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Caste in the Protestant Churches: An Historical Perspective

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This was a paper presented at a recent meeting of the Theological Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India on the question of caste in the church. The Indian caste system is again in the forefront in sociological and theological discussions, not only in India but also elsewhere. In India particularly, in relation to Donald McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle, it is a hot issue. As a historian the author collects a vast amount of material from the past, to show the various responses the church has given to the evil of caste in India, sometimes successfully. However it is gratifying to note that the evils of caste mentioned in the paper are to a large extent extinct now, such as the use of two cups in the Holy Communion for different castes, and the requirement of caste details in marriage banns. One can only heartily agree with the host of witnesses here, that caste is the root evil in Indian society as well as in the Indian Church. Evangelicals should leave no stone unturned to conquer this monster.

Editor

Any attempt at understanding Indian cultural and political history will be inadequate, if the influence of caste upon people and events is not taken into consideration. This is even the case, in varying degrees, for all three streams of the Christian community, Syrian, Roman Catholic, and Protestant; although over the years each has dealt with the issue in somewhat different terms.

It is certainly clear, from the considerable volume of extant source material available, that caste has been a recurring theme throughout the period of the emergence and development of the Church within the Protestant communion. Even though it was conceded that caste was a difficulty with which the apostolic Church did not have to wrestle,¹ the founders of the Protestant Church in South India did not escape censure. In a paper read at the Missionary Conference in London in May 1894, Sharrock observed that 'the first of the p. 326 difficulties which constitutes caste a problem [arose] from the fact that the old missionaries, dating from the middle of last century, tolerated caste in the Church'.² This derived, according to S. Paul, from their failure to understand the true nature of Hinduism. 'They imagined, perhaps, that if the wild olive branch were ingrafted with the true olive tree, it would partake of the root and the fatness of the olive tree. Caste, however', argues Paul, 'is not a parasite of Hinduism, but one of its chief roots'.³ Sharrock was wisely cautious about throwing 'stones at the old, saintly missionaries; still,' he said, 'we cannot be blind to "the difficult position", as Bishop Sargent described it, "in which the

¹ E. M. McPhail, 'Character of Present-Day Mission Work in the Light of the Conversion of Europe to Christianity in the Early Centuries', *HF* ser.4, 10 (December 1899): 448.

² J. A. Sharrock, 'Indian Problems: Caste', paper read at the missionary conference, London, 30 May 1894 (London, SPG Industrial Press, 1894): 1.

³ S. Paul, 'Caste in Tinnevely', *op. cit.*, p.82.

early missionaries have placed both the people and us".⁴ Earlier still, in 1835, and in a manner quite reminiscent of Abbé du Bois, Bishop Wilson painted an extremely gloomy picture. 'It is no exaggeration to say that the Church was founded in sand', and, that furthermore, 'to call the converts Christian at all' seemed to the Bishop to be 'almost a perversion of the Queen's English'.⁵ Perhaps understandably, there were many things about the character of the growing Church which only attracted 'abhorrence' and 'reprobation';⁶ however it was understood that such things were tolerated in the first place 'not as a licence to continue but to be swept away'⁷ in the course of time.

Even so, the *Harvest Field*,⁸ perhaps the most widely read mission periodical in India of the time, called the early missionary toleration of caste a mistake.⁹ Rajahgopal was much less inhibited. It was 'an unspeakable calamity', he said, 'that the early missionaries, either through pliability or short sightedness ... should have allowed men to come [into the Church] with the vile garments of caste about them ... They knew what caste was ... but they were in a dilemma.'¹⁰ Most of those who responded to the missionary appeal were, according to Rajahgopal, a motley group of families, men and women, who almost p. 327 all came from 'doubtful motives'; either 'a desire of loaves and fishes ... [or] a desire of deliverance from serfism ... and said, "We want you to take care of us." '¹¹ At this point the missionaries 'did not insist upon the renunciation of caste',¹² and, confesses Rajahgopal, 'We do not know whether any of us, had we been in their circumstances, would have acted differently.'¹³

Part of the problem, continued Rajahgopal (and A. D. Arulanantham, writing in *The Indian Church Quarterly Review*, agreed)¹⁴ was that missionaries, impatient for success, from a love of numbers, and a desire to see churches rising, opened the floodgates to heathenism.¹⁵ Rajahgopal and the Free Church of Scotland Mission took the position that converts should have been assisted to renounce caste unconditionally from the very beginning. Instead they were, by and large, baptized into membership in the Christian Church without the issue of caste being adequately dealt with. It was hoped that 'further

⁴ Sharrock, 'Problems', *op. cit.* p.2.

⁵ Quoted by Sharrock, *Ibid.*

⁶ M. V. Samuel, A letter to the President of LELM Synod, Tranquebar, from 16 members of the LELM Church, Madras. 13 January 1910. p.2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The precursor of the *NCC Review*.

⁹ 'Editorial Notes: Caste and the Church', *HF* ser. 3, 5 (September 1893): 117.

¹⁰ P. Rajahgopal, 'Caste in its Relation to the Church'. *The Indian Evangelical Review [IER]* 4 January 1877): 369.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ A. D. Arulananthan, 'Caste and Christianity', *The Indian Church Quarterly Review [ICQR]* 6 (July 1893): 326.

¹⁵ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *op. cit.*, p.363.

instruction, and moral training, and development of Christian life, would work out the heaven'.¹⁶

But this was not the case. For even though bishops decreed against caste, and missionary committees and conferences drafted minutes and enacted laws and regulations to put it down,¹⁷ upwards of a century and a half of toleration had not eradicated it, noted the *Harvest Field* in 1893.¹⁸ Rajahgopal observed in 1877, that caste was 'gathering strength every day, and eating out the vitals of Christianity'.¹⁹

DEBATES ON CASTE

Over the years, considerable discussion took place on the subject, debating whether the caste system was a religious or a social institution. Rev. R. E. Gullison published, in 1903, the findings of his correspondence With more than fifty persons, both missionary and P. 328 Indian Christian, under the title *Symposium on the Toleration of Caste*,²⁰ and it is clear from the responses of participants that most would have accepted Rev. J. Cooling's definition of caste or the caste system. It comprised, he said, 'all those social customs or usages of the Hindus for which they claim religious sanction; and as religion with a Hindu extends to almost every detail of his life, the caste system is a term almost synonymous with the whole social system of the Hindu'.²¹ For Cooling, caste was 'a kind of trade guild'²² whose aims were to prevent pauperism, to provide an association within which the individual was 'taught to subordinate himself to the well-being of the community',²³ and to restrain vice and secure 'the moral purity of the home life'.²⁴ At the same time Cooling was not blind to the fact that at a very early period in Indian history the 'sanctions of religion were claimed'²⁵ for the caste system. It was, he said, in the interests of 'the priests who had arrogated to themselves the highest rank in the social scale, to do all they could to prevent others from invading their privileged position'.²⁶ They taught therefore that the divisions among men, decided on by dint of vocation, 'were ordained by God, and that it would be a violation of His ordained will for a man to undertake any other occupation than that of the caste into which he was born'.²⁷

¹⁶ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *op. cit.*, p.159.

¹⁷ *Christian Patriot*, 21 October 1899. See also *Christian Patriot* 5 December 1908, p.5; *HF* ser. 3, 5 (September 1894): 599; Elizabeth A. Hibbert-Ware, 'Caste and Christianity,' *HF* 32, 11 (November 1912): 425.

¹⁸ 'Editorial Notes: Caste', *HF* (September 1893): 117.

¹⁹ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *loc. cit.*

²⁰ J. Cooling, 'The Christian Substitute for the Caste System', *HF* ser.3, 9 (February 1898): 50.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p.51.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The *Christian Patriot* on the other hand took a contrary position to Cooling and argued instead that the earliest sources on caste 'speak of it as a religious institution'.²⁸ The paper attempted to bolster its argument further by quoting, a few years later, a missionary, the Rev. Wheeler Bogges, who was convinced that caste was a religious rather than a social institution:

Because (a) it has its roots in the sacred literature of the Hindus; (b) its defenders claim for it a divine origin; (c) religious duties are linked with caste in that it formed a necessary qualification for the performance of those various duties; (d) Hindu religion gives the bounds of the various castes so that no one can change his caste from a lower to a higher; (e) religious rites p. 329 are necessary to restore caste when it is once broken; (f) rules for maintaining caste by purification ceremonies are religious.²⁹

Having said all, the crux of the matter for Sharrock consisted in the fact that caste was social as well as religious, 'or rather social because it is religious. The Hindu', he said, 'is nothing if he is not, at any rate in ceremony religious. Religion dominates everything, hence caste, which is the essence of Hinduism, pervades every action of a man's life.'³⁰ In any event Sharrock took umbrage with those who contended that whatever caste was for Hindus it was merely a social organization to Christians.

So long as Christians will associate with Hindus of the same caste, but not with Christians of a different caste; so long as Shanars will not receive the Holy Communion at the hands of a Pareiga priest (though socially and educationally their superior); so long as a Vellalar will send a Shanar to dine in his cattle shed; so long as Vellalars will not sit in the same place in church with Shanars; and finally, so long as clergy of different castes, but of the same social rank, will not inter-marry, it appears to me inconceivable to describe caste as merely a social institution among Christians.³¹

No matter in what form caste manifested itself in the Church, it was in the final analysis, for the *Christian Patriot*, 'contrary to the Spirit of Christ',³² for the system was established upon the fundamental idea 'of the superiority of certain classes of human beings over others, a superiority which has a divine sanction'.³³ In an article, 'The Relation of Missions to Caste', J. D. Maynard, of the Mission of the Society of Friends, saw something else. For him caste was an 'effective political force' conceived by 'Brahmanical genius that sanctified and petrified the distinctions of race, rank and occupation'.³⁴ At first sight, the deep rooted fault of the caste system and its incompatibility with Christianity appeared to be over a detail of practice: Christianity wants to convert, whereas caste forbids its adherents to change. However the much deeper and more significant incompatibility between the two lay, according to Maynard, in the fact that p. 330

Caste is rigid; Christianity is responsive and adaptable. Caste is a system; Christianity is life. Caste is of the law; Christianity is of faith ... Caste is of the dead past; Christianity of

²⁸ *Christian Patriot*, 12 February 1898, p.4.

²⁹ Quoted in *Christian Patriot*, 20 June 1903, p.4.

³⁰ Sharrock, 'Problems', *loc. cit.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

³² *Christian Patriot*, 15 February 1902, p.4.

³³ *Christian Patriot*, 12 February 1898, p.4.

³⁴ J. D. Maynard, 'The Relations of Missions to Caste', *HF* 17, 12 (December 1906): 450.

the eternal future. Caste rests on a conception of the ultimate reality of the distinctions between men, accepts and fixes these, and gives no hope of a change. Christianity rests on a conception of the equal value of all men before God and the temporary character of all earthly distinctions.³⁵

The *Christian Patriot*, at the same time, was in no doubt as to the practical outworking of the system considering that 'the worst evils, social, moral and spiritual that India [was] suffering from [could] be traced more or less to the pernicious influence of caste'.³⁶

Interestingly, and perhaps obviously, opposition to caste extended beyond the concern of the Christian community. There were many Hindus who acknowledged the evils of caste and who agitated against it. The Maharaja of Gaekwar, speaking at the Indian National Social Conference in 1904, affirmed the evil of caste on the ground that it hampered the life of an individual socially, economically and professionally. But, he observed,

its most serious offence is its effect on national life and national unity. It intensifies local dissensions and diverse interests, and obscures great national ideals and interests which should be those of every caste and people, and renders the country disunited and incapable of improving its defects ... It robs us of our humanity by insisting on the degradation of some of our fellowmen who are separated from us by no more than the accident of birth.³⁷

Following this, the editor of *The United Church Herald* included in the journal's January 1913 edition a tenfold statement of objection to caste agreed upon at an 'Anti-Caste Conference' held just prior to that date in Bombay. The significance of the declaration, noted the editor, was in the fact that it was not a statement 'of missionaries or of others outside of the caste system' but that it revealed 'the increasing evils of that system as they bear upon those who have to endure them from within Hinduism itself'.³⁸ Caste was objected to because it was 'directly and indirectly responsible for the huge mass of ignorance and illiteracy ... [because it] created a wholly artificial order of social precedence ... [and] brought about the huge problem of the Depressed Classes'. The statement, published in leaflet form 'to be scattered broadly over the land', concluded with an appeal to everyone who had the good of India at heart to rally against caste and 'seek to change the foundations of a system which has outlived any usefulness it might have had ... and build up a new generation of broader vision, of more catholic sympathies, of a loftier altruism, and of a purer and intenser patriotism'.³⁹

These were among the reasons that the *Christian Patriot*, from the very beginning of its publication in 1890, set itself against what it referred to as 'this baneful system whose unfortunate existence in the Native Christian community has only been marring its usefulness as a body but also has been the source of many a positive mischief'.⁴⁰ It was this same concern for the influence of caste upon the life of the Church that very probably led the Madras Native Church Council, at its inauguration in 1868, to accept a Caste

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Christian Patriot*, 12 February 1898, p.4.

³⁷ H. H. Gaekwar, 'Current Mission News: The Indian National Social Conference', *HF* 16 (January 1905): 30.

³⁸ 'Modern Opposition to the Hindu Caste System from Within', *The United Church World* 4, 10 (January 1913): 407.

³⁹ *Ibid.* See Appendix for Statement in full.

⁴⁰ *Christian Patriot*, 15 October 1896, p.4.

Declaration form which, although drawn up in the first place by the Church Missionary Committee,⁴¹ was signed by all members before taking their seats as members of the Council. The Declaration stated:

Believing the system of Hindoo Caste to be contrary to the spirit and requirements of the Gospel of Christ, injurious to the souls of those who adhere to it, and an impediment to the exercise of brotherly love among the members of Christ and to the spread of the Gospel in this country;—because it inculcates the false idea of pollution on account of birth—because it confines a man and his family forever to the grade in which he was born, and prevents his rising into a higher class [sic] of Society, whatever may be his character and merits—and because it recognizes a combination of individuals assuming authority and power to hinder those who follow out the dictates of conscience, and who wish to enjoy liberty in matters of marriage, food, and social intercourse;—I do on those grounds condemn and renounce the system of Caste, and admit it to be the duty of every Christian man heartily to renounce it; and I will, with God's help, discourage it both by my words and example; and I will uphold and assist [sic] all those who exercise their Christian liberty in opposition to the system of Caste.⁴²

This Declaration was faithfully signed by all incoming members of the p. 332 Council up to at least 1917. Not all such rhetoric, however, was consistent with actual practice.

One thing was certain: in drawing to a close a discussion that extended over several weeks, the *Christian Patriot* in June 1896 recognized that

Christianity is on trial in India. Many are watching to see how we are affected by it as a community. Let us resolve to bury at the foot of the cross of Him who, though he was God, took upon Himself the form of a servant and made Himself of no reputation, all our egotism, our self-conceit and social bigotry and make an earnest effort to realize in the heart as well as in the outward life, our oneness in Christ. To us, resurrectionized [sic] Christians and Christians whose citizenship is in heaven, there is no Pariah, nor Brahmin, no Rajah nor Semirdar but one new man.⁴³

Theologically there was broad agreement as to the nature of caste. One of the earliest statements on the subject, and one that was widely endorsed, derives from a resolution agreed on in the 1879 Bangalore Missionary Conference which regarded

Hindu caste, both in theory and practice, as not a mere civil distinction, but emphatically a religious institution; that viewed in this light it is diametrically opposed to the Christian doctrine of the oneness of human nature, and the brotherhood of all true Christians, and that it is the duty of all missionaries and churches to require its entire renunciation, with all its outward manifestations, by all those who desire to enter the Church of Christ.⁴⁴

CASTE EFFECTS ON CHURCH LIFE

A particularly nasty incident took place in 1915 near Venganoor, Trivanarum, and was related by E. Masilamani, a correspondent to the *Christian Patriot*. A London Missionary Society Chapel had been erected in Mangalatoocoom and was to be dedicated by the

⁴¹ Proceedings of the Madras Native Church Council, 29 November 1884.

⁴² This form was attached to the front page of the MNC Council Minute book. UTC.

⁴³ *Christian Patriot*, 18 June 1896, p.4.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Christian Patriot*, 21 October 1899. See also William I. Chamberlain, 'The Attitude of Missionaries Towards Hinduism As A Social System', *HF* ser. 3, 8 (January 1897): 5.

District missionary, Mr. H. T. Willis. When he arrived for the service the local pastor informed him 'that there was a slight hitch in the arrangements as the Sharnar Christians would not allow the Pulya Christians to use the Chapel'.⁴⁵ Willis was assured upon inquiry 'that under no P. 333 circumstances would they allow the Pulya Christians to enter the building and their entrance would be prevented by force if necessary the Sharnars having come prepared with instruments of assault'.⁴⁶ Thereupon the missionary closed the doors of the church and left, leaving strict orders that the building should not be opened for services until further orders. Masilameni provided no further comment upon the incident except to say that it 'typifies the spirit of the Christians of South Travencore'.⁴⁷ Caste exclusiveness also led to a refusal by some Christians to permit Pariah⁴⁸ believers to enter their houses for cottage prayer meetings or weeknight preaching services. Still other Christians refused to eat on public occasions, or at Church festivals, simply because they or Europeans were present.⁴⁹ Some, according to Rajahgopal, 'did not scruple to assert that if the Saviour was in India and mingled with the lower classes they would refuse to eat with him'.⁵⁰ Jones did observe, however, that by the turn of the century this practice was becoming a 'diminishing evil'.⁵¹

The use of caste-titles when addressing congregation members was in common use. This was particularly the case in the publication of banns of marriage, where titles indicative of caste origin were used.⁵² It was in fact, said Jones, in relation to marriage customs that the most severe caste rules had 'been carried over bodily into Christianity'.⁵³ It regulated marriage arrangements to such a 'fatal extent', said Walker, that it was regarded by 'multitudes as almost a crime, not only to marry "out of caste" (as the world expresses it), but even to transgress the minute subdivisions of caste'.⁵⁴ It was, in fact, the 'marriage question'⁵⁵ that for many lay at the root of the whole issue of caste in p. 334 the Church. This was the case for Chinnial Eames, of the American Mudura Mission, who in an address given in Pasumelai, said, 'Once let there be free opportunity for intermarriage between those who originally came from different castes and the question will be practically solved. But,' he said, 'so long as the Christians determinelly [*sic*] and wilfully

⁴⁵ *Christian Patriot*, 24 July 1915.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ 'Pariah' was a term commonly used throughout the 19th Century to refer to those people considered outside the scope of the Hindu caste system. It is this same community that has also been spoken of as untouchable and outcaste. At the turn of the century the word Pariah was dropped in favour of 'Panchamas, or the fifth Section of Hindus' (*Christian Patriot*, 28 May 1896, p.4). It was Mahatma Gandhi, who, with political ends in view, designated the community 'Harijans' and it is this latter term by which the community is popularly known today.

⁴⁹ Burgess, *op. cit.*, p.300.

⁵⁰ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *op. cit.*, p.365.

⁵¹ Jones, *op cit.*, p.60.

⁵² *Proceedings of the CMS for Africa and the East. 96th Year, 1894-1895* (London: Church Missionary House, 1895), p. 196.

⁵³ Jones, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁴ T. Walker, 'Spiritual Life in the Indian Church', *HF* 13 (December 1902): 454.

⁵⁵ Quoted in *Christian Patriot*, 16 August 1902, p.5.

confine the marriage of their children to those of the same caste there can be but little advancement'.⁵⁶ Chinnial Eames did not of course advocate intermarriage simply for its own sake, but how often it was true, he noted,

that even amongst the best educated of the Native community, even among Pastors themselves, an opportunity to marry a son or daughter into a different caste is refused, even when marriage seems most desirable in every other way, and a marriage is contracted with another party most undesirable save that they belong to the same caste. A beautiful, bright, well-educated young girl is given in marriage to a worthless, ignorant and even dissolute man simply because he is of the same caste, or a young man, well educated, and of much promise is handicapped all his life by being united to an ignorant and careless wife.⁵⁷

Another manifestation of caste was exhibited by the unwillingness of some congregations 'to accept as catechists or pastors those who hail from a lower social Hindu stratum than their august selves'.⁵⁸ However, perhaps the most grievous demonstration of caste in the Church was the refusal by some 'to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with Christians who before their conversion to Christianity belonged to the pariah community'.⁵⁹ In 1877, Rev. Rajahgopal told of a whole village having been given careful training and instruction in the Christian faith and then who having been baptized 'declined to join in communion in order to escape the pollution of the one cup'.⁶⁰ In some situations two communion cups were used, Rajahgopal continued,

to preserve caste rules; and in some Churches where one is used, with the connivance of pastors, men of supposed high caste come in first, and then the lower castes. In other Churches, we are given to understand, the caste and non-caste communicants sit separately, a beadle walks with a stick p. 335 keeping the latter to their places, and preventing any approach to the higher-caste men, which would be pollution.⁶¹

Two years later, in 1879, Burgess confessed that formerly two cups had been used in Communion, one for caste members and one for non-caste. He hoped, however, that the time had passed when 'this sin of dividing Christ in His most affecting ordinance'⁶² would be tolerated. His wish was not granted. Twenty years later Sharrock told of communicants still being allowed to 'approach the Lord's Table in the order of caste'.⁶³ Then in 1908, in a paper, 'The Relation of Missions to National Customs; Especially Caste', Rev. John Lazarus of the Danish Mission referred to 'caste-folk' taking the Sacrament first 'followed by the non-caste communicants' in order that the former might 'avoid pollution through saliva'.⁶⁴ There were even cases when force was resorted to, in order that certain factions

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Jones, *op. cit.*, p.59. See also Sharrock, *op. cit.*, p.303.

⁵⁹ Burgess, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁰ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *loc. cit.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Sharrock, 'Caste Suppression', *op. cit.*, p.303.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Lazarus, quoted in *Christian Patriot*, 5 December 1908, p.5.

could uphold their conviction of not desiring to receive Communion together with Pariah Christians.⁶⁵

MISSIONARIES' DENOUNCEMENTS

Most missionaries and denominations denounced caste and tried 'as far as possible to ignore it in their work'.⁶⁶ For the founder of the Caste Suppression Society that was not enough.⁶⁷ The *Christian Patriot* agreed, and chastised mission societies for their inconsistency. As an example, the paper told of missions that avowed 'principles of entire hostility to the spirit of caste' and yet who continue to open 'Caste Girls' Schools' which carefully shut out pupils of supposed lower caste, and then to add further injury to the situation endeavoured to staff them with ' "caste Christians" alone'.⁶⁸ The *Patriot* was much more disturbed and outspoken however over the substance of a paper by Rev. H. Y. Corey, apparently first presented to a Conference of Canadian Baptist missionaries and later published in the *Baptist P. 336 Missionary Review*. Corey's thesis was that if caste was afforded the same degree of tolerance the Apostles accorded to Judaism and customs such as slavery it would go a long way to put the Christian Church in sympathetic relation with the people it wished to influence and save. 'This,' said the *Christian Patriot*, 'is a startling attitude for a Christian missionary to take up in the twentieth century.'⁶⁹ To declare that caste is opposed to Christ's express teaching on one hand and yet to allow it to remain on the other because it might bring the 'Church into closer relations with the heathen, is to go against the lessons of history. The Church,' said the editor, 'has always witnessed for a higher standard than prevails on earth.'

Once the Church tolerates or is indifferent to caste, the Hindu can well turn around and ask us wherein lies our vaunted superiority. 'How are you,' the social reformer may reasonably ask the Christian, 'any better than we? We stand for abolition [of caste] ... you are for compromise.' We [*Christian Patriot*] would rather as Pandita Ramabai says, have one real convert than make any compromise; for that compromise will defeat its own end.⁷⁰

That was not the end of it. A week later, in an article, 'Should Caste be Tolerated in the Indian Church?', the newspaper continued its criticism.

We are told that toleration of caste would result in a larger number of conversions from the higher classes. This is exactly what the Roman Catholics preach and practice; ... These converts are so much like Hindus that the Hindus themselves regard the change of faith as purely nominal.

Corey's position was declared to be 'in fact an apology for caste', and as such, marked a 'new departure in the attitude of Protestant Missionaries towards caste in India. We hope,'

⁶⁵ Four members of the Pursawalkam (*sic*) Church, in a letter to Rev. I. M. N. Schwarz, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Church Council, Tranquebar. Madras, 6 April 1883, LELM Packet 20, UTC. See also M. V. Samuel, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁶ Hibbert-Ware, *loc. cit.* See also *Christian Patriot*, 5 December 1908.

⁶⁷ Sharrock, 'Caste Suppression,' *loc. cit.*

⁶⁸ *Christian Patriot* quoted in 'Exchanges and Reviews', *BMR* 13 (February 1907): 87.

⁶⁹ *Christian Patriot*, 13 June 1903, p.4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

said the *Patriot*, 'that it is confined only to Mr. Corey and that he stands by himself in advocating lit].'⁷¹ The *Christian Patriot* was adamant. It was thoroughly convinced that 'from the point of view of the interests of the Kingdom of Christ ... [any] toleration of caste would spell nothing but corruption and shipreck [sic] to the Indian Church'.⁷² Rev. C. H. Monahan, of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission, was in full accord with the *Christian Patriot*. Any attempt to promote Christianity on the basis of lowering standards in respect to caste would, he said, 'be ridiculous p. 337 if it were not so sad ... [and] must ever prove as futile as it has done in the past.' Monahan's appeal was for 'True Christianity ... or none at all. If we have so little faith in our divine Mission as to think that undiluted Christianity cannot succeed in India at least let us have undiluted heathenism with its frank disavowal of the spiritual equality of men. But,' he pleaded, 'don't let us flood the country with a spurious imitation of Christianity.'⁷³

Nevertheless, perhaps prompted by Corey, others attempted to wrestle with issues related to Church order and caste. One such person was Rev. L. P. Larsen. He was of the opinion that perhaps missionaries had sometimes extended their condemnations to include situations that were in fact amoral. 'I do not think,' he said, 'we have any right to use Christ's name to legislate about the forms of men's social life where there is no moral issue involved.'⁷⁴ Then, in a very thought—provoking paper presented in 1906 to the Bangalore Missionary Conference, Rev. H. F. W. Lester, in treating what he perceived to be a real problem, took the position that as baptism broke caste and that if the Church did not 'assume what the country believes to be our obligations towards the baptized men, we are disgraced and our convert considers himself to be deceived.' If, on the other hand, the Church did make provision for the material wellbeing of its converts, 'we establish a principle which is unworkable and produces more harm than good'.⁷⁵ Lester declared that if baptism cut a convert off from his community and livelihood and developed in him any measure of dependence upon the Mission or Church it was on those grounds 'irresponsible'. He therefore went on to speak of an 'unbaptized Christianity' which although a compromise, represented, for him, a wiser course of action. 'I would just as soon see a man,' he said, 'in the house of Rimmon as lounging about my verandah.'⁷⁶

Maynard pursued Lester's line of argument and suggested the problem of caste in the Church was not only a negative one of how to oppose it but that it also had 'an even more far-reaching positive aspect—the whole relation of the Church to a highly organized civilization'. He did agree that caste was 'one of the great evils of Hindu society' but felt a need to acknowledge it to be a 'very p. 338 marvellous and in many ways successful form of social organization' which had become deeply embedded into the very fabric of Hindu society and therefore could not be dismissed summarily as an 'evil'.⁷⁷ As far as Maynard understood the situation it was the perception of both non-Christians and converts alike that the organized Church was just 'another caste' which differed from his own in many,

⁷¹ *Christian Patriot*, 20 June 1903, p.4.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ C. H. Monahan, 'Symposium on Caste', *BMR* (June 1903): 224.

⁷⁴ L. P. Larsen, *Ibid.*, p.223.

⁷⁵ H. F. W. Lester, 'A Missionary Problem' (a paper read before the Bangalore Missionary Conference, August 1906), *HF* 17, 9 (September 1906): 41.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.344.

⁷⁷ Maynard, 'Relations', *op. cit.*, p.448 f.

and perhaps superior ways, but which was practically speaking 'a society of the same nature'.⁷⁸ The upshot was that Maynard played down the importance of membership in any particular church. His opinion was that caste was in fact 'fostered by our church organizations, whenever those organizations harden into fetters instead of being the expression of the Spirit of God'. The Church, he said, 'exists for men not men for the Church.' Maynard was quick to agree however that for many the existing Church was a help and that 'so far as it helps, it is Christian' but that so far as it made 'external demands and does not supply spiritual needs, it is infected with the caste spirit, and is a hindrance to the cause of Christ'.⁷⁹ In January, 1907, the *Christian Patriot* responded to Lester and Maynard, whose papers had earlier been published in the *Harvest Field*. In justice to them, and others who held similar views, the *Patriot* admonished that they had not realized where the logic of their views was driving them. 'If it is true that caste is evil, antagonistic with [sic] the truths of Christianity and a great curse to the Church as well as to the individual believer who obeys it, then let us by all means oppose it, fight it, and use every means to root it out of the Church and the individual.'⁸⁰ If, on the other hand (quoting Lester and Maynard), caste 'gives a "moral rule of life," if "it is a civilizing influence" and "not wholly evil", then let us in every possible way yield to it, encourage it, conserve it, nay, preach it for the sake of its "moral" and "civilizing influence"!' 'Many an honest missionary and missionary society,' continues the article, had 'too often blundered to the detriment of the Church and its healthy growth'. In conclusion the *Christian Patriot* issued a warning. 'Missionary brethren,' it said, 'take your bearings, and realize which way you are drifting. Under the false notion that you are fighting this monster [caste], make sure that you are not keeping him alive.'⁸¹ p. 339

In contrast to all of this Elizabeth Hibbert-Ware took a somewhat unique and novel approach: namely, that caste was 'not the impenetrable barrier to the advance of Christianity that it [had] sometimes been supposed to be, but the vulnerable spot in the armour of Hinduism'.⁸² She therefore pleaded for the development of a strategy that attempted to discover within the caste system a certain integral weakness that could be exploited to the advantage of the expansions of the Kingdom of Christ in India. 'Caste,' she went on, 'may be the very means by which the Christian forces may find an entrance into the heart of Hinduism and finally overcome it.'⁸³ Hibbert-Ware understood large movements of people into the Church as being due to the collective decision-making process of whole caste groups. Such action was likely to lead a whole caste in a village to embrace Christ. But, she observed,

The movement will not stop here. The same caste people in neighbouring villages will be interested in the change made in the lives, status, education and marriageability of the new Christians. Therefore, they will also inquire about the new teaching; and if the first

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.456.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.458–459.

⁸⁰ *Christian Patriot*, 5 January 1907, p.5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Hibbert-Ware, *op. cit.*, p.431.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.427.

village is influential, the others who are related to it by blood and marriage are also likely to be drawn the same way.⁸⁴

There was unquestionably a considerable amount of attraction in Hibbert-Ware's proposition. In spite of that, it does not seem to have been seriously pursued; the burden of evidence would rather indicate a widespread rejection of, if not animosity towards, caste in the Church both among missionaries and Indian Christians alike.

Rev. John Lazarus had several suggestions, but above all approved of those who 'nipped caste in the bud', as he was convinced that the 'remedy must be applied at the very outset when a congregation is being gathered'.⁸⁵ Some therefore recommended that only those converts who renounced caste be considered for baptism.⁸⁶ Rajahgopal agreed, contending that 'baptism is the time to settle with a man whether he is to be a true Christian or not, and it should be laid down as a principle that he cannot come into the Church with the dirty rag of caste upon him'.⁸⁷ The difficulty, as far as Sharrock was concerned, p. 340 lay in the fact that too often converts entered the Church with such mixed motives and with only a vague idea of what Christianity meant. And, he felt, without 'any real *metanoia* (repentance)—any real change of heart'. Sharrock therefore reiterated what Rajahgopal had said, maintaining that 'we ought to be more strict in admitting [converts] by Holy Baptism' on the one hand and in exercising 'more discipline over those baptised' on the other.⁸⁸ It was further suggested that those who retained caste not be admitted to the Lord's Supper.⁸⁹ Moreover, Burgess advocated that such persons be excluded from all offices in the Church.⁹⁰ This latter position was confirmed with a Resolution drafted at the Fourth Decennial India Missionary Conference in 1902.⁹¹

In addition, Jones contended that the time had come for Missions to 'cease entirely' from regarding caste as a condition in the appointment of workers to particular congregations. Apparently this had been quite a widely known practice. 'Every mission agent,' he said, 'should be regarded as available for every post for which his training and piety qualify him, apart from consideration of caste.'⁹² Lazarus also argued that applicants for employment in the ministries of the Church should not even be asked about their caste previous to conversion and that all consideration for appointment and promotion 'must be based purely on merit and character'.⁹³

CHURCHES' ACTIONS AGAINST CASTE DISCRIMINATIONS

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.428.

⁸⁵ Lazarus, *Christian Patriot*, 5 December 1908, p.5.

⁸⁶ Gullison, 'Symposium', *op. cit.*, p.219 f.

⁸⁷ Rajahgopal, *Missionary Conference 1879*, p.319 f.

⁸⁸ Sharrock, 'Problems', *op. cit.*, p.2.

⁸⁹ Rajahgopal, 'Conference', p.310.

⁹⁰ Burgess, *loc. cit.*

⁹¹ *Report of the Fourth Decennial Indian Missionary Conference December 11th–18th 1902*. (Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1903): 27.

⁹² Jones, *op. cit.*, p.63.

⁹³ Lazarus, *loc. cit.*

In 1894, Bishop Gell of Madras, in a pastoral circular, prohibited the adding of social or religious titles to the names of parties when publishing banns of marriage.⁹⁴ Lazarus went a step further and recommended that besides marriage banns 'the retention of caste-titles in Church registers and records ... and other announcements, in Mission reports and all other documents should be forbidden'.⁹⁵ Others obviously felt more stringent measures were required and P. 341 suggested excommunication as a remedy, especially for those who, on the ground of caste, caused division in the Church.⁹⁶

It was apparent lack of brotherhood in the Church, or what Bishop Whitehead in 1905 referred to as the 'problem of unity', that would present the greatest challenge to the 'moral and spiritual progress of the Indian Church in the future'.⁹⁷ The danger, he warned, was not only that the Indian Church 'may perpetuate the divisions of Western Christendom, but that it may add to them a hundredfold by splitting up into an infinite number of Caste churches',⁹⁸ and in doing so 'substitute the spirit of caste for the spirit of brotherhood as the basis of the Christian society'.⁹⁹ Then, perhaps more in truth than presumption, Whitehead asserted, it was missionary influence that acted as a catalyst to hold the various caste groups in the church together; but that sooner or later the question would arise 'why different Castes should not have their own ecclesiastical organization'. He hoped 'that the very gravity of this danger' would compel the Indian Church to study seriously the subject 'of the unity of Christ's body as one of vital importance to its well being'.¹⁰⁰ The problem had already been understood by Jones to be one for the Indian Church to grapple with. But for him, more than its well-being was involved. Caste in the Church, he said, was a Goliath which threatened the community's integrity, if not its 'very existence as a Christian Church'.¹⁰¹

Later, in 1903, the *Christian Patriot* expressed the view that if a campaign against caste could only be 'guided and controlled by the spirit of Christ', and if people could be brought to see 'how repugnant and loathsome' caste was in relation to the mind of Christ, it was bound to be successful.¹⁰² After all, noted Monahan, it was a simple fact that there was no Church in which an outpouring of the Holy Spirit had not led to the breaking down of caste.¹⁰³ It was much more a personal issue, according to Rev. N. Gnanaprakasam, who, in an article published in 1918, noted that where one sees a really Christlike man, caste scruples are set aside in dealing with that man.¹⁰⁴ 'The one p. 342 and only remedy', then, for the caste problem, as well as for all other moral and spiritual ills of human nature was 'for us to learn Christ as depicted in the Gospels and in the Epistles and be transformed

⁹⁴ CMS Proceedings, 96th Year, 1894–1895.

⁹⁵ Lazarus, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁶ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *op. cit.*, p.370

⁹⁷ Henry Madras, 'Future', *op. cit.*, p.17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17 f.

¹⁰¹ Jones, *op. cit.* p.64.

¹⁰² *Christian Patriot*, 28 November 1903, p.5.

¹⁰³ Gullison, *op. cit.*, p.220.

¹⁰⁴ N. Gnanaprakasam, 'Christianity and Caste', *HF* 38 (August 1918): 297.

into His glorious image, advancing from glory to glory'.¹⁰⁵ Two years later, Rev. G. E. Phillips confessed it was unfortunate that caste had not been eradicated from every part of the Christian Church but that it was 'a discredited, defeated, and continually waning force' wherever the Church was living and strong.¹⁰⁶

Without doubt considerable progress had been accomplished. Transformation among believers was taking place. For this reason the *Christian Patriot* strongly objected to certain persons 'rising up and shouting that the Christian community is rotten to the core'. It pointed to the

hundreds of Christian men and women in whom conversion has effected a radical change of life ... [and who] by their ceaseless energy and by deeds of love—in one word by the living of out and out Christianity [had] shown that they are indeed the salt of India, living Apostles known and read of all men.¹⁰⁷

Rev. John Lazarus was one Indian pastor who lived in the confidence that the day would eventually come when there would no longer be caste in the Indian Church. He expressed his views, in 1909, in a paper in which he contemplated the development of the Church over the ensuing fifty years. 'In the future Indian Church,' Lazarus claimed,

the caste of character will have taken the place of the caste of birth. There will be no such distinctions as Brahman and Pariah, or Chetty and Chuckler. Such redundant affixes as Pillai and Iyer, Naidu and Nadar, will give place to a plain Mr. This mixture of castes, resulting from unrestricted inter-marriages, will ... produce a new race of Indians as remarkable for strength of intellect as robustness of physique.¹⁰⁸

Two generations later, all true believers are still anxious to see the dream of Lazarus fully realized. By contrast, it also seems that Rev. John Jones' turn-of-the-century hypothesis also remains valid; namely, that 'if missions had their existence to begin over again ... they would meet the caste system with a different determination and with a greater p. 343 vigilance and more whole-souled antagonism'.¹⁰⁹ It remains, then, for us, members of the contemporary Christian community, with the perspective of even greater experience and the present unparalleled opportunities for the Kingdom of God in India, to do the same.

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¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁰⁶ G. E. Phillips, 'The Contribution of Christianity to the New India', *TETW* 18 (April 1920): 161.

¹⁰⁷ *Christian Patriot*, 28 November 1895, p.6.

¹⁰⁸ J. Lazarus, 'The Future Indian Church', *HF* 20 (October 1909): 372.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *op. cit.*, p.62.