INTRODUCTION
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It is generally believed and sometimes alleged the Catholic missionaries have opened or established institutions only for the sake conversion of others to Christianity. In this research work, I have made an attempt for the removal of this wrong notion and critically examined the Catholic missionary institutions in Vidarbha and Marathwada in religious, economical, cultural, political, educational, medical and humanitarian fields. So vast and variegated is that Catholic missionaries contribution to Vidarbha and Marathwada that several volumes would be necessary to do justice to the subject.

It is universally accepted fact that of all the influences that promote culture or refinement in a people, the most vital is religion, since it permeates the spirit of men, transforming the exterior by first transforming the interior. The Catholic missionaries have played a fundamental role in moulding the thought and culture of India. Difference of opinion there may be over this issue, but none can deny that the Catholic missionaries have made a deep and indelible impression on the mind of the people of Vidarbha and Marathwada.1

In this connection, one can not help recalling to mind with profound reverence and grateful heart, the
service rendered to the land of Vidarbha and Marathwada by some of the great pioneers of Catholic missionary institutions like Fr. Ernest Thevenet, Fr. G. Jacquier, Fr. Marian Thomas, Fr. Sage, Fr. John Mary Girard, Fr. Patrick Wall, Fr. Joseph Raymond, Fr. John Thevenet, Fr. Balmand, the Bishops of Nagpur Archdiocese Msgr. Alexis Riccaz, Msgr. Charles Pelvat, Msgr. John Mary Crochet, Msgr. Stephen Bonaventure, Msgr. Francis Coppel, Msgr. Louis Gayet, Msgr. Eugene D'Souza, Msgr. Leonard Raymond and Archbishop Leobard D'Souza. The first Bishop of Amravati, Msgr. Rosario Joseph, msfs, the first Bishop of Aurangabad Rt. Rev. Dr. Dominic Abreo and the present Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Ignatius D'Cunha, are only a few of the more illustrious names among many, many more missionaries, past and present, whose number is legion and whose dedicated work for Vidarbha and Marathwada very often goes unheard, unhonoured and unsung. So exemplary has been the selflessness and so extraordinary the fervour of many of these missionaries that the phrase 'MISSIONARY ZEAL' has become a well-known and commonly employed expression.

The catholic missionaries have contributed more to Vidarbha and Marathwada welfare than all other agencies combined. The phenomenal success of the missionaries was largely due not only to the fact that many who professed the catholic faith practiced it in their
lives, but also to the power of the Christian ethic itself. To indicate how influential this ethic has been in life and thought, one must go back into history.²

It was the Christian ethical spirit that encouraged undoubtedly by support from the enlightened section of the non-Christians that placed on the statute book of India with a special reference to Vidarbha and Marathwada, measures of social reforms of far reaching import. The suppression of sati and the campaign against the thugs both had a distinctly humanitarian significance and were carried on in defiance of the legal sanction which they claimed. The reform of the India penal code, the abolition of slavery, the declaration of infanticide as murder, legislation affecting the age of consent in marriage and permitting widow re-marriage, the legislative action for the reformation of criminal tribes and for the humanitarian treatment of the lepers, lunatics and dump animals all were integral parts of the same movements and inspired by the same ethics.

Above all observes Charles Heimsath in his book "Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reforms" their spirit of unselfish and physical energy devoted to their work made the Catholic missionaries examples of the social welfare and social reform tradition in our
country. It is an historical fact that the examples and stimulus afforded to non-christians reformers by Catholic missionaries have exercised a strong influence on the life of the people of Vidarbha and Marathwada. These two regions social movement owes much to the revolutionizing influence of the Catholic social and charitable institutions. The lead that the missionaries gave to the people of our region for the emancipation of women is widely known. The Catholic missionaries work for the outcastes, scores, of excellent impression on the minds of people. The impression of Catholic charity to the downtrodden thereby created on the minds of people could be illustrated by many quotations of which one of the non-christian leader will suffice, "The heroism of arising the low form slough of degradation and debasement was an element unknown to ancient India. The action of the Catholic missionaries was an entirely original idea." 3

It is widely known that not only the modern social movement for social reform in India but the main modern movements for reform within hinduism were deeply influenced by Catholic missionaries. Ram Mohan Roy, the Father of modern India, considered christian ethics, especially as expressed in the sermon on the Mount, as the most important christian religious complement to Hindu spiritual experience. The ethical challenge of
the Catholic christian faith, the basic conviction is that of love of God must find its expression in the love for man, that good and bad are not totally relative, but related to the very structure of reality, has inspired many Hindus in the last hundred and fifty years.4

The message and examples of the Catholic missionaries did have for many Hindus the religious implication that every human being, as a child of God, has a right to be cared for by his brother in God. Bhakti poets and mystics in the middle ages may have taught the same that Hindus in our age rediscovered their teachings but it is equally true that it was under the christian inspiration that our non-christian brethren added to their contemporary understanding of religion this social and ethical dimension.

The life of Christ is regarded by those who know of it in our country as approaching the ideal and christian values and standards of conduct are given frank admiration. If men said a Government Minister "loved one another in the spirit in which Jesus Christ wished them to, they would evolve an ideal society." The occasional description of Mahatma Gandhi as Christ-like itself, an appreciation of the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Bible is studied and quoted, speeches, writing
and news papers articles show remarkable familiarity with its contents and there can be no doubt that there is general appreciation of the spiritual force of which christianity is the expression. No single individual perhaps has contributed more to the wise diffusion of christian thought than the Father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi. His developments and principles of Ahimsa as an active and not merely passive element in life, was due in considerable measures to the sermon on the Mount. The vivid sense of sin of the Mahatma, his faith in human nature when inspired by love, his recognition of the value of human soul, his insistence in practice and precept of the efficacy of suffering, show strong evidence of the Gospel meditation. It was christianity that fist attacked untouchability and the customs of Indian society. In this regard Mahatma Gandhi woe "my fierce hatred of child marriage, I gladly say is due to christian influence. Before I knew anything of christianity, I was an enemy of untouchability. My feelings gathered momentum owing to the fierce attack from Christian missionaries on this evil." 5

The recognition of the principle brotherhood of men under the fatherhood of God, the new conception of the truth and freedom of the individual and acknowledgment of the truth of the nobility of service to fellowmen, could be traced directly or indirectly to
the Christian missionary teaching and examples. Christianity certainly helped to spread the new doctrine of humanity, individual responsibility and social duty transcending the social group such as family and the caste.

Keeping in mind all these ideals, the Catholic missionaries established various types of institutions to reach out to the needy people of Vidarbha and Marathwada and did yeomen service to the downtrodden and contributed their might to eradicate the then existing social evils of the society. They also gave their might to eradicate illiteracy and remove poverty. The missionaries considered them as their less fortunate brethren. What they preached was put into practice by their very life style.

It is also noteworthy that fundamental political ideals have been enshrined in the Constitution of India. This Constitution has been predominantly modelled on the constitutions and traditions of western democracies which have been in turn considerably by the Christian humanism of the west. While it would be irrelevant, here, to examine the total inspiration drawn by western ideology from Christian thought, but may at least cite two or three prominent examples. In the middle ages the Catholic Christian missionaries vigorously advocated the
principle that all men are equal in the sight of God, especially because every human being has a principle of value, a spirit and this mattered more than rank, wealth or power. The universalist ethics of Christianity denied any difference between high and low, between race and ace, between freedom and slave. This not only provided the ideological bedrock of the political idea of equality, it gave a new sanction to the idea of brotherhood of man, and above all reinforced the principle of the intrinsic worth of personality. This principle in the end became the corner-stone of western democratic doctrine.6

The concept of secular state also has a basis in Catholic Christian thought, "render to Caesar the things which are Ceasar's and to God which are God's", became the concise and profound dictum of secular concept. Catholicism from its inception, has taught the basic dichotomy between the temporal and the spiritual. The realm of Ceasar and the realm of God respectively. This idea of Church-State separation from a christian point of view.7

Too subtle to be expressed precisely, the spiritual and ethical influences of Catholism are evident in India in multifarious respects. Its monastic idealism, captivating mysticism, the conception of Mary
as mother of God, have struck the deepest chords of the Indian religious sentiments. It is said for example that Ramakrishna Parahamsa went into a trance on seeing a picture of the Madonna. Christianity's stress on love and forgiveness, on meekness and humility on honesty and simplicity, sincerity in a world of insincerity and show, its ideals of truth in God, hope in death, love of labour and even more love of neighbour, have brought fundamental changes in Indian life and character so it is with the life of people of Vidarbha and Marathwada.8

L.S.S.O'Malley pays a handsome tribute to the influence of Christianity in India in his scholarly work named "Modern India and the West". His words deserve being quoted at some length: "Although the influence of modern India on the West has been comparatively slight, Western civilisation has made a deep impression on the life of Indian, social, religious, economic, political and cultural aspects. It is hard to distinguish the permanent content of that civilisation from temporary forms, but throughout the greater part of the world it may be said to connote three things namely the Christian ethic, the rule of law and the conquest of nature of science. The fist has been introduced in India and other parts of the world by the diffusion of Christian thought and a system of Government embodying Christian principles. The rule of Law which is itself infused by

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the Christian ethic, has been established and we have learnt that the weak have rights as well as the strong, that arbitrary force must give way to even justice, and that Government is bound by law as much as the private citizens. Law has become the basis of civilization to an extent to which there is no parallel in the previous history of India."\(^9\)

The people of Vidarbha and Marathwada who are the beneficiaries of the numerous established institutions of the Catholic missionaries in various forms and projects. The sincerity and hard work and the missionary zeal kept them always alive and active forgetting their own needs at times. A deep study has been made this respect dividing the work into chapter scheme in order to bring out the deep love and service of the great Catholic missionaries for the downtrodden and the common masses of Vidarbha and Marathwada. There are institutions both in urban and rural places. Their deep concern for the poor made them to open institutions in the interior villages which has helped the poor in transforming themselves and thus realising that they too are human beings, expressing heartfelt gratitude to the Catholic missionaries for leading them to light. Numerous are the beneficiaries of the Catholic institutions as they have come up in life and made tremendous progress.\(^{10}\)
As my chapter scheme is divided into six parts, I have made the research regionwise as per the initiative taken by the pioneering Catholic missionaries at several places in Vidarbha and Marathwada. The marvelous work done by them in the religious field bear witness today at various places when we see the strong and architectural churches that stand as huge monuments at Nagpur, Chanda, Amravati and Aurangabad where the heads of these four Catholic dioceses reside. I have brought to light the herculean efforts of some of the pioneering missionaries and the struggles that they had to undergo. Their missionary zeal and self sacrifice has been given prominence in my research work.

One of the chapter clearly deals with all the educational institutions run by the Catholic missionaries in Nagpur, Amravati and Aurangabad regions. This is an attempt to relate the life of the great missionaries to the people of Vidarbha and Marathwada with true sense of labour of love. I am however aware of the limitations of my endeavour to establish this relation of the Catholic missionaries and the life of the people. With a view to a more comprehensive study regarding the social, medical and humanitarian work also been attempted. I would invite comments and suggestion on this work. I would especially welcome suggestions on
aspects, activities, institutions and personalities of significance in the study of Catholic missionary institutions in Vidarbha and Marathwada.
FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES:


02. Ibid. pp.45-54.

03. Christian Community and the National Mainstream. Dr.Louis D'Silva, Mumbai. p.45.

04. Ibid. pp.46-47.

05. All India Seminar on the Church in India ii, CBCI Centre, New Delhi, 1969.

06. Ibid.


