

CALVARY BIBLE COLLEGE

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TOPIC: RE-AFFIRMING OUR IDENTITY AS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD TO THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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1. INTRODUCTION

A countless people had lived and died in this world. It is an undeniable fact that no one will stay forever here on this earth. Each of our ancestors or the people in the past had lived their lives in their own contemporary world. The way how they were living in their respective times would be so different comparing to as of now. As the time has changed gradually, the inclination of the traditions and ethos of the society also has changed time by time. The prevailing issues, ideas, evils, value systems, etc. of each contemporary society could be varied from one generation to another. One thing which is very clear is that from the first generation, the people have been facing some burning issues as well as prevailing evils in the society.

The trend of the society in which we are living now is also in a fusion state. We want justice and security, but we feel that injustice and insecurity are rampant everywhere. We are longing for peace and fraternity, but violence, hatred and discrimination among the people are still growing extensively. Amidst of all these situations, we, the Christians need to show our identity as “the light of the world” in order to bring the world into order as possible as we could. In this paper, I will try to bring the significance of light in the creation, and how we could become “the light of the world” in the midst of different scenario of our contemporary society.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIGHT

If we look at the very first page of our Holy Bible, we see this:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness (Gen. 1:1-4).

In this passage, we see a very significant thing in the creation of the light. In verse 2 we could see that the earth was formless and empty, also darkness covered the face of the deep. The Hebrew words use for *without form and void* is ‘*tohu wavohu*’ which means ‘*waste and void or total chaos.*’ There was nothing in it desirable to be seen, for it was *without form and void*. Confusion and emptiness; it was shapeless, it was useless, it was without inhabitants, without

ornaments, the shadow or tough draught of things to come, and not the image of the things. There was no true beauty to be seen in this earth. If there had been anything desirable to be seen, yet there was no light to see it by; for darkness, thick darkness was upon the face of the deep.¹

But in verse 3 we read that God said “let there be light, and there was light.” In another term this may also be understood as ‘Let there be order.’ Light serves as the symbol of good and the beautiful, of all that is positive. So, the creation of the light may be understood as God was putting everything into order out of chaos. Order began to appear and replace dark chaos.²

Light is necessary for making God’s creative works visible and life possible. In the Old Testament, light is also symbolic of life and blessing.³ God liberated the chaotic world and brought light and order, setting the universe in order, creating all other beings – living and non-living to inhabit the world and separated light from darkness.⁴ Now we understand that light is very important for the sustenance of every living thing. The light which is mentioned here is not a mere bright light (like stars or sunlight) which shines in the dark; rather it is an imperative which transform chaos, disorder, turmoil, confusion, etc., into order and meaningful existence.

3. WE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

We are now all familiar with Matthew 5:14 in which Jesus said, “Ye are the Light of the World.” Here Jesus said that we, the followers of Jesus Christ, are the instrument which could change the disorder civilization into the order one. He is expecting us to transform the setting of turmoil and confusion in our world into peaceful, cheerful and fine scenery.

There is a saying like this:

*Small people talk about people; Average people talk about events;
Great people talk about ideas, Genius people don’t talk, they act.*

We are not a *small people* who talk about the other people; their mistakes, their inequity or bad habits. We also know what is happening now in the world, different events in our daily life, let us just not speak about the events like *average people* do. It is also not enough just to have ideas to solve our problems like *great people*. We must be like a *genius people*, who act out. Our master Jesus already told us what we are, so we need to act out and re-affirm our

¹ Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 4.

² D.A Carson, et al., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (Secunderabad: OM Books, 2002), 60.

³ Edward E. Hindson and Daniel R. Mitchell, *Zondervan King James Version Commentary: Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 15.

⁴ R.L. Hnuni, *The People of God in the Old Testament* (New Delhi: Lakshi Publisher’s & Distributors, 2012), 158.

identity as *the light of the world* in this world, trying to bring an orderly existence in our contemporary society out of chaos and disorder situations.

4. SCENARIO OF OUR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

We could see many chaotic activities if we closely look the society in which we are living. Out of many problems and issues, let us take only five points for this time, such as: Globalization, Immorality, Division, Materialism, and Individualism.

4.1. Globalization

Wikipedia defines Globalization as ‘the process of integration across world-space arising from the interchange of world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture. Advances in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, including the rise of the telegraph and its posterity the Internet, are major factors in globalization, generating further interdependence of economic and cultural activities.’⁵ We cannot deny that we are living in a ‘*glocal*’ context where global and local are intertwined, what we are doing here is global as well as local. How the world has become interpenetrating can be exemplified by one definition:

*The English Princess with an Egyptian boyfriend crashes in a France tunnel, driving a German car with a Dutch Engine, driven by a Belgian who was drunk on Scottish whisky, followed closely by Italian paparazzi on Japanese motorcycles, treated by an American doctor using Brazilian medicine. This message was created by an Indian on a Chinese phone smuggled by a Pakistani.*⁶

On the one hand, *globalization* brings good impact as we can easily communicate and access news around the world in no time, we can sell and buy from our bedroom through internet marketing, we can chat with people all over the world by social networks such as Facebook, Whatsapp, WeChat, and the likes. Also the modes of transportation and availability of machines become easier and increase.

But on the other hand, this *globalization* has caused a growth of industrialization, an expansion of Multi-National Companies (MNCs), and increase of transportation systems, etc. It

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalization> (12.04.2014)

⁶ As quoted by L. Imsutoshi Jamir, “Globalization of Media Culture” in *Glocal in the Market Place: Theological Perspectives on Globalization* edited by Wati Longchar (Jorhat: South Asia Regional Solidarity Committee, 2011), 18.

has a negative impact on the environment, which we called ‘global warming’⁷, due to greenhouse gas emitted by industries, and by a heavy reliance on fossil fuels for transportation, deforestation for the site of industries, etc. We may live comfortably now, but we need to know that the more we advance in technology, the more we destroy our environment. This will bring difficulty to survive in our near future generations.

4.2 Immorality

Ever since God expelled Adam from the Garden of Eden, human beings continue to commit evil things in the sight of God. From the Bible, we can see the first acts of immorality were - envy, murder, lying, etc., from the story of Cain and Abel. Since then, the practice of different kinds of immorality has been going on till today. When we look around our surroundings, we may see that there are different kinds of prevailing immorality in our society.

As the communication, transportation and information technology are advancing day by day, so is the crime, naughtiness and embarrassment. If we look at the news, we see that murder, robbery, revenge, violence, cheating, etc., occupy the main headlines, and we almost regard these things as usual. We can also see the proliferation of drug abuse, alcoholism, sexual immorality, abortion, misuse of technology, net-crime, etc., just outside our doorsteps. We cannot stop these immoral acts no matter how hard we try, because we are now living in a world where Satan is executing his power. It will increase day by day until the end of the days.

4.3. Division

India, being the country of unity in diversity, has been accommodating diversified citizens belonging to different religious communities, tribes, ethnic groups, and communities; and her constitution has provided freedom to all the citizens irrespective of their faith, colour, gender, socio-economic status and positions. But, division occupies a wide space in our contemporary society. We can see different kinds of division and discrimination as follow.

4.3.1. Religious Fanaticism: No religion teaches hatred and conflict; rather they all expound about peace and fraternity. But what they propagate and what happen in reality is so different. Some religious leaders try to spread their own belief and reject other faiths. The Hindu

⁷ Global warming is the term used to describe a gradual increase in the average temperature of the Earth’s atmosphere and its oceans. It has resulted in increases of sea levels as ice sheets and glaciers melt which has an extensive impact on biodiversity and weather systems. Average global temperatures have risen approximately 0.6°C since the late 19th century (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global-warming>).

leaders try to make India as 'the land of Hindu' (*Hindutva*), culturally, traditionally, and religiously. In the meantime, the Muslim people do not deny to kill and to be killed in defense of their belief. Even in the dominion of Christianity, there are different kinds of denomination. And each denomination has its own tradition and doctrine.

4.3.2. Racial Discrimination: If we look wider, we can see that racial discrimination is still rampant in many places. The weaker race or section of the community are being despised and mocked by the strong and large ones. Some people are rejected and excluded because of the colour of their skin, the accent of their speaking, the choice of their dress, and the habits of their food. This brings about communal division and enmity among the races.

4.3.3. Gender Discrimination: The program of uplifting the status of women has been implemented since a few years back, and is still going on in our country. But in many places, the position and status of women is still unfavorable. They are still regarded as mere living assets or movable property. They are given a less chance in the decision making level. They are controlled and oppressed by men in the family and the society for the sake of being patriarchal society.

4.3.4. Discrimination of Unprivileged People: In our present society, there are lots of drug / alcohol addict, people with a poor family background, victim of HIV-AIDS and other chronic diseases, person with disability, orphan, widow, etc., who could not attain their afforded position, because they are underprivileged. They have capability and energy to reach their place if they were privileged. But they do not have a chance because of their positions, because they are discriminated and looked down in the society. Meanwhile, the so called fortunate people are getting a chance to hold a position, obtain a wealth, and acquire a good name. We cannot deny this fact.

4.3.5. Status Difference: There is a big gap between the rich and the poor; the dominant group and the dominated group of the society. While the rich could get and enjoy anything they like, there are 21,000 children (below 5 years of age) die every day around the world because of poverty.⁸ The rich get richer and try to hold all power into their own hands while on the other side the poor get poorer and poorer. Since there are a lot of difference in the lifestyle, outlook, choice, dress, taste, and enjoyment between the haves and have not, it is very hard to cope together in many ways. The poor hesitate and feel uneasy to stay close with the rich people, at the same time the rich people prefer to make friends from their equal status. This difference in status has affected the community life, even the life of the church.

⁸ <http://www.globalissues.org/children-died-around-the-world> (15.04.2014).

4.3.6. Nepotism: When there is a chance of applying a seat, job or post in the academy, firm, or government office, partiality in selection is prevalent everywhere. Close relatives of the selecting authority are likely to have a good chance than the others because of favoritism. In some places, bribery and corruption are found. The ones who can pay bribe have a good chance even though they are not eligible for the post or seat. This nepotism or favoritism brings about unemployment for the qualified persons. It is an open secret that the rich people used to invest huge amount of money to the political parties especially during the time of election and the winning party in return used to repay them by means of devising ways and means by which those people will be benefited.

4.4. Materialism and Consumerism

Materialism is a way of thinking that gives too much importance to material possessions rather than to spiritual or intellectual things.⁹ It is a theory or attitude that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life.¹⁰ Consumerism is a social and economic order and ideology that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-greater amounts.¹¹ Consumerism causes a materialistic belief that the more materials acquired the better, implying an increased value placed on material possessions.¹² We live in a society that promotes materialism and consumerism. We envy our neighbours and we want to have what other people have even we do not afford them. People are buying what they want or desire, not what they need.

Most of today's youth are driven mad by the lifestyle created by globalization forces. They are very conscious about their figure and beauty. Many of us are crazy about what is advertised as fashion. When the new model of electronic gadgets and fashion are coming up, they want to have the latest one, not because they need them, but because they want to be a person who owns that latest model. They think that the honour and respect lie on possession of materials with a high price. They are conscious of the price, not the reliability or helpful of the things, they become a price tag person. Even in the church, many people try to show off their new designed fashion, they only try to catch the eyes of others. These beget a fake life and a nominal Christians.

4.5. Individualism

Nowadays, individualism or egoism occupies a broad place in our society. Individualism regards man—every man—as an independent, sovereign entity who possesses an inalienable

⁹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/materialism> (12.04.2014).

¹⁰ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/materialism> (15.04.2014).

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consumerism> (12.04.2014).

¹² <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/consumerism.asp> (12.04.2014).

right to his own life, a right derived from his nature as a rational being.¹³ It is the pursuit of individual rather than common or collective interests. It is the doctrine or belief that all actions are determined by the benefit of the individual, not of society as a whole.¹⁴

We began to think only ourselves individually. We give more concern to our private matters rather than society. We are all busy after our own occupation. We seldom visit our neighbours unless we have a particular reason to see them for our job or for our own benefit. In the cities, people do not know who are living in their next door. People are satisfied when their personal desire was accomplished. They just follow what their hearts say is right. They think that they do not need other people, even God. Many youth wear any dress, eat and drink whichever they desired to, go and explore whatever they like, live whatever lifestyle they chose. They don't care about what other people would think of them.

5. RE-AFFIRMING OUR IDENTITY AS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

As we mentioned earlier, God made light to shine in the darkness, God made order out of chaos and disorder. And when God came into the world in flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, he said to his disciples, "You are the light of the world." So, we, the followers of Jesus Christ, are meant to bring order in the midst of confusion and turmoil world, because we are the light of the world, it is our identity. So, we need to re-affirm this identity and other people must see in us the true image of Jesus who brings peace, joy, salvation, love, and fraternity among human beings in the confusion world.

Now let us see how we could affirm our identity as the light of the world into our contemporary society.

5.1. Light of the World in the Intrusion of Globalization

The Christians cannot be left in the intrusion of globalization, because we all the people are living under the same sun. But we can still show our identity as a light in this globalized world. Many people misuse the advantages of the developed information technology; but, as the light of the world, we must utilize these tools, machines, technology, etc. in a good manner.

We must not let the newly developed technology, enjoyment, and allurements, control ourselves. Many people are chained by social networking; they give their more time for this without any reason. We must use these things for reasons. We must let the other people know that we are the followers of Jesus Christ through our status, photos, comments, and link which

¹³ <http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/individualism.html> (15.04.2014).

¹⁴ www.thefreedictionary.com/individualism (15.04.2014).

we posted in the Facebook or the likes. We must use these things for spreading the Good News directly or indirectly.

Because of this globalization, we can easily see, hear, and get what the other part of the world can. There are many bad things and practices which are very easy to imitate. At the same time, there may be some new respectable and good insights from their traditions and practices which we have never know before. We need to learn how to differentiate those things. We must copy and adapt with those good manners, we must not just copy their dress tradition or lifestyle of the other side of the world, but we must copy their cleanliness, dignity, diligence, respectful, determination, etc. We also must show and propagate our good practices and culture to the others.

As the globalization brings disorder world in the form of global warming, there cannot be a proper climate and season like decades ago. We need to take a care for our next generations. Unless we have a concern for them, their world will be worse than of today, their lives would be in more chaos than us. What we can do now is to preserve our natural resources and afforestation. We must be careful in disposing our waste, such as plastics, filthy water, garbage, unwanted materials, etc., so that other people may imitate us and do the same. Then, we could be the light of the world in arranging our world in a proper manner again.

5.2. Light of the World in the Midst of Immorality

As a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ, we may be isolated from the practices of murder, cheating, envy, robbery, violence, corruption, drug abuse, alcoholism, sexual immorality, abortion, misuse of technology, etc. But it is not enough just to be detached from those things. Since we are the light of the world, we have a duty to shine in the midst of different kinds of those immoral practices. It may be very hard or impossible to abolish all those things. But we can do something, that is, to reduce those things by preventing those who practice, and to show them a right way for their future life. We then must try to bring the good news to them.

First of all, we need to understand them. It is not wise to blame and despise them without knowing or investigating their problems, backgrounds, situations, etc. Many people do evil things because their situations compel them to do. Secondly, we must make ourselves available for them. They need someone whom they could trust and share their problems to. So, we need to make ourselves acquaintance with them. Then, we need to work hard and contribute for them in order that they might be freed from those practices. What we can do may be very little, but our prayer for them and show sympathy for them can do a big thing. They need to know that God still loves them even they had committed evil things; it is our duty to tell them. Then, we shall impart to them that those evil practices only bring problems and turmoil our society, if we all are freed from those practices, we can make our world into a better place.

5.3. Light of the World in the Dominion of Division

In the world of division, we, the Christians, need to show our identity as the light of the world. Because of division in different ways, our world has been cracked into many pieces; it brings our world into a disorder world.

In our contemporary world, where religious fanaticism is prevalent, we, first of all, need to find how to live peaceable with people of other faiths. We need to put more and more emphasis on practical Christian life, Christ-like life, in all places where we work together with them at all levels and corners of our contact with them.

Secondly, we must do away with racial discrimination, because this racial discrimination only brings hatred and conflict among the human beings. We need to propagate more and more that all human beings are made in the image of God. No particular race or tribe is valuable in the sight of our God; we are all equal irrespective of our skin colour, language, culture and traditions.

Thirdly, we need to pay more attention to gender discrimination. In many places, women are given less opportunity in the job, decision making authority, etc., and they are used merely as movable property because they are women. Since this can bring an unequal distribution of justice, we need to reconsider this issue deeper. Paul tells us that there is no division between men and women, since all human beings are equal in Christ.¹⁵ So, as a Christians, we must give effort to stop harassing women, and try to uplift their status more stable.

For the fourth point, we must show our light to the unprivileged people. They need to live peaceable with us. But if we do not show our love and acceptance to them, they may easily feel that they are stigmatized in the society. We must help, encourage and uplift the addicted persons, victim of HIV-AIDS and other chronic diseases, person with disability, orphan, widow, etc., and show them that they have a place in the church and in the society. Our hands must be ever ready to reach them.

For the next point, we must not encourage to create a gap between the rich and the poor; the dominant group and the dominated group of the society. We have to give the same attention to everyone. In some churches, people hesitate to come to the church because they do not have good clothes to wear. We must keep in mind that wearing expensive dresses can repel other people. As the future minister of the church, it will be very easy to give more concerns to the haves and neglect the haves not. But we need to show our light alike to each one of them irrespective of their status or possessions.

We also need to resist the practice of favoritism in any stream. We need to raise our voice for the eradication of these practices. Those who are eligible for the job, seat or post must be selected fairly according to the conditions laid down by the selecting authorities, not because

¹⁵ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatian 3: 28).

they are the relatives of the authorities. The rampant practices of bribery and corruption also could be exterminated if we work together with the same mind. Knowing that the truth prevails, we need to expose the truth at any price. So, we would be able to make this broken division world into an order place again.

5.4. Light of the World in the Interference of Materialism and Consumerism

Our Lord Jesus Christ never lived expensively. He even did not allow his disciples to live expensively in their ministry.¹⁶ Paul also said that he knew how to be contended in whatsoever position he might be.¹⁷ As a follower of Christ, we must live humbly and we must be satisfied with what we got from God. We need to preach that the richness and wealth do not lie in the materials and gadgets we possess, but in the inclination of our heart. And the beauty does not lie in the fashions, makeup and accessories we wear, but in our characters.

So, we must try to be contended in our belongings, we must show other people our true beauty which is not depend on the latest fashion or developed materials. We must buy what we need, not what we want. We must teach other to live according to one's income. We must not long for the worldly riches, fame or allurements. For Jesus himself said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6: 19-20).

5.5. Light of the World in the Disruption of Individualism

In the world of individualism, we often neglect the feeling of other people along with their opinion. Paul says, "*Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men*" (2 Cor. 8: 21). He encouraged us to live honestly with others. So, we also need to pay attention to the feelings and opinions of the others. Since human beings are a social being, we cannot survive alone; we all need each other for the sustenance of our lives. We are supposed to live, share, help, encourage, and co-operate with one another as a community. Individual person is like an angel with only one wing, he cannot fly alone, and he needs to hug other so as to have two wings and then could fly.

¹⁶ In Matthew 10:9-10, Jesus said, "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat."

¹⁷ In his letter to the Philippians, he said, "for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11-12).

As a light of the world, we have a duty to build a good rapport and establish a strong connection with our neighbours and friends. We must not be just satisfied when our personal desire is accomplished. We need to consider whether we hurt someone's feeling by our words and deeds or not. In his letter to the Corinthians, we can see how Paul cared for the others; he promised not to eat meat since it can hurt the feeling of the others,¹⁸ while he could eat meat if he cared only himself and neglected the others, since it did destroy the work of God.¹⁹ So, we must open ourselves to others; caring them, helping them, encouraging them, sharing our joy and sorrow with them. Then they could witness that we are the light of the world.

6. CONCLUSION

Now we come to know the different kinds of issues prevailing in our contemporary society. What we can do may be less in order to set our society into order, yet we must continue to fulfill our duty, reaffirming our identity as the light of the world. God is expecting us that others could see in us the like-life of Jesus Christ; the creator of everything and who wants his creations to be in order. It may not be possible for us to show our identity as the light of the world in all the disorder situations which we have mentioned above. Of course, we are imperfect human beings. But each of us has at least one strong point, uniqueness, and talent to change our non-arranged society into a systematic society.

To conclude, let us remember that we are the followers of Jesus Christ, who affirmed our identity as the Light of the World. And let us now re-affirm this identity in our contemporary society, so that we could bring peace, justice, love, unity, fraternity and cheerfulness in our globalized world, where immorality, division, materialism and individualism are rampant.

Points to discuss:

1. What are the other issues which make our society disorder?
2. How can the church perform equality among the congregation in the intrusion of division?
3. In what ways can we be a light for the others inside our CBC community?
4. Discuss how globalization is helpful and, at the same time, harmful for us.
5. Discuss more how materialism could affect the life of Christians.

¹⁸ In 1 Cor. 8: 13, he says, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

¹⁹ Paul says, "For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Romans 14: 20-21).