The Salt of the Earth” – Faith that has an impact on Society

Introduction

Central to Christian faith is Jesus’ revelation of God as unconditional and universal love (Mt.5:43-45; Jn 3:14-16; 1 Jn. 4:7 ff). The Holy Father in his ENCYCLICAL LETTER CARITAS IN VERITATE tells us, “Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity. Love – Caritas – is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal love and Absolute Truth” (Introduction. 1). Holy Father continues in his introductory section of the Encyclical: “Charity is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity, which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36-40)”.

In this unconditional and universal love of God, every human person stands restored in his/her dignity of being created in the image and likeness of God. In the introductory section of the encyclical, Holy Father takes home to us that it is this love that forms the driving force and principle of human and societal relationships. “It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbor; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones). For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as St. John teaches (cf 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first Encyclical Letter, “God Is Love” (Deus Caritas Est: everything has its origin in God’s love. Everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it. Love is God’s greatest gift humanity; it is his promise and our hope”.

Let me tell you at the outset that the “saltiness” of Christian faith is this love. It possesses an intrinsic capacity, a unique power, to affect and transform people and society, structures and relationships. We know that a small measure of salt saltifies proportionately a large measure of food; so is the case with the force of love, which forms the core of Christian faith. Although Christians form only a tiny minority in
Bihar, we have realized that Christian faith, with love revealed in Jesus Christ as its essence, breaks the boundaries of being a minority and affects the entire state in its effort of nation building, development and promotion of democratic, egalitarian and humanitarian values.

I am here to share with you this good news – the good news of the power of Christian faith to affect and contribute towards the transformation of people and society in infinite ways. Though we Christians are tiny minority in the state, our presence and contribution is far beyond.

An exhaustive sharing on how Christian faith is like “the salt of the earth” in Bihar is beyond the scope of my presentation. My sharing on the theme is rudimentary, brief and indicative. I have divided my presentation into four parts. The first part gives a brief history of Christian religion in Bihar, the second part gives a brief introduction to the social situation of Bihar especially from the point of view of the challenges; the third part gives a sketch of major impact of Christianity on Bihar Society; and the fourth part concludes the presentation with a few contemporary challenges.

**Christianity in Bihar**

Recorded Christian presence in Bihar begins in 1620, when a Jesuit mission was founded at the old city of Patna, capital of Bihar. But the mission was abruptly wound up in a year. Active Christian missionary work started only around 1701 when Italian Capuchin missionaries came to work in their newly founded mission, the Tibet-Hindustan Mission whose territory comprised of Northern India (Hindustan), Nepal and Tibet. Among the several Church organizations working in Bihar since then, the Catholic section is the oldest and has the largest following.

The three major ethnic Christian communities in Bihar are: the Bettiah Christians, Tribal Christians and the Dalit Christians mainly located respectively in West Champaran district in North Bihar, the Chotanagpur Plateau in the former South Bihar, and the central plains of Bihar south of the Ganges. After the bifurcation of Bihar State into Bihar and Jharkhand in 2000, two ethnic communities largely comprise Bihar’s Christian Community: the Bettiah Christians and the Dalit Christians. The demographic picture of the Christian community in Bihar is miniscule: the nearly
250,000 Christians (of whom nearly 70% are Catholics) make only near about 0.26% of the 103.8 million population of Bihar. However, the community’s presence has been very visible through its educational and humanitarian institutions and the mission personnel. The vast majority of the beneficiaries of the Christian institutions have been non-Christians.

**Social Situation of Bihar**

One of the most densely populated parts of the “Hindi heartland”, Bihar, is India’s third most populated state with a population of 103.8 million (census 2011). The state has an area of 94,163 square kilometers and has 130 towns and 39,015 inhabited villages, administratively divided into 9032 village panchayats (local administration) in 38 districts.

The social composition of the population presents a clear class divide across caste lines. In Bihar, the upper castes comprise 3% of the population, where as the upper backward castes comprise 19.3%, lower backward castes 32%, scheduled castes, 15.72%, scheduled Tribes 0.9%, Muslims 16.53% and Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Others together comprise 11.23%.

The religious composition of the population in the state as per the 2001 Census is as follows: Hindus 83.23%, Muslims 16.53%, Christians 0.06%, Sikhs 0.02%, Buddhists 0.02%, Jains 0.02%, ‘Other Religious Persons’ & ‘Religion Not Stated’ persons 0.11%.

Nearly 44% of Bihar’s population lies below the poverty line (the highest in India). With a low urbanization rate, poverty is predominantly rural which is associated with limited access to land and livestock, poor education, health care, low-paid occupations and low social status. The rural poor being landless, is dependent on agricultural wages or casual non-farm jobs for income, and is likely to be poorly educated. The Dalits and Tribals are thrice as likely to be poor as compared with upper castes.

Bihar has the lowest per capita income (Rs.6719). The health indicators of Bihar also presents a grim picture: 70 community health centres (for average 644 villages, serving average 1061667 persons), 161 primary health centres (serving average 27 villages or 45287 persons).
Bihar was at one time known for its civilization and learning. The great ancient Indian civilization flourished from its capital Patliputra. The great Buddhist and Jain scholars spread their wisdom since 6th century B.C. onwards from Bihar. Nalanda and Udantpuri (present day Biharsharif) were known for Buddhist learning. Mithila, Vaishali and Patliputra were centres of Sanskrit learning. Scholars from many countries of the world came to these centres of learning till the 8th century.

In spite of such a rich background, Bihar lags behind all other States in terms of literacy, leave alone elementary education. The literacy rate as per the recent census (2011) is 63.82%. Educationally it is the most backward state in India and most of the illiterates belong to Dalit and ‘landless labourer’ classes. Compared to the country as a whole, Bihar has low enrollment, low retention, high dropout rate and a high percentage of non-enrolled children in the 6-14 age-groups.

**Impact of Christian Faith**

I shall briefly dwell on the impact of “Christian Faith” on Bihar Society. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the impact of Christian faith is quite extensive. A majority of villages in Bihar have encountered Christian faith in different ways and to assess its impact and to narrate the details of it is beyond the scope of this sharing.

An understanding of the impact of Christianity in Bihar is possible only when we indicate the volume of humanitarian works done by the Christian Churches in the area on the one hand, and as we assess the extent of mobility achieved by the target Christian communities and others. As cited earlier, although Church membership in the state is less than one percent of the total population, its visibility through its contribution to different areas of nation building and development of the State is very significant. A large number of public institutions serve the society in general and Christian communities in particular. The Catholic community alone runs 4 colleges, some 50 high schools, 160 middle and primary schools, 25 vocational training institutes, 15 non-formal training centres, 15 hospitals, 100 health care centres, a few old age homes, leprosaria, over 40 social welfare centres in 280 mission centres, with the help of 1800 church personnel and thousands of lay collaborators. i*
I shall here limit myself to a few areas. I shall first share with you the impact on Christian faith on two major ethnic Christian groups in Bihar, namely the Bettiah Christians and the Dalit Christians. Secondly, I shall share with you the contribution of the Church in the field of education and also in the health services in the State, where education and health are major challenges. Thirdly, I shall dwell on the contribution of the Church in the field of social empowerment of the poor, which is an integral dimension of nation building in the State. Finally, I shall dwell on the impact of Christian faith on the general public.

**Bettiah Mission and its impact**

The Bettiah Mission became the home of a new Christian group since 1945 A.D. The Church had a significant impact on the Bettiah Christians in three areas: 1) education 2) occupation and 3) socio-religious identity. In education, the change is reflected in a high level of literacy: from a non-literate culture to a literate culture, resulting in a near total literacy among the Bettiah Christians, by 1990s. This followed from the educational initiatives and impetus to pursue education: through primary, middle and secondary schools and hostels, both for boys and girls, teacher training institutes, vocational training centres and the like. The community also responded to a substantial improvement in life chances: employment generating training and activities such as knitting, tailoring, composing and type-setting; employment as peons, clerks, catechists, teachers and supervisors in the Mission’s own institutions in Bettiah and elsewhere in North India and in the financial institutions such as credit societies and artisanal co-operative societies and mutual help societies for help in various needs, including housing.

The change in the Bettiah Christians’ occupations has been mainly due to educational mobility. Occupations have changed from traditional to non-traditional ones: clerical, teaching, blue and white-collar jobs and so on. A majority of the working men, till about 1940, were active in carpentry, black-smithy and carting, irrespective of their pre-conversion caste-based occupations. However, by 1990s, Bettiah Christians had moved out of carpentry, black-smithy, carting, etc., a vast majority (80%) of them being in blue and white-collar jobs, particularly, teaching (34%).ii*
Marriage, apart from membership in the same religion, has been the most cohesive factor, which has constructed the Bettiah Christian community into a new ethnic Christian community. Caste, consanguinity, endogamy, kin and other norms related to this ritual were subordinated. The tradition of inter-caste and inter-community marriage was subsequently extended to include other ethnic Christian groups. Since 1980s, the Bettiah Christians have been marrying adivasi Christians of South Bihar, Bengali Christians, Dalit Christians and Christians from outside Bihar. Unlike in several Christian communities, it has helped nullify caste consciousness and caste-mentality among them without losing their essential cultural particularities.

Anthropologist K. N. Sahay says that unlike several Christian communities in India, the Bettiah Christians seem to have realized “an ideal of a casteless society’.iii* This is a significant contribution to Bihar by the Bettiah converts, who originally belonged to high and middle castes. The richness and complexity of Bettiah Christianity, as it developed over the past 265 years and known today as the “Bettiayi Christian” tradition, tended to draw on the great tradition of Christianity through the little traditions of the evangelizing missionaries: Italian and German Capuchins, American and Indian Jesuits and other missionaries including the local ones who discouraged caste-based interaction among the Christians.

The Church’s Impact on Dalit Christians in Bihar

Turning their attention more to the Dalits, the Jesuit and Diocesan missionaries in Bihar started extensive evangelization work in the Bhojpuri and Magahi speaking divisions, south of the Ganga. Educational institutions, hostels for students, health care centres, relief and rehabilitation works became part of the activities of an increasing number of mission centres where conversions became a mass movement. Appealing to collaborators for help, the Jesuit Bishop Bernard Sullivan (1927-1947) invited many religious societies to work in Patna diocese having the whole of central and north Bihar under its jurisdiction. Consequently the Medical Mission Sisters (MMS) started the Holy Family Hospital in Patna City (1939), the Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel (AC) opened the Patna Women’s college in Patna (1940), the Sisters of Notre Dame (SND) and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth (SCN) joined in late 1940s and many more congregations extended their presence in the subsequent decades.
With the addition of more Church personnel recruited from various Catholic regions of India more geographical areas were covered which necessitated creation of more ecclesiastical units in Bihar. In 1980, Patna Diocese was bifurcated (Patna and Muzaffarpur dioceses). In 1998 two new dioceses (Bettiah and Purnea) were created by bifurcating Muzaffarpur diocese and carving out some parts from Bhagalpur diocese. Patna was bifurcated in 2005 into Patna and Buxar dioceses. In the mean time in 1999 Patna was raised to an archdiocese. The Archdiocese of Patna has now five suffragan dioceses (Muzaffarpur, Bettiah, Purnea, Bhagalpur and Buxar).

The Mission, with its multi-dimensional, spiritual and temporal programmes consisting of preaching, educational service, medical service, humanitarian works and the like, affected the dalits who adopted Christianity. Visible social transformation among them has been in the realms of social, religious, spiritual, cultural and economic life. Moreover, the spread of general awareness of the socio-economic problems of their society and the creation of forums in parishes and villages where their problems could be discussed, gave the converts psychological and moral support. iv* These were supplemented with supportive, foundational Christian principles, insights and doctrines so that the converts’ psyche would discard some of the hitherto unquestioned dicta, which chained them to perennial low status and helped them to move towards a re-discovery of their lost dignity. v*

In practice, the Mission sponsored the education of the dalit children, which in turn, facilitated alternative, more remunerative and higher status employment. Most of the working population until about 1950s was engaged in agriculture and caste-based or jajmani-bound occupations, particularly leatherwork. However, by 1990s, a large number of them were holding blue and white collar jobs, indicating significant change in their socio-economic life. vi* The number of dalits who received the benefit of education and who obtained higher status jobs could be taken as a measure of their vertical status and psychological mobility or liberation from a subaltern mind-set.

Today in south Bihar, the rate of literacy among the Christian Ravidasis is over 60% whereas, the corresponding rate among the dalits in Bihar was only 28.5% until recently.
Christian Participation in Education

We now come to the contribution of Christianity to the education in the state, one of the biggest challenges of the state even today. The Christian community in India has been at the forefront of providing quality education both in urban and rural areas. It is estimated that though the community consists of only 2.98% of the total population of India, it shoulders nearly 20 percent of education service in India. The community has pioneered in women’s education and education of the marginalized sections, especially Dalits, Tribals and other Backward Castes in the country. In higher education, some Christian colleges are counted among the best colleges in India.

In Bihar, education has been one of the main services of Christian Missionaries since the 1920s when the Jesuits began to work in Bihar. Various Church organizations are engaged in rendering exemplary service in the field of education in the state. The Catholic Church agencies alone run over 400 educational institutions including 3 colleges and 145 hostels for students. One of the three undergraduate colleges of the Church, the Patna Women’s College (PWC), managed by the Apostolic Carmel nuns, is considered the best in the state. A constituent college of Patna University, PWC caters to some 4000 students (only females). The other two are co-educational colleges: 1) St. Xavier’s College of Education and 2) St. Xavier’s College, both at Patna, run by the Patna Jesuits.

Viewed from the depth of its impact, the educational service in Bihar can be seen as consisting of three periods: extensive education (1921-27), intensive education (1928-78) and distributive education (1979-ff). A large number of institutions were opened during the first period under Bishop Louis Van Hoeck’s pastoral care. When he arrived in 1921, there were only 9 schools with 516 students and when he left for the newly created Ranchi diocese, there were 38 schools with 1835 students. In the next period, many more schools were founded in mission centres, including the management of two elite schools in Patna (St. Xavier’s, wince 1940 and St. Michael’s since 1968). The third period saw the management of non-formal schools (for mass education and adult literacy) in rural areas. Necessarily, this resulted in distributing the resources to larger number of underprivileged sections especially in rural areas.
The most significant impact of education on the Dalits has been liberation from their previous bondage and achievement of upward socio-economic, occupational and status mobility. Throughout these periods, the vast majority of the beneficiaries of the Christian educational service have been non-Christians. Though constrained by resource crunches, it is envisaged that these Christian initiatives would enhance the quality of education in Bihar through committed approach and service-oriented vision for ‘God and Country’. It may be no exaggeration to say that Christian educational network caters to nearly 100 thousand children all over the state.

Together with the contribution of Christian faith to education in the State, equally important contribution of the Church can be seen in the field of Health. A large number of dispensaries located in rural Bihar, where medical care continues to be hard to come by, have made significant contribution for the enhancement of health of the rural population.

**Impact of Christianity and Social Transformation**

So far I have shared with you the impact of Christian faith on few selected areas, namely its impact on two groups of Christian communities in their religious, social, economic and cultural aspects of life; its impact on two crucial aspects of nation building – education and health.

I shall now briefly dwell on the impact of Christian faith on a few other crucial aspect of nation building on principles of equality and justice. It may be noted here with a sense of satisfaction, that the contribution of the Church in Bihar, inspired by the teachings of Vatican Council II and the social teachings of the Church, has become more diversified to include social empowerment actions for promotion and protection of human rights, women rights and child rights, protection of environment etc. Church is Bihar has undertaken pioneering initiatives in these fields. The social action network of the Church runs many reputed social work centres in the state. They are doing marvelous work in the expansion of education to thousands of children through its innovative and mass educational programs. The Church collaborates with the State in spreading developmental gains to the poor.
The last few decades of Church’s engagement with concerns of the rural poor has impacted a large number of rural populations in the area of education, health, economic mobility, protection and promotion of human rights, women empowerment, leadership and capacity building. These and such other activities aimed at the well being and dignity of the poor is a remarkable and notable contribution towards building up of more egalitarian, just and prosperous society in the State where poor and all the others can live in dignity, free from fundamental deprivations.

**Impact on the Civil Society**

Individuals and various Church bodies have impacted various secular and democratic voluntary organizations, policy makers within and outside the government and leaders of different religious through different levels of networking. The Church through different individuals and organizations has inspired many others to venture into the challenging task of contributing to nation building through promotion of human rights, secular and democratic values enshrined in the Indian Constitution. She has worked closely with different organizations of the government on various concerns that affect the lives of the dalits who constitute the majority of the poor in Bihar. Inter-religious dialogue is another important area of our social engagement to promote not only religious harmony but to unite all people of good will to promote human well being, egalitarian principles, social justice and fellowship.

**Some of our tasks and challenges in our missionary endeavour today**

I have attempted to share with you how Christian faith has been “the salt of the earth” in different ways of its life and mission in the State of Bihar. As followers of the Christian religion we are still a tiny minority in the State. But I have no hesitation in stating with pride that the essence of Christian religion – love, as salt of the earth – through its multi-dimensional and very palpable expressions, has given the Church an enviable place in the State. However there are many challenges before us. I shall attempt to highlight some of them here for our reflection and corresponding action.

1. **First of all, we Christian missionaries are called to be persons of deep God-experience, Jesus experience and genuine humanness experience.**
In general, (11) Indians are deeply religious even though millions are living under sub-human conditions. People in general have fascination to those who speak out of experience of the Divine, and they believe that such an experience can empower them to regain their lost humanness. Hence we have to prepare ourselves in all possible ways for deeper God-experience, which generates within us Jesus’ vision of mission and love for human person. Therefore mission has to be seen and lived as nothing but communication of experiential life-giving Good News rather than imparting of well formulated doctrines and structures. Instead of becoming just another ‘labour-force’ for the Church, instead of stressing on ‘doing’ or verbal proclamation, we need to stress on ‘being and becoming’ this God experience.

2. **Mission is a call to witness, which is to be very relevant in a situation of being a minority.** Acts of the Apostles 1:8 lays strong emphasis on the mission of witness when it says: “you shall receive the power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’. Phrases like ‘missionary is the message’, ‘medium is the message’ and ‘method is the mission’ etc. give a powerful message to all of us. Most people identify the message with the messenger. While accepting the messenger they accept the message. It means that the way the missionaries present and approach the divine, the humans and the cosmic realities, is the way they carry the message of Jesus Christ. The way we approach our neighbor, the society and the living realities, and the way we respond to issues affecting the human family itself carries the Good News. A religious life-giving message can be lived both intensively and extensively. To be the salt of the earth therefore is to live the life-giving message of Jesus intensively before reaching it out extensively to all.

3. **Be light, Salt, Leaven and Fragrance** (Mt 5:13-14; 2Cor 2:14-16); While Jesus called us to be salt, light and leaven of the world, St. Paul calls us also to be like fragrance of the earth. Generally, the quantity of leaven and salt is small in size, but their transforming effect is immeasurable. So also a small lamp in a huge dark room can brighten the entire area. Similarly though small in number, if we Christians live the Gospel message intensively on personal level, on the level of
our institutions, it can have far reaching and transforming effect. Evangelizing mission therefore, transcends proclamation and becomes a witness through life and work.

4. **Missionaries are called to be people-centered, just as Jesus was.** In his public life Jesus was always amidst people. Through human needs he entered into the lives of the people and thereby empowered them to be transformed. He had a compassionate heart to enter into the wounds and brokenness of lives of the people. Instead of an attitude that ‘people should come to us and not we go to people, or go to the lost’, special efforts are to be made to come closer to the lives of the common people.

5. **Call to facilitate unity, community building and Harmony in a pluralistic society.** In a land of diversity and plurality of races, cultures religions, philosophies, spiritualities, languages and other divisive forces, the mission of the tiny Christian community is to work for national integration, joining hands with various groups and organizations which facilitate unity and harmony within the larger society. To be rooted in Christ is also to be related to all people of God. Hence excessive institutionalization of the people of God according to a particular (Roman or Western) law is an obstacle to this mission.

6. **Humans are essentially communitarian beings with basic communal needs.** For humans, to be in the world is “to inter-be”, to be inter-related. Humans are beings in relationship. Their needs like the need for belongingness, affection, affiliation, recognition, fulfillment, achievement etc. could reasonably be met only in smaller or larger communities. Christian message is essentially communitarian. The God we believe is community. God is communion and is in communion with all creation and humans. The Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus was a community of people who experienced God as a loving parent and led the hearers to forgive each other (Mt 6:12), who realized that love in sharing and in the service of the others was more important than observing ritualistic laws (Lk 6:11). The Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus was a community of people who understood that to be disciples of Jesus involved “washing other’s feet” (Jn 13:1-13), “taking side of the poor and the oppressed, the publicans and sinners” (Lk 4:18-19) and an interior change of heart and mind (Mt: 5-7).
In such a community of mutual love, sharing and service, there will be no longer rich and poor, dominant and oppressed, chose people and marginalized. Every human being is called to belong to this new community (Mt28:19). If the Church is a sacrament of God’s communion with all creation, when the divisive forces are at work, when exploitative and oppressive globalization is destroying unique and rich differences by homogenization of the people and when caste divides people discriminately, the mission of the Church is to challenge these forces by presenting itself as an expression of true communion. An authentic communion is an authentic embodiment of unconditional love. Love that is exclusive towards only some people cannot be real love, and communion that expresses itself in sectarianism cannot be true communion. Hence it will be very appropriate to build basic Christian communities as well as basic human communities, so that the whole humanity becomes a communion of communities.

7. **Religions and Inter-religious Dialogue:** Religions are the result of ongoing dialogue between God and humans. Religions are construct and ways to God. They are human responses to God who has been revealing himself to humans in manifold ways from the moment of creation. God’s Spirit is at work in them. Hence they are within the plan of God. North Indian people have been responding to God in their own pluralistic cultural forms. That is why it has been the cradle and sanctuary of many world religions. Since God, his Spirit and his Word are present in them, religions in themselves are not bad news. This calls for mutual prophecy and mutual fructification. Since Religions have God’s presence and goodness, our mission is to uphold and promote all that is good in them and enter into a process of dialogue, the goals of which are constant mutual purification, enrichment and transformation. In a multicultural and multi-religious context to be a Christian is to be inter-related, inter-human and inter-religious. Dialogue is not a concept. It is people, men and women, sharing the meaning and mystery of human existence, struggling together in suffering, hope and joy. Today it is very important that we collaborate with others, though they may not hold our beliefs, but like us are committed to human wholeness and solidarity.
Dialogue and proclamation of the Gospel are integral but dialectical and complementary dimensions of the Church’s mission of evangelization. Authentic dialogue includes a witness to one’s total Christian faith, which is open to a similar witness of the other religious believers. Dialogue implies openness and alertness to the Mystery of God’s action in one’s religion and beyond its boundaries.

8. **Call to be a Church without walls.** Since Christians are humans in a particular cultural set up, certain organizational set up and cultural identity is inevitable. The Church at the same time cannot mediate Divine mystery effectively if it becomes highly organized, structured, closed and rigid. It needs to keep itself open to the Spirit and to the plurality of its expression in multiple cultures. Hence it needs to be a Church without walls. Church must be identified primarily not by its orthodoxy but by its orthopraxis, not by separation from cultures and religions, but by its immersion in them. If Churches remain authentic expressions of the presence of the Holy Spirit, while preserving their own identities, they can also promote communion among Churches as well as among all humans of different cultures and religions. We must remember that preserving one’s identity by the principle of contradiction or by exclusivism is alien to the vision of the Gospel and the cultural ethos.

9. **Prophetic and Liberative Mission.** In a situation of backwardness, injustice, oppression, discrimination and dehumanization, Christians are called to awaken themselves to the Biblical prophetic call and the prophetic mission of Jesus. A prophet is a charismatic leader who is close to God and close to the people of God: he experiences the dehumanizing living conditions of the people, observes them, studies them, analyses them and interprets the socio-cultural, politico-economic question from the point of justice for all and for the values of the Kingdom. Prophets are sensitive to all, especially to the poor and the powerless. They challenge all dehumanizing systems, organizations, customs, rituals, laws and practices and work for the transformation of the society and for a better and more human future of the whole society. In multi-religious and multi-cultural societies, Christians must also develop ability for negotiating boundaries and boundary crossing.
10. **Prophets stand for integral liberation, which involves option for the poor.** It is an option for a new society, where there will not be destitution and exploitation. Poverty of the poor is not primarily caused by the wickedness of a few rich people, but by the unjust socio-economic and political systems, which permit the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, reducing the majority of the people to want and misery. Hence, removal of poverty requires commitment and action to transformation of the unjust systems. The disciples of Jesus should stand for the human rights of all citizens and raise their voice together with other people of good will, whenever these rights are violated and injustice is done to them. With regard to subaltern movements, Church can play a catalytic role siding them, taking a stand on behalf of their dignity and rights, expressing solidarity with them and whenever possible offer training, conscientization, right ideological clarification and direction.

11. **Challenge of Inculturation:** Christians are still considered foreigners in their own land. Their numerical presence is almost insignificant. But their powerful institutions, such as English medium schools almost in all towns and cities, and their centres like hospitals, schools for the handicapped, the deaf and the blind etc. are very much sought after. Because of these influential institutions, Christians though tiny in number, give an elitist image to the common people and reinforce the faulty image that they follow a foreign religion, are supported by foreign funds with allegiance to foreign powers. Insightful missionaries hold that the Church has adopted structures that are beyond the real needs and possibilities of the local Churches. That is why needs arise to depend on foreign funds for basic life and pastoral action.

**Conclusion**

As I conclude let me remind you that to be ‘the salt of the earth’ we need not be a majority community. Our Christian Faith does and must have a deep impact on the society at large, in as much as it is a ‘living faith’. We do have to face the present day challenges. Due to economic constrains we are not able to contribute to the spread of education to our Christian brethren and others in the rural villages as much as we would have liked to.
There is need to expand our educational initiatives to bring quality education to a larger number of Christians and others in the rural villages, for whom quality education is a far cry. In spite of our concerted efforts of Church leaders, other likeminded organizations and some political parties, the Dalits who have accepted Christian religion continue to be denied of the benefits of affirmative action of Indian State such as reservation in government services, although their socio-economic condition in general is no better than that of other dalits. Moreover, we are also faced with the challenge posed by a faith not informed by reason and reason not enriched by faith. It is indeed a task to communicate true Christian values and teachings to the young mind influenced by consumerist culture.

We hope that Christian faith will continue to be, in an ever greater manner, the “salt of the earth” in building up a true human society, where in the poor and all the others will be respected and loved as sons and daughters of God. The message, life, death and resurrection of Christ our Lord will continue to transform not only our State Bihar, but also the entire universe till every human person is restored to the dignity of being created in the image and likeness of God. Thank you for lending me your ears.

Archbishop William D'Souza, S.J.
Patna Archdiocese

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iii* K.N.Sahay, Christianity and Culture Change in India ( New Delhi: Inter-India Publications 1986)

iv* Swapan Kumar Nandi, “Impact of Christianity on the Chamaras of Majhwaja, a Bhojpur Village” in Journal of Social Research, Vil.19, No.1 (March 1976); Also, Nicholas J Pollard, "Whither....."
