Chapter - VI

CONCLUSION
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Today the mission of the Church to Vidarbha and Marathwada regions is being realized in a new way. Deep transformations have taken place in the political, social, cultural, economic situation in these regions. The Catholic Missionaries contributions must be seen in the context of these developments. In the past, the western powers dominated the Church mission and vast opportunities were offered to her for expansion. Today the Catholic Church Missionary activities seems to be put on the defensive. The Church has to face the revival of Vidarbha and Marathwada regions who have been liberated from foreign rule, the renaissance of the ancient cultures and religions of the east, the ascendancy of Islam as a world power, secularizing influence approach to the problems of our society. How does the Catholic Church visualize and express her mission in this fast changing world?

This question is profound and has many dimensions. The Church has searched for a renewed understanding of her own life and her place in the society. The Church is not meant to dominate people. The Church is the pilgrim people of God with the message of God's love for
every human being, a visible sign of communion with God and unity among all human beings.

However, the actual realisation of this new approach, have still to be worked out. It will be different from place to place, country to country. Even within India we are faced with wide range of cultural, social and religious conditions, in rural and urban areas, among tribals, Hindus and Muslims. The same fate was of Vidarbha and Marathwada regions. The Catholic French St. Francis de Sales Missionaries who took the initiative in experimenting this new approach in our regions.1

At the arrival of the French Catholic Missionaries via Vishakapatnam to Kamptee and Nagpur, it was not an easy task for them to begin their missionary activities at once. They were faced with several problems, like language, climate, customs and traditions, etc. It was a gradual process of the missionaries that brought tremendous changes in the social, cultural, economic situation and political life of our people of these two regions.

The life of the common masses especially the Schedule Caste was in a pitiable condition. The then political situation was not very much sound. These people were looking out to liberate themselves from such
situation and constantly in search of some help. On the arrival of the foreign Catholic Missionaries the scope of their search strengthened. The Catholic Missionaries did pay a sympathetic approach towards them.

The French Catholic Missionaries started their services for the foreigners who were in British Government services at the initial stages. They built churches, regimental schools etc. for them. At the same time these missionaries turned their eye towards the neglected section of our Indian community. Boardings, village schools dispensaries, medical health camps etc. were organised in large numbers. The Indian neglected section of our society got in touch with missionaries. They found entry into schools and thus got the chance of experiencing the love of foreign missionaries.²

The effects of the mission activities:

In general the effects were very good. The goodness of the missionary activities was realized after some time. At the initial stages doubts were created in the mind of the people because of the French Missionaries. However, in the due course of time these doubts took a new turn. The selfless and dedicated services of the missionaries were appreciated and brought conviction to the people. They took shelter in them. They found out that some body is interested in
them. There came the changes, transformations in the very life of the neglected sections of community.

The majority of the programmes were organized for the upliftment of the poor sections of the society. They were given food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care etc. So many schools, boardings, hospitals, creches, home for the destitute, leprosy centres, technical institutions, place of worship, formal and non-formal training centres etc. were made available for our less fortunate brothers and sisters. All these programmes took momentum at the increase of Indian Catholic Missionaries, coming-out at the services of these people and replacing the foreign missionaries who carried this herculean task with fervent zeal and courage.

The work done by the missionaries in field of education and social upliftment is note worthy. Thousands of poor children have benefited from the services of the Catholic missionaries. The large number of pre-primary, primary, high schools opened at both rural and urban areas of Vidarbha and Marathwada regions has helped the people of all section of our society. Service is the motto of our great missionaries. Education is the third eye of the person. This third eye can be widened only through proper disciplined
education. The Catholic missionaries have succeeded in this task of giving good and standard education. People from all walks of life like to send their children to the missionary run institutions as they are convinced of the hard work and sincere efforts of the work of the missionaries. There are a few colleges where a large number of our students do their graduation in all three faculties, Arts, Science and Commerce. A number of students have come up in life due to our missionary run good institutions. The people have a great respect for our Catholic missionaries. The unwanted children are kept in our boardings, orphanages, hostels etc. and thus provide them a chance to receive education. Thus the missionaries have contributed their might in the formation of nation building. Today’s students are tomorrow’s nation builders. Therefore, it is a must to inculcate into the young mind a strong national feelings and their responsibility towards their country. Therefore, education by the missionary institutions has contributed to a great extent for the growth and development of our region, our state of Maharashtra and our country in general.

People are blessed with different talents. Our catholic missionaries have recognised these hidden talents in the young and given every encouragement and change to develop these hidden talents. If one has the
talents in technical line, such persons are chosen and directed them accordingly. Therefore, the Catholic missionaries have opened up technical schools in Vidarbha and Marathwada regions e.g. at Nagpur and Aurangabad.

The Catholic Missionaries have encouraged for the formal and non-formal education like tailoring, embroidery, welding etc. so that the drop outs from the schools get a change to earn their livelihood. Many have taken advantages of these services of the Catholic missionaries and come up in life. These non-formal training centre have been running in collaboration with that of State Government at times so that it get recognition and it will be job oriented.4

Thousands of our people in Vidarbha and Marathwada have benefited by the socio-economic services run by the Catholic missionaries. The food for work scheme provided by the Catholic relief service, New Delhi and Mumbai zone has helped thousands of marginal farmers either for the digging of a new well, deepening of their well, bundings around their fields or levelling of their fields for better harvest or yield. People work in their won fields and the Catholic relief service agency has paid them in kind so that they improve their fields and work hard for better crops. Thousands of poor
people who had no house of their own were helped by the same Catholic relief service scheme. Thus the missionaries have comforted the homeless with houses. The basic needs of humanity like clothing, food and shelter have been promptly provided by the missionaries until recent times. Such was the marvelous work done by the catholic missionaries at several places in Vidarbha and Marathwada. People have often admired the great concern of the missionaries for the poor and needy. The true love and concern must be proved in action and not by mere words. Seeing is believing and in such fashion the social work was carried on in our regions.

The mother and child programme was another type of programme being carried on for the benefit of poor women who can not afford to provide nutritious food for themselves and their children below 5 years. Such were taken into consideration and were helped by the missionaries so that both the mother and child maintain good health and thus avoid greater danger or diseases. This will help to build up a healthy family with energy and happiness.

That Catholic Missionaries to the cause of T.B. and lepers are also made a special mention. Due to the selfless services a large section of our people have got complete relief and they are working and earning their
livelhood as normal persons. The missionaries of charity have put up their camps at the services of lepers in various streets, they have washed their wounds and put medicines and educated the people how to prevent leprosy and the measures to be followed. Free medical camps have been organised and a large number of our people in Vidarbha and Marathwada region have become beneficiaries of the same services.

There are a number of hospitals were the catholic missionaries take care of the sick and the dying with great concern and love. The missionaries give comfort to the sick and the dying. Due to the high price of medicines on these days the poor people can not afford to go to a good hospital. Such deserving people are being treated in our missionary hospital. Our hospitals are always at the service of humanity without any caste or creed.

The effects of the home for the aged run by the catholic missionaries too speaks volumes of pages. The elderly and sickly people are literary lifted up from the streets and are given a chance in our home to die as a human being and not like an animal. This is greatest service that one can render to humanity in allowing the hopeless to die peacefully and reach back to God with human dignity and self-respect. Every person is
precious in the sight of God and all of us have a right to live as human being. Our less fortunate brothers and sisters are thus provided with such facilities in our Catholic missionary institutions.\(^5\)

So numerous are the effects of the sincere services of the Catholic missionaries both in the regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada. So, in conclusion, I would like to say that the contribution catholic missionaries to the shaping of the life of our people in Vidarbha and Marathwada in modern times has indeed been very impressive. They established schools and colleges, hospitals and dispensaries, orphanages and institutions for the maimed and the handicapped. They elevated the neglected class to high social positions and made them worthy of their dignity as men and inspired them with self-respect. They stimulated many religious and social reforms in Hindu society and made it self-conscious. They have helped in the elevation of the status of women by giving the lead in female education. The community centres and industrial schools opened by them are, like their other institutions, the best of their kind.

The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance, disease inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been
to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.⁵

If such work is indeed the touchstone of true service to our country, they the Catholic community is certainly engaged, in a very large measure, in the nation's most urgent and authentic task. By its social and humanitarian services to India's less fortunate millions without regard to caste, creed or community, by its deep involvement in the stark, existential life-reality of the poor, the destitute, the oppressed and the marginalised who constitute the vast majority, it prompt assistance at a basic human level in a era of felt need like Vidarbha and Marathwada regions and its compassionate presence at numerous bleeding points of Indian community exerts a beneficent influence in a mighty current in the national life.

"The Christian community in India is a minority so it is in Vidarbha and Marathwada. And yet its contribution towards the upliftment of our people stands out as a telling example of how a community, even if small in number, can do great and noble things. The people of our regions owe a great deal to their Catholic missionary brethren for their magnificent efforts in the field of education, health and general social

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development. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation of the valuable contribution of the Catholic Christian community has made to the rich mosaic of India's culture and to encourage them in their noble and selfless efforts".

Save for the handsome official tributes paid to it, why is that the Catholic Christian community is frequently portrayed in terms none too flattering? Why is that the community has been harshly vilified with scant respect for truth, as 'antinational' and even as a 'historical liability'? If one had to go by deeds and not words, then not only is the patriotism of this community to the Indian nation to none but the abundant evidence points to a community whose sublime ethos and splendid service makes it undoubtedly one of the regions and nations biggest and finest assets.7

Is the Catholic Christian community fated to be unjustly criticized and permanently maligned? Down the centuries Christians have been singled out for slander and often for persecutions. Even Christ, for all his noble deeds, was the target of malicious attacks by the Scribes and the Pharisees who pursued him with relentless rancour throughout his public ministry. And yet people flocked to him with the possessed, the paralysed, the blind and the lame whom he resorted to
physical and spiritual health. It is also probable that many of our fellow countrymen of other religious persuasions are not fully informed about the true role of Catholic Christians in India. In which case this little work might help to enlighten them.

A moment comes but rarely in the history of a people when its spirit yearns for utterance. This is such a moment in the history of Catholic Christian community in Vidarbha and Marathwada and India as a nation. With the utmost sincerity of purpose, the Catholic Christian community today humbly and earnestly desires to do for the emergent India of tomorrow even more than its forebears have done for the India of yeasteryear. But a new and strong India can never become a reality without a basic sense of unity and fraternity in the national larger community. In our times there is an emerging consciousness for a new humankind among members of diverse creeds. The unity of a heterogeneous nation like our regions would be best founded on fundamental loyalists that bind all together in terms of a common humanity which, after all, is the basis of all community. The substantial unity achieved today by the Catholic Christian community within its won ranks is as the symbol of this theses implies, only a preliminary step in a continuous endeavour towards communal harmony and national integration.8
For its vast and variegated contribution to the masses of our region there is a minimum that the catholic christian community could expect in return from a grateful state. A community that has served our state and Vindarbha and Marathwada regions out of all proportion to its members can legitimately expect to represented in any councils and be given a role in its affairs at least in proportion to its members. It would also behave public authority to ensure, in the interest of equality and fairplay, that a small, peaceful, disciplined and service oriented minority would have its understandable fears allayed, its fundamental rights safeguarded, its just demand conceded, its legitimate grievances redressed and the unfair discrimination practised against it in some respects ended.

So, the Catholic christian community today extends the hand of fraternal co-operation to all, with friendship towards all and ill-will towards none, in the interest of our nation, in the hope that the members of all communities will jointly, labour, inconcord and mutual respect, for the advancement of the commonwealth and the authentic progress of our renascent motherland.
FOOT NOTES AND REFERENCES:


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05. Ibid.

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08. The Catholic Church in India, Aloysius Soares. pp.238-239.