one needs to understand the meaning of modernity. Europe and many other 'advanced' 'post-industrial' societies from around 1950 designed our definitions of 'modern society'. Postmodernists argue that "postmodernity" is different from "modernity." According to Postmodernists, stable institutions which used to bind people together have much less influence now, as the emergence of new and formal media technologies across the globe make people much freer to design their own identities and culture based on factors beyond geographic location.

Postmodernists believe that the world has gone beyond modernism but do not predict where this journey will land humanity. Some might see this trend of thought as leading the world towards nihilism (the rejection of all religious and moral principles, teaching; the belief that life is meaningless). Many Sociologists criticize the views of the postmodernists. The 'modern' period which began many years ago in Europe is considered modernity by some Sociologists. The Modernist mindset valued scientific investigation, absolute truth, logical and pragmatic organization, orderly surroundings etc. This led to queries that challenged long-established institutions like religion, government systems, etc. Sociologists spell out a few salient features of modern society.

***Knowledge held by the people increasingly comes from science and rationality rather than from religious faith, superstition etc***

Since this modern period the world has been dominated by logical thinking and science. Thanks to modernism, the so-called belief of 'act of God', especially in regards to disasters, human suffering, etc. are now seen through the lens of science and logical thinking. Landing on the Moon is probably one of the highest achievements in the progress of modern science. Modernists proclaimed that the more we trust in science and technological progress, the better our society would be.

***Urbanization and city's growth***

From the 18th century onwards, there was a huge flux of human migration to industrial and commercial hubs in search of employment and livelihood. Though agriculture was one of the main sources of income in earlier centuries, the modern city and urbanization augmented better income opportunities.

***Formation of bureaucratic states and administrations***

Local and central government and administration played a significant role in the lives of the people. The concept of welfare state, development of education, and public housing became a major turning point in shifting the lives of everyday people towards modernity.

Postmodernity refers to the view that the institutions and ways of living characteristic of modernity have been replaced to such a profound extent that our

society is fundamentally different from the 'modern' society. Postmodernism is a term that refers to new ways of thinking about thought.

Postmodern philosophy is broadly characterized by scepticism or relativism (the doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, historical context, and are not absolute) and encourages general suspicion of any one vein of reason. Scepticism in Western Philosophy is the attitude of doubting knowledge claims. The original Greek meaning of skeptikos means inquirer. Sceptics question the adequacy or reliability of knowledge claims by asking what principles they are based upon or what they actually establish. They question whether such claims are really true. They also question their rational foundations. Therefore, Postmodern philosophers, broadly characterized by scepticism, are still in search of truth.

Similar to postmodern scepticism is ethical relativism, the idea that there are no absolute truths in ethics and that what is morally right or wrong varies from person to person, culture to culture, community to community or society to society. For example, if practices of polygamy or infanticide are considered right in one society/culture, then they are right for that society, even as the same practices are considered wrong in another society or culture. In the vein of ethical relativism, there is no culture-neutral standard to which we can appeal in order to determine which culture's or society's view is correct.

Man's power to produce scientific knowledge reformed the world by prioritizing rational human thought. What is wrong in using our mind and using science to determine what is true or false? Mind you, the Bible is not necessarily against using our minds; it simply emphasizes the limitations of human thought. God Himself says, "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord" (Is.1:18). St. Paul, while preaching, would 'reason from the Scriptures' the truth concerning Jesus (Acts 17:2, 18:4). The Human mind is also referenced when God gave the great commandments.

The Scripture says "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt. 22:37). The Scriptures also lament how the human mind has fallen, because it "does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can we know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor.2:14). So, St. Paul makes mention "for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" 1 Cor 3:19). Then he warns them: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). For this reason, once we receive Christ as our Saviour and are given this second birth, making us new persons inside (2 Cor.5:17), we are then commanded to let God renew our minds through the truth of the Scripture (Rom.12:2).

## **2. THE SALIENT FEATURES OF POSTMODERN SOCIETY**

### ***Rapid Social Change Resulting in Fragmentation of the World***

Postmodern society is swift and quick to change. It is like a fidgeting child. As a result, it lacks any coherent, stable social structure. This can be seen among desk workers. In earlier generations, a desk job was considered a 'job for life'. That means to say, in earlier years people stuck to a particular job. Now, jobs are being replaced by projects. People are much more likely to move jobs and change careers several times throughout their working lives. Individuals not only embrace movement but also institutions. For example, commercial companies move to countries where the labor is cheap. The emergence of flexibility of labor associated with the world of work means people move more often in their lifetimes. This results in less population stability in geographic regions, which changes the nature of 'social capital' in local communities.

Social capital can be understood as that type of capital that is not owned by an individual player but exists as a potential resource because it is embedded in the networks of relationships. Social capital is accumulated and used by way of social exchange. If we look at it instrumentally, social capital refers to an investment in relationships that can lead to greater access to a wide variety of resources. Due to the fast fragmentation of local life for economic reasons, local communities migrate only to build other fragmented lives. Therefore, migration in search of sustainable livelihood poses a major challenge for the social networks of some communities.

The fundamental difference between modernists and postmodernists is that postmodernists argue that theirs is a consumer-oriented society rather than work-oriented, as the modernists would claim. The image of the postmodern society is thus one of a shopping mall rather than a factory. Postmodernists argue that they live in a 'pick and mix' society. They are free to pick or choose their lifestyles from a broad range of options. Individuals are much less shaped by their class, gender and ethnic backgrounds today. For example, women feel they need not be only housewives. Society is less divided along gender lines and ethnic lines. Being born a woman or born black or brown should not pre-determine one's future or shape one's consciousness (identity) as it did in modernity.

### ***Cultural Evolution and Hybridity***

Fast changes have taken place due to globalization, and this has resulted in cultural diversity and hybridity. This causes a mixture of cultures and traditions. There is a bewildering increase in diversity of social and cultural consolidations in our society in comparison to 100 or even 60 years ago. For example, shopping malls and supermarkets allow us to purchase a whole range of products. The concept has percolated deep into the rural areas of many countries, India is not an exception. This has resulted in slow phasing out of the traditional marketing systems. The fast development of the mall concept is believed to promote diversity and hybridity in our society. Nearly every other sphere of life (family life, education, and work) gets steadily more diverse.

## **Rejection of the Belief that Universal Truth Exists**

**Relativism is the idea that there is no universal truth but only points of view.**

## **Incredulity (the state of being unwilling to believe something) Towards Metanarratives**

Metanarratives, otherwise known as grand narratives or master narratives, aim to offer a totalizing schema for interpretation of events and experience. For e.g., Marxism could run the risk of being a metanarrative insofar as all the problems of the world are reduced to the question “class”. The postmodernist considers metanarratives the product of totalitarian intentions and dismiss them as involving the fallacy of essentialism. As opposed to grand narratives, the postmodernist foregrounds the small narratives or little narratives.

## **The Virtual Creates the Actual**

Postmodernists believe that we are living in hyperreality. Hyperreality refers to the worlds and cultures of simulation and virtual reality. Simulations and created images comprise reality, be it in newspapers, on T.V channels, or on internet/social media etc. In the post-modern world, images do not necessarily represent reality because these images are doctored. One can't always differentiate between virtual and actual. We have witnessed a countless number of examples in the Indian mission context where the virtual has been falsely interpreted as real and factual, leading to marginalization of vulnerable and subaltern groups.

## **Revisiting and Rewriting of Existing Narratives**

Such rewriting of existing narratives by the postmodernists is politically subversive. We might call it an empty parody (deflating original narratives by applying new narratives to diminish a group or subject). We have examples of how groups in power are rewriting the narratives in our tribal mission areas. For instance, the ruling class repeatedly uses the concept “Vanvasi” or “Forest dwellers” for *Aadivasis* or indigenous settlers. By rewriting the existing narratives, the ruling class wants to create a narrative that the original settlers are not indigenous people; rather they are only forest dwellers. In this way, the ruling class tries to insert themselves as original settlers and not outsiders. The fact of the matter is that the *Aadivasis* are the original settlers and the rest are outsiders.

## **The Focus is on Readers and not Authors in Postmodernism**

Postmodernism evolved as a response to modernist beliefs. It holds the idea that there are no truths, only interpretations. Because of this belief a postmodern work of literature can't have one free from error meaning or presentation; it has to be interpreted by readers themselves.

Various authors have criticized postmodernism as promoting obscurantism, as abandoning enlightenment rationalism and scientific rigor and as adding nothing to analytical and empirical knowledge.

### **3. MEANING OF POST-TRUTH**

One has to grapple (engage in close fight or struggle without weapons) with the notion of truth in order to understand the notion of post truth. The emerging questions today are:

- a. What does the truth refer to?
- b. Does it refer to facts and evidence?
- c. Can we access objective truth?
- d. If there is no 'real' truth then what is this big deal about post- truth?

It is well said that in times of universal deceit, telling the truth will be a revolutionary act. If we are not clear about our accessibility to truth, then the question arises: What are the theoretical groundings of the post truth? Post-truth today as it exists is an extreme manipulation of the fertile grounds laid by postmodern theories.

Sensational lying and the obscuring of facts undermine the notion of truth. These two increasingly prevalent phenomena shape the present century and usher in the advent of the era of post-truth. Post doesn't necessarily mean that we are past the era of truth but rather are defined by the prevalent marginalization and trivialisation of truth. Primarily definitions of post-truth note that emotion has become more significant than objective fact in shaping personal beliefs and public debates. Second, post-truth includes the relativisation of truth: the idea that political statements and even empirically-grounded scientific positions are subject to the manipulation of knowledge producers. "Post-truth" is explained as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." The culture of media today is very much trending toward appealing to emotions and personal beliefs in order to attract the vested interest of national and international political leaders. The element of truth is deliberately suppressed, voices are stifled, rights and freedom of speech are violated, and media is bought. In some cases, a few nations are becoming prisoners of the past. Present day India is one example where the past history of foreign invaders and of Colonists is applied selectively to media narratives in order to invoke religious emotions, personal beliefs, or support for a particular political party. Tainted media shows the majoritarian rule as true and final, instead of living in the present and building a robust future.

### **4. POSTMODERNITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

Quest for truth and knowledge is a continuous endeavour that has existed throughout human history. Mind you, it's not only knowing the truth but registering

or recording it and disseminating it to the next gen that is considered fundamental to human civilizations. In ancient civilisations, there had been paintings, art, sculpture etc. through which they communicated. Whatever they did not understand, they attributed it to God or nature. When they did not understand the cause of a disaster, they thought that God must be angry. Religion and faith in higher order was the basis of knowledge during this time. Then came the scientific revolution. In the 18th century, there came philosophers like Auguste Comte, J.S. Mill, and Herbert Spencer who looked at the world through the lens of science. Science, critical thinking, rationality, rejection of idealism, atheism etc were some of the ethos that formed the basis of positivism. Science and reason played a pivotal role in shaping the collective society. This was the trajectory of modernity.

Now in the postmodern era, the world and in particular the Church is groping in the dark as postmodernity looms large. Postmodern philosophy is broadly characterized by scepticism or relativism and a general suspicion of reason. While modernist methods of thinking and understanding were verbal and analytical (such as reading, writing, intelligence, analysis, clarity, explanation, logic and thinking), postmodernism places more attention on the symbolic and visual. Therefore, today our younger generation in the church is turning experiential rather than rational. Decisions as to what is true too often rely on intuition rather than deep thinking. God designed our ears to listen and our minds to think with a conscience, but our present form of communication in which we overemphasize visuals makes our acts of listening devoid of conscience. Due to the heavy influence of the internet, television, and cell phones, conceptual and analytic thinking is in danger of becoming obsolete.

The world scenario is Collapse of global ideology, relativising of values, loss of hope. What is the response of the church in this context? What are the challenges? They can be listed as follows:

### ***Postmodernism- a knowledge crisis***

In the argument of postmodernists, there is heavy backlash against claims on truth that is universally true and must be believed. Claims to truth are said to be nothing more than attempts to assert power. For most post-modernists, the ultimate felony (crime) is to permit moral lessons to come from outside ourselves (i.e., from God), as this would be to enslave ourselves and deny our human potential. One of the influential theorists who held this view was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Furthermore, post-modernism seeks to dismantle Christianity by overturning traditional standards and binary oppositions. After Nietzsche made blasphemous assaults on God being the arbiter of knowledge, many questioned: 'if there is no such thing as right and wrong or good and evil, then how can we validate what we think we know? While postmodernism proposes harmony and community, it is done at the expense of deconstructing established texts, structures, arts and systems. Postmodernism does not propose permanence of principles because it proposes relativity of place, person and time. There is no objective

moral standard by which we can base absolute judgment and establish demarcations between truths and fallacies. Thus, the statement: “True to you but not to me.” The deadly poison spewed by postmodernism is treating the Bible not as something unique or distinct from all other books. Thinkers like J. Hebermas questioned Nietzsche’s arguments. To counter postmodernist culture among the younger generation, the Church needs to shape the story of Christianity by standing firm as a countercultural community with the following principles: 1) Render Christ as the center of all things 2) Restore the Biblical and historical theology of worship 3) Recover the conceptual and symbolic orders of worship 4) Return to classical Christianity in matters of faith.

In our tribal mission, a large number of youths are falling to the prey of postmodernism as the preferred method of communication viz. the internet, mobiles, mass media. These platforms have made the whole world a global village.

### ***A challenge arises today as to whether or not we can still treat the Bible as the authoritative and true Word of God***

A postmodernist would say we can definitely not trust one body of words as true, but what about we Christians? Examining the way some Christians today approach the Bible is a good benchmark for how much the assumptions of our culture are seeping into Christian discipleship and church life. But there are Christians who uphold the postmodern individualistic assumption that the Bible can mean whatever they like precisely because it does not communicate authoritatively. There are Christians who believe, The Bible says one thing and I strongly feel another, surely my feelings are the only reliable thing I have to go on. When we hear these types of things, we need to alert ourselves. This is a challenge that our Christian community must face in a common boat.

### ***Reading the Bible Selectively***

When we read the Bible selectively, the Bible doesn’t become the primary source of truth about God. Rather, the Bible becomes a place to find subjective statements about ourselves. We also tend to edit out the parts that are tough to understand or that say things we may not like to hear.

### ***Emergence of Hard Pluralism***

There are differences of opinion about the religious thoughts so severe that there is little or no hope of them ever being resolved. To use the language of philosophy, they are incommensurable. This fact has implications for inter-religious dialogue. It is futile to pretend that all religions, though using different languages and concepts, are all pointing to the same ultimate reality.

### ***Cultural Hegemony and Adverse Effects on Subaltern Groups***

Hegemony relates to how the ruling class turn their ideologies into common sense and how they preserve the status quo. In this context, it is the ruling class

wielding power at all levels: economic, social, media, political etc. In turn, the poor and subaltern class is increasingly marginalized. Postmodernists are oriented towards ruling the rooster. They are the ones growing towards cultural hegemony which results in the subaltern class being marginalized, at risk and vulnerable.

### ***The Media as a Puppet in the Hands of Ruling Parties and as a Negative Influence on Tribal Ecosystems***

Undoubtedly the media is the fourth pillar of democracy and has been cracked severely all over the world. Both print and electronic media have been purchased by the ruling party and corporations. Postmodern media provokes, engulfs and encircles our discretionary powers. Gradually, the media is losing its credibility. The media deviates from issues that are impeding the growth and development of people. This has become a “new normal,” especially during the economic disaster, Covid-19 pandemic. The truth is constantly manipulated. The nations are busy disseminating the propaganda of the government as a result, the youth are misguided. Wrong information and opinions are established and disseminated among the youth. The youth are directionless and aimless.

In the tribal mission context of the SVDs in the INM province, the adverse influence of media has caused marginalization of vulnerable groups, especially people living in tribal settings. Propaganda media polarizes communities and ruling parties’ market only the news it wants. International products reach remote villages through media, changing the staple food culture and crop patterns in the remote villages. For example, Millets (Ragi), the nutritious staple food, has been replaced by wheat and wheat-based food products. Wheat can’t be grown in a humid climate. Still, the government public distribution system popularly known as “ration distribution” in India supplies wheat to tribal communities who sell these grains, as they are not taught to make use of them. They buy millets or rice instead.

Commercialisation of seeds and genetically modified seeds have flooded in Indian markets so that the conventional seed bank of tribal farmers is becoming obsolete. So, the media is promoting external farming products instead of generating awareness on intensive farming and improvising the existing seed bank system: once the backbone of Indian tribal farmers. Secondly, government administrators do not take steps to promote and strengthen farmer-product procurement. Advertisements of genetically modified seeds pervasive in the media is leading some farmers to commit suicide as their crops fail due to incompatibility of weather and soil to the crop.

Malnourishment among tribal children is a perennial problem. This issue is inadequately addressed. Hungry families in India see their crop patterns change rapidly in the tribal belt due to their use of globally commercialized seeds. Sustainable Food security should not just be about dispensing rationed grains but strengthening the traditional crop patterns, staple food culture, and also addressing issues related to land rights of tribal communities. These communities should have access to irrigation facilities so they can conserve plant biodiversity.

Due to inadequate food security, the issue of child malnourishment is on the rise. India is one of 196 countries who have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2022. Article 21 of the Indian constitution reads ... No person shall be deprived of his/her life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. From there proceeds the right to life: to have good and nutritious food, shelter, and clothing. Malnourishment among tribal children is a blatant violation of Article 21. When Jesus says in Mt. 19:14 "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these," we are reminded of Jesus' mission among children as pro-life, life giving and life sustaining. In Indian provinces, the SVDs' mission among tribal children is commendable. It hosts innovative activities viz. schools, hostels and boarding facilities. The SVD mission teaches child rights awareness to children themselves, to parents, teachers, neighbors, and other stakeholders.

Corporate-sponsored false information, shoddy reports, and propaganda on the media has become the order of the day. On social media we have witnessed much false information changing normalized behaviours and poisoning the minds of people. The objective of spreading false information is to gain control of the market economy and to polarize communities for political gains. This has affected the tribal ecosystem. Postmodern attitudes have affected the basic living situations in the remote rural tribal habitat.

### ***Declaring Many 'ends'***

Postmodernism has so many 'ends', namely 'the end of ideology' and 'the end of history'. Efforts to create a new selective history that suits the postmodernists is going to be a dangerous trend that will creep into mainstream society.

### ***Faith-based manipulation of a scientific truth, which turns into a wider belief***

Negation of scientific truth and establishing particular truths for political, corporate gains has become the order of the day.

## **5. THE WAY FORWARD IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGES**

The church should not be apologetic for bearing witness to eternal truths. As a church we need to rediscover the sacramental nature of community. The Church must put service before power and status. Developing innovative pastoral, social, educational interventions in our mission needs to be worked out. The Church's mission on this earth is the making of a new humanity.

### ***Spiritual Renewals and Animating the Mission***

The clarion call to unite the parish community is spiritual renewals and animation. The parish communities need spiritual renewals because they have given less importance to spirituality and more to religiosity. Spiritual renewal is the key to the renewal of the church. In the spiritual renewal-mission, the church is to facilitate its flock to be integrated. In order to fight the robust waves of postmodernism and post

truth, the church also in its mission with the people need to be robust in its spiritual enhancement only then the changing narratives, new normal and patterns can be addressed by the church community especially affecting the specific groups like youth and children. These sections of the parish are the most affected by the forthcoming waves of postmodernism and post truth.

### ***Ecumenism as a Mission***

One of the critical challenges for the church is ecumenism or a common parlance between all churches. Common parlance relies on various churches' initiatives to bring together mainstream churches and small churches. Two major hurdles in bringing them together are the issues of doctrines and dogmas. At local, national and international levels, efforts must be made to bring churches together and work together in collaboration and come to consensus on key issues in order to further the mission of the church. When it comes to dogmas and doctrines, the issue becomes touchy. By reminding churches to focus on their common mission rather than doctrines and dogmas, inter-church collaboration will improve.

### ***Shepherding Mission: Love for Community***

Jesus is the best epitome of the Good Shepherd. He says "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:11). What is the focus of Jesus while proclaiming that he is the good shepherd? It is to passionately be in love with the sheep that has been entrusted to the shepherd. A hired shepherd wouldn't take care of the flock as a good shepherd because he is only doing his profession. A good shepherd, by contrast, lays down his life for the flock and so fulfils his mission. Therefore, in our mission our efforts should be like that of a good shepherd: not merely aim to complete our mission but do so passionately: in love with the mission of taking care of the flock that is entrusted to us. In doing so, we become animators or facilitators in our interventions and not managers or administrators. In corporate parlance, those at the helm of the affairs are known as CEOs i.e., Chief Executive officers. We the good shepherds might be called CEOs so long as it stands for Chief Empowerment Officers.

In an Indian context, inter-religious dialogue is part of the mission. Mission interventions should prioritize interreligious dialogue in action. Over many years, ordinary dialogue has not yielded much fruit; however, dialogue in action has brought groups, communities and individuals together for fraternal living. Interventions with a taste of social service are effective in building communities of communion.

### ***Development and Welfare as a Mission***

In the backdrop of the emerging waves of postmodernism and post-truth, we need to focus on the development and welfare of individuals, groups and communities with whom and for whom we are working. We need to employ participatory, inclusive, rights-based, holistic and preventive approaches. When truth is negated by formidable ideological opponents ubiquitous in this postmodern and post-truth era, individuals and groups provide adequate guidance.

Educating individuals, groups and communities is important because they become aware of their rights, duties, and liabilities. The second approach is radical inclusion. Our mission cannot exclude anyone. Including the excluded is paramount importance in our mission strategy. This is what we are trying to do in tribal communities. The third approach is right-based. There remains long-standing ignorance among the marginalized sections of our society. Information is not disseminated, because information is power. The attitude of postmodernism and post-truth is to wield power by concealing information controlled by the hands of a few. Particularly vulnerable in India are the tribals, Dalits etc. Our efforts are to disseminate information to communities through various training programs which empower them to move towards self-sufficiency. The fourth approach is holistic. With this approach, we do not just focus on improving one aspect of human development or welfare, but rather all issues that curtail when an individual feels vulnerable or oppressed. We focus on the spiritual, social, political, physical, and economical developments of those in our church, in line with the UN's sustainable development goals.

### ***Media and Mission***

Earlier I discussed how the media plays adverse roles in vulnerable sections of India's communities. Here I would like to delineate how the media is an important focus for our mission. Through media, especially social media, we can communicate a lot in order to prevent the youth and children from the clutches of postmodernism and post truth. We also need to expedite producing materials required to keep the flock intact from deviating due to misinformation and propaganda. At the local level, the tribal youth are given training and exposure to counter the deep negative influences of mass media and social media. In rural areas at the village parliament level, media literacy training is given to both children and youth. To protect children from media-related traps that endanger their rights, The Village Child Protection Committees (VCPC) work with government authorities, elected members of the village parliament, village health workers, and local teachers, and village nutrition supply officers. VCPC plays a significant role in bringing tribal communities to awareness on how to assert their rights.

### ***Conflict Resolution as a Mission***

In our work, conflicts are inevitable. Such disputes can be within organizations or with individuals. In a post-modern scenario, such conflict increases as communities, groups and individuals become increasingly divided on values, principles, and policies. How do we become mediators, arbitrators or negotiators as conflicts escalate? Facilitating conflict resolution can be a great method for earning trust from communities while de-escalating communal tensions, family and domestic violence etc. In tribal communities the mission of conflict resolution plays a vital role in maintaining local peace. Jesus as the messenger of peace invites all of us to be the torch bearers of peace, justice and integration. I personally serve as mediator on an Ostracization

Prevention Committee mobilized by the Anti Ostracization Act. I have observed that this committee has brought enormous amounts of benefits to the community.

### ***Ecology as a Mission***

In the context of the emergent ecological crisis, the Church as a whole and in particular the Indian church has a lot to contribute to the ecological concerns as a mission. God's creation, as scripture says, was good (Genesis). But over the years, human development induced interventions that wounded the ecosystem, as we can all witness through news of extreme weather events, degradation of the soil etc. The loss of biodiversity and global warming is gathering pace. Therefore, in the postmodern scenario it is imperative for the Church to be part of a global response. Creation is the creator's highly engineered masterpiece which cannot be played with like a toy in the hands of a child. There are compelling theological arguments for Christian action in caring for the environment as God's creation, and this represents a clear rationale for our eco-mission. Ecological issues are close to the heart of Pope Francis. He has time and again invited Church leaders to address the global issue at local level. We work on this issue in the tribal belt of the SVD, INM province. In this region, forest renewal efforts are beginning in collaboration with the government's Social Forestry Department and Agricultural Department. Promotion of climate-friendly energy resources with. Use of solar lamps has also contributed to alerting local populations about global warming.

### ***Holistic Education and Health as a Mission***

God's mission must continue through educational institutions that not only teach the established curriculum but also shape noble characters. Hospitals not only heal but also promote the teachings of the great Physician. Through its involvement in relief and development agencies, the mission not only provides humanitarian aid but also offers words of hope in a God who loves and cares for them.

In the postmodern era, educating our young minds is highly significant. Young minds are groping in the dark due to excess adverse impact of media and false narratives which favor the corporate world. Our educational institutions must counter such nefarious activities in order to build a society that is conducive for synodal living. Quality, personality and capacity building and value-based education for a holistic development of our young must remain a primary focus.

Health is another critical area of the Church's mission. In the postmodern era, commercialization of health has become one of the major hindrances to holistic health. Much of India's medical system commercializes its services and is hardly concerned about the holistic health of individuals. The healing touch Jesus had on leprosy patients, as well as those deemed lame and dumb, is now a cash manufacturing industry. During Covid-19, it became clear that many medical institutions squeezed money from the poor under the banner of treatment. Our local efforts are to promote traditional tribal medicinal knowledge. During Covid-19, death rates in the tribal communities did not reach 2%. This is mainly because traditional and organic food habits helped people

in these tribal communities build immunity. For postmodernists in a market driven economy, the food habits changed to an extent that the local traditional crop patterns have been transformed. One of the specific objectives of our health interventions in tribal communities is promotion of a traditional healthcare system which can reduce the negative impacts of the postmodern corporate money-making health industry.

### ***Promotion of Local Culture and Language as a Mission***

Promotion of local culture is paramount importance for our mission intervention. Without knowing or understanding local culture and language, missionaries can't have an entry point in the community. A missionary should be passionate about learning and loving local culture and language. They should work to gain perspective as to how the community interventions are strategized. Learning the local language and culture will make our presence vibrant.

### ***True Partnership, Collaboration and Networking as a Mission***

Partnership, collaboration and networking invite collaboration for purposeful action. We must invite people to share their views and deliberate on issues in order to spark collective efforts for change. In the given postmodern era, it is imperative to build allies and collaboration with like-minded agencies, organizations, groups and associations. Our local efforts are to network with government agencies, authorities and collaborate with other non-governmental agencies. That has enhanced our abilities to reach out to people of good will in order to help the vulnerable, especially during Covid-19. Our networking and collaboration with both government and non-government agencies has helped reduce Christian isolation which has posed major hurdles for mission interventions in the past. One of the immediate and imminent allegations against us from other communities in an Indian society is proselytization or religious conversion. Our networking and collaboration mission has brought enormous positive impacts in reducing distrust.

### ***Promotion of Human Rights, especially in the Context of Tribal Communities***

Individuals belonging to tribal communities are known as indigenous people or *Adivasis* in India. Due to colonization, industrialization, and postmodernism, these indigenous people have been pushed to the margins. Due to displacement as a result of industrialization, their very existence and dependency on water (jal), forest (jungle) and land (zameen) is at stake. In the context of the Old Testament in Ex. 3, the story of the burning bush in which God appears to Moses. God's presence reveals in His plan to liberate all people. God is a liberating presence. In the context of the N.T, we read the incarnational theology revealing 'God is with us' (Mt.1:23). God tries to liberate all and enhance human rights for all. While we work for the promotion of the rights of people, especially the vulnerable tribal communities, we emphasize each person's Right to Life, Right to Food Security, Right to Forest Land, Atrocities Prevention of Scheduled Tribes and Caste.

## **Social Advocacy as a Mission**

Social advocacy is related to social justice and peace. If there is no justice, there is no peace. Over the years around the globe, we have witnessed many social justice movements. What do they communicate to us? They communicate that violations of civil and human rights happen everywhere. Those who speak out have not experienced justice, and freedom at par with their other counterparts. The goal of social advocacy is promotion of social inclusion and change that empowers people to exercise their rights. The ultimate goal is for representatives of vulnerable populations to participate in policy making and so liberate them from the clutches of social evils, while promoting equality, fairness and justice.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, we have been animated to write our mission statements of our institutions, regions, provinces etc. Stephen Covey in his book 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' says "A mission statement is not something you write overnight, but fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution, the solid expression of your vision and values. It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything else in your life." If so, our mission must manifest its passion in our interventions. It is said that the most extraordinary people in the world today don't have a career. They have a mission, and more importantly they embody a mission. For us the SVDs, we are a mission and our name is our mission.

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