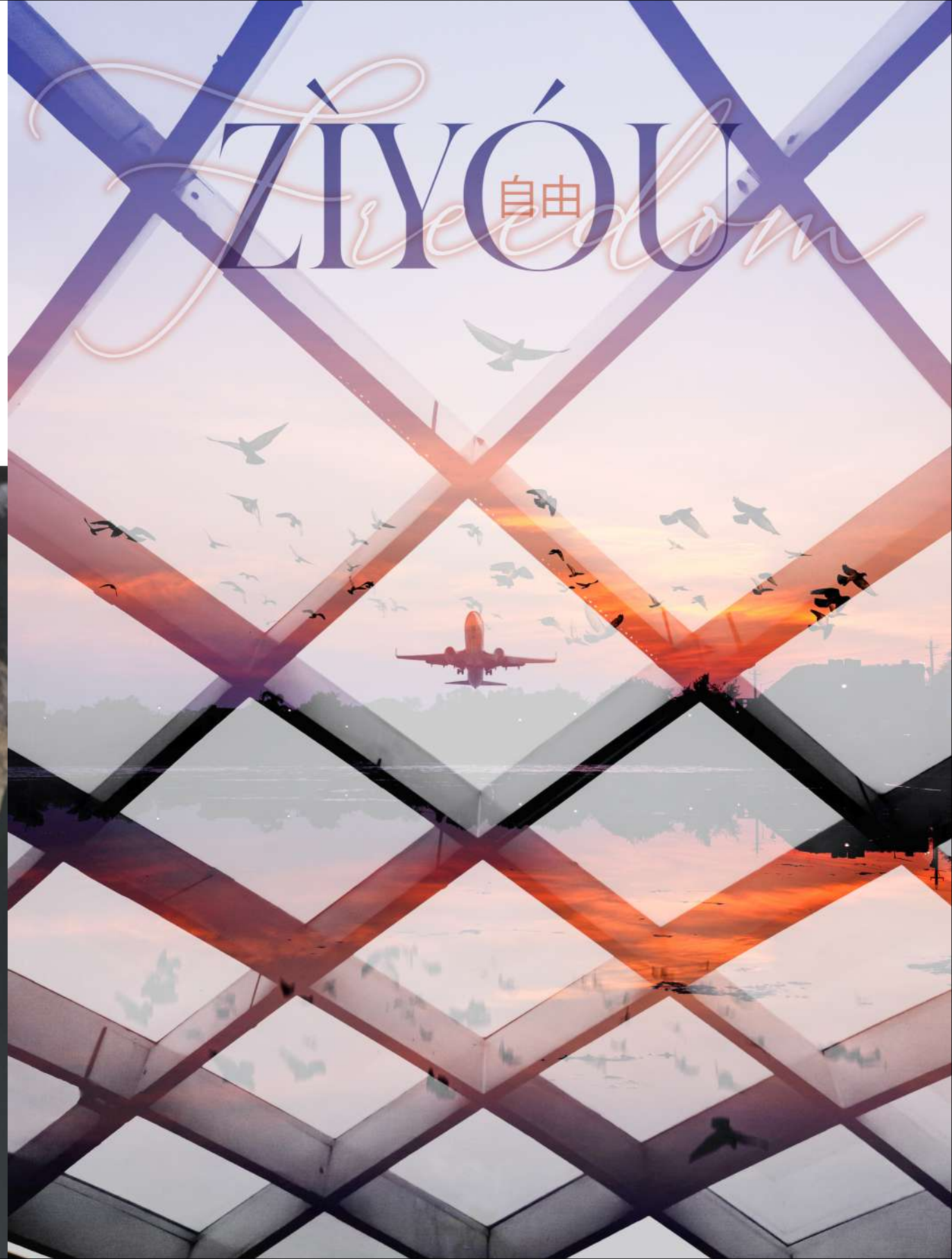


"I (will) not go
to heaven
because I am a
preacher. I am
going to heaven
entirely on the
merit of the
work of Christ."
Billy Graham

Chosen
to be *free*
GALATIANS 5:13





INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN PANAMA

The indigenous peoples of Abya Yala in Panama have lived in the territories for hundreds of years. The indigenous nations that fall within the more recent territorial designation of Panama include the Gunadule, Emberá, Wounaan, Buglé, Ngäbe, Naso, and Bri Bri. With their strength, knowledge, work, art, food sources, resistance, and insurrection, they have marked their path in this country. The path has not been easy; it has come at the high cost of the lives of thousands of indigenous brothers and sisters. Their cosmogony, based on spirituality nurtured by an understanding of the land and our relationship to it, has given us a country that has set aside areas for conservation. For example, in 1981, the Darién region of Panama was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and in 1983 was named a World Biosphere Reserve. A great biodiversity of plants, trees, and animals is conserved in indigenous territories. This biodiversity encompasses plant genes, seeds, and

brief reflections on Ancestral Memory & Creation
JOCABED REINA SOLANO MISELIS

wisdom that contribute to the life and heart of what Panama is but which so often goes unrecognized by the Panamanian mestizos who are out of touch with the memories of the people groups whose struggle to survive is informed by their indigenous identity. Panama's indigenous communities have been tending to, preserving, and relating to the land with love and respect for centuries. Yet our Christian churches throughout Panama demonstrate a malnourished theology of creation. Preserving the biodiversity of our plants, trees, animals, and the birds that migrate to Panama every year should flow out of a robust theology of what abundant life means. This



The church would greatly benefit from listening to our indigenous communities

abundant life shows us we are part of creation and thus allows us to incarnate our vocation as responsible caretakers of what God has made. The church in Panama has the challenging opportunity to follow Jesus's model of embrace, hospitality, justice, and active compassion in so many realms. In this endeavor, the church would greatly benefit from listening to our indigenous communities. While there is diversity between indigenous communities and practices in Panama, indigenous groups generally offer a holistic understanding of community in terms of social and cosmic milieu. That is, all living beings are mutually interdependent. This concept offers a way of approaching social relationships that is in stark contrast to the capitalistic modes that dominate relationships in the globalized world today: modes marked by utilitarianism, individualism, consumerism, patriarchy, and ruthless competition. Sadly, these same traits are all too apparent within the Panamanian Christian church. Indigenous voices hold out a way of understanding the encounters between cultures (or

between any subject & an **other**) that is not based on a colonial mindset. Instead, indigenous cultures generally reflect the New Testament commitment to life together in a way that values plurality and diversity.

Learning from the convergence of the various people groups living in Panama—including indigenous communities, Chinese, Indians, Italians, Jews, Venezuelans, Colombians, Nicaraguans, Spaniards, Greeks, US Americans, peoples of African descent, mestizos, and others—compels us in the Christian faith to work together on intercultural projects that build bridges of reconciliation, life, and justice in Panama. The church in Panama could offer so much if it began to work from a place of mutual epistemological respect and wisdom and in favor of society's disadvantaged members. The church could articulate, create, and be involved in public policies that nurture a thriving life together in the country. Evangelicals have the opportunity to offer grounded, interdisciplinary, and practical proposals for the

grievous problems our country faces. Thus they could participate in Jesus's narrative of reconciliation through extending his love and abundant life to all his creation.



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christian persecution in NIGERIA



Persecution is a global reality that affects nations in diverse ways. It reveals the nature of the human heart being "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Just like sin is a matter of the heart, so also persecution is a matter of the heart that is by nature 'desperately wicked' which can incite persecution against others in inhumane ways.

Persecution is "hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of race or political or religious beliefs; oppression." Also, "persecution is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group by another individual or group. The most common forms are religious persecution, racism, and political persecution, though there is naturally some overlap between these terms. The inflicting of suffering, harassment, imprisonment, internment, fear or pain are all factors

that may establish persecution, but not all suffering will necessarily establish persecution."

"Religious persecution is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or a group of individuals as a response to their religious beliefs or affiliations or their lack thereof. The tendency of societies or groups within societies to alienate or repress different subcultures is a recurrent theme in human history. Moreover, because a person's religion often determines their sense of morality, worldview, self-image, attitudes towards others, and overall personal identity to a significant extent, religious differences can be significant cultural, personal, and social factors."

Furthermore, to look at the nature of persecution of Christians as a form of religious persecution that is against the truth. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. This implies that persecution of Christians is fundamentally founded on lies, deceit, falsehood, and works of darkness perpetrated by the devil, demons, and unbelievers against Christians who have the truth and light, Jesus Christ. "Christian persecution is any hostility, experienced from the world, because of one's identification with Jesus Christ. This can include hostile feelings, attitudes, words and actions. But what does the Bible mean by the word "persecution"? In Matthew 5:10-12, Jesus says in the Beatitudes that persecution is a blessing. Not one that many of us ever desire!"

Christian persecutions are in varied forms "from verbal harassment to hostile feelings, attitudes, and actions, Christians in areas with severe religious restrictions pay a heavy price for their faith. Beatings, physical torture, confinement, isolation, rape, severe punishment, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in education and employment, and even death are just a few forms of persecution they experience on a daily basis."

Open Doors aptly described the nature of persecution of Christians in Nigeria, thus: "Persecution in Nigeria is, simply put, brutally violent. In much of northern Nigeria, Christians live their lives under the constant threat of attack from Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Fulani militants and criminals who kidnap and murder with few consequences. While all citizens of northern Nigeria are subject to threats and violence, Christians are often specifically targeted because of their faith—ISWAP and Boko Haram want to eliminate the Christian presence in Nigeria, and Muslim Fulani militants attack Christian villages specifically. In addition to the violence risks, Christians in some of Nigeria's northern states also live under Shariah law, where they face discrimination and treatment as second-class citizens. Christians who convert from Islam also face rejection from their families, often pressured to recant their faith in Jesus; sometimes, they are even violently attacked."

The growth of the Church in Nigeria accounted for the increase of persecution across the nation, especially in the North with heartbreaking intensity which included: kidnapping, rape, murder, land grabbing, deprivation, oppression, marginalization, and unimaginable inhumane actions being perpetrated by unbelievers especially, Islamic fundamentalists. The attacks are virtually experienced in almost every aspect of the society at homes, schools, markets, churches, and wherever Christians gathered to worship or do business. They were cases of suicide bombers and false security personnel.

However, nothing can separate the Church in Nigeria from the love of God in Christ, Jesus. We are encouraged by the fact that precious in the eyes of the Lord is the dead of His saints. Therefore, the Word of God has been a beacon of hope for us and will always be our anchor that

is sure and steadfast. "But if anyone suffers [ill-treatment] as a Christian [because of his belief], he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God [because he is considered worthy to suffer] in this name."

Hence, Christian persecution in Nigeria is a reality that we live with because we know who has the power of the dead and life. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof and this includes Nigeria. "If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." This verse accounts for the heroic stories of believers that were martyred in Nigeria because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Just like Stephen, heaven opened to welcome them home.

The church in Nigeria has a builder, his name is Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. "Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means **rock**), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." Thank you.

Lungfa Maikarfi, is a missionary called to advance the cause of the Gospel as a missions mobilizer and Oral Bible Translation advocate based in Jos, Nigeria.



GOD

the creator of languages



It was my long-time desire to see the Word of God in the heart language of the Veddahs, the Aborigines of Sri Lanka. The thoughts mentioned below popped up in my mind as I was getting involved in the project of translating the God's word into Vedi Basha, the language of Veddahs, in Sri Lanka. There was a huge question among other language speakers in the country, of whether it was necessary to spend time and money on this project which would only benefit a miniscule minority in the country. As I was getting enthusiastic on this beautiful work, I was praying over the questions when God gave me few thoughts which I am sharing with you here.

The Contemporary English Version states in Genesis 11:7, "Come on! Let us go down and confuse them by making them speak different languages—then they will not be able to understand each other." This passage is something we all knew. God in His Sovereign mind saw that these people who gathered in the Shinar plateau are going nowhere and getting too much obsessed about their capacity. He made sure that they lost their understanding of each other which gave a complete halt to the construction project of Tower of Babel.

Alfredo Trombetti, the Italian Linguist in his Proto-World theory though contended by few explains that all languages go back to the same root. The proto-linguistic scholars such as David Shulman, MaSo Victor go even a step further. Though they contradict on the geographical place of origin, they even point the name of the first language. This again subscribes to the fact that there was a single language until the Babel construction. And who would have spoken or taught the first language – God himself to Adam right?

Now, coming back to the tower of Babel event, we see that, it is God again who has created many languages. In other words, it was the will of the Lord to have many languages. We read in Revelations 5:9, Everyone was there—all nations and tribes, all races, and languages (MSG). It means, people of all languages are there in Heaven, and not just from the tribe of Judah or Rome, the seat of the first and third century Christianity, respectively. If

Heaven's praise is multi-cultural and multilinguistic, I would imagine that God is enjoying the diverse linguistic world too.

If God is interested in multi linguistic community, it is not a rocket science to figure out, who would be interested in bringing people under one language policy, be it in state, province, or in nation. Infact all the political boundaries are manmade boundaries, and nothing is permanent as we see in history. But then, let us remember that language is God made. I believe we cannot compromise something that is God made for a man-made stuff.

Let me make it clear, I am not saying do not be patriotic, as Christians, we need to obey our authorities and I do not have second thought on that. However, in many countries, I see language impositions under the guise of patriotism, invisibly erasing the diversity God has created. Even Christian missions in many countries, due to ease or under the guise of peace initiatives, multi linguistic programs are discouraged.

God – the Language Recognizer
Many of us focus the words Jesus spoke on the cross. There are several other things that happened in that Calvary. One of the things that caught my attention was the board that was hung on the cross. John 19:19 says, "Pilate ordered the charge against Jesus to be written on a board and put above the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The words were written in

Hebrew, Latin, and Greek." (CEV). This was a declaration of who Jesus was but then why a trilingual board?

We need to understand the political background of Judea for that. The kingdom of Judea was in political crossroads. Judea repeatedly being captured by foreign nations, until Greek capture, had the flexibility of retaining its language and culture as Babylon, Persia, Syria, or Egypt were mono cultural. It was enough for Jews to learn one more language to interact with them. However, the story of Greek invasion was different. It spread all the way up to Indus valley (present day Pakistan) and was multi-cultural, multi linguistic and multi religious as well. So, the need for a common language across the kingdom arose even more, as the people from every region within the empire got scattered to every other region in the empire which mandated the people to learn Greek.

As the Greek empire fell in 146 BC, Rome was considered as the new enemy for Jews given all its oppressive laws and taxation. With the reality of Hellenistic Jews, Greek was more acceptable by the then Jews than Latin, which was considered oppressive as it was the language of the Romans. The rebel movement in Palestine also favored Greek against Latin. We know this from the apocryphal literature of Maccabees which moves from Hebraic style of literature in its first book to Greco style of literature on its second book. This equates the equation of why Pilate had Greek as well on the board, as the charge against Jesus was that He is one of

the rebels against the Roman empire.

I also believe that every event in the Mt Calvary, be it crucifixion or sharing the cloth or whatever, had a divine will in it. There is a divine will in hanging a trilingual board on the cross – stating the God himself accepts or promotes a multilinguistic message, the language of the locals, the language of the rulers and the language of the rebels too.

God – the Language Emphasizer

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts has a great message for linguistics. The dogmatic challenges and arguments has left many in the Christian world to narrow down their thinking of speaking in tongues to a debate of what it is or why it is. Between the speaking of tongues, there is a silver liner which I want to highlight. It is the list of languages that is mentioned over there.

Among the list mentioned in Acts 2:9, 10, one can find some national languages such as Arabian, Arsicid Pahlavi (spoken by Parthians or present-day Northeast Iranians), Egyptian, Elamite (spoken by present day Southwest Iranians), Latin (spoken by Romans), Libyan, Median (spoken by present day Northeast Iranians) and Assyrian, Babylonian, Sumerian (all three spoken by Mesopotamians or present-day Iraqis). But my favorite part is that the list also consists of Greek dialects and localized languages such as spoken in Asia (Western Turkey), Cappadocia (Central Turkey), Minoan (Crete Island), Pamphylia (South

Turkey), Phrygia (Central Turkey) and Pontus (Northern Turkey).

Why should the Holy Spirit manifest in so many dialects and languages? Though there are many opinions, let me share something close to my heart. There were three communities in the locality – local Jews, Hellenistic Jews, government officials and the tradesmen (since Jerusalem was a business center crisscrossing four international highways). All the communities put together will either know Aramaic or Greek. If the essence of the outpouring were to just share the message, the Holy Spirit could have manifested only in Aramaic and Greek. But then He manifested Himself in many languages. So, the essence is more than the message. Yes, He is Universal. He recognized not just the official languages of those time but also the localized languages and dialects.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit emphasizes that every localized language and dialect is important and should be treated equally. So, can we conclude that recognition of every language and dialect is important and if not, something is missing from us on respecting the pouring of the Holy Spirit and His long-time divine plan in this world?

The church and the missions in history were the ones which helped in sustaining many languages through its literary contribution. I am pausing for a moment to think ourselves if we are the same people who are the cause the erosion of languages under the guise of peace initiatives, inter-ethnic programs, sermon interpretations, ease of coordination and so forth. The diversity of human race was God's plan and as church are we tuned to His will?

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Asian Church To The West, on Whose Mission?

Asians from all faiths have migrated to the West since the early 20th century. Their influence on a few aspects of western culture is significant. One notable contribution is the popularisation of Eastern mysticism. Today, Yoga or Transcendental meditation have become familiar names in Western cultures. Besides that, many people of Asian origin are in influential positions. For example, the current vice-president of the United States of America and many CEOs of multinational companies are people of Asian origin. Amid this strident progress, what is the impact of the Asian Church in the West?

Is it so insignificant that many believers from South Asia moved

to the West, yet God's purposes for his kingdom through them were unnoticeable? Did we genuinely seek God's kingdom, or was it merely our desire for economic or professional progress?

Missionary movements

In response to God's call, missionaries left their homes and local churches and travelled to unreached places to serve the people, proclaim the gospel and plant churches. For example, there was a great missionary movement from the West in the 18th and 19th centuries to the Indian subcontinent. Notably, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and William Carey, who did enormous work in developing vernacular languages, started schools for the poor. Ida Scudder

pioneered the healthcare system in India, and Sam Higginbottom pioneered agriculture education. Their sacrificial service transformed nations and the hearts of people through the gospel.

Similarly, in the early nineteen sixties, the South Indian church sent missionaries to the northern part of India to bless those regions in many ways. They were ready to leave the comfort of their homes and families to face opposition, sickness or even death for the cause of the gospel. However, by the early nineties, when mission organisations challenged believers to go to north India as missionaries, it was not in the interest of the youth, their parents and even church leaders for varied

reasons. Moving to the US became God's blessing, but the missions in Asia and Africa were questionable.

Church on a new mission

Meanwhile, the churches here were busy aping the West; their music, theology, liturgy and programs filled our churches. So, instead of becoming the disciples of Jesus, we have become disciples of Western Christianity. As their money started pouring in, South Asian missions mostly became mere promotion material to raise funds.

In the name of evangelism, Christian leaders opened the way for the prosperity gospel preachers and televangelists who came preaching that health and wealth are all we need to seek from God. Therefore their motivational talks prepped us to dream big and pursue the American dream God is giving us.

Then with the changing economic conditions and an increasing number of qualified youth, this theology helped the South Asian church take on a different mission. As a result, thousands of Christians, if not millions, have left for the West to study or work toward their professional goals.

The problem: We lost sight of the kingdom

The problem is not about moving to the West but why. The church is imitating the world in our pursuits of career, wealth and status and completely ignoring the kingdom of God. Most of us fail to understand what it means to seek God's kingdom and why Christ commands us to do so. Because the institutionalised Church, by and large, lost the

understanding of the gospel and its call to disciple nations. Therefore we did not cultivate a missional mindset to serve and disciple nations in our homeland or the lands our work or study took us.

Except for a handful, most of us believe that moving to the West is a legitimate blessing God gives to the good. Those who moved take pride in subtly messaging it through social media. They mislead even the 'born-again' to lose sight of the Kingdom of God and focus on material blessings.

That is why, when we move to the West, we get stuck to our regional subcultures (Hindi, Sinhala, Telugu, Tamil, Nepali, or Malayalam Sunday gatherings) with no purpose of integrating with the culture and the local Church where God has taken us. Instead, we send money to churches or televangelists back in Asia to satisfy our religious obligations. It shows that we prefer to identify by language, even worse, by caste than by the kingdom of God.

A glimmer of hope

Despite these cultural pressures to seek greener pastures, many truly obeyed God's call. For example, a doctor from CMC Vellore decided to serve the poor, but his family and his church discouraged him from that. They said, "Don't take your faith that seriously." But, he and his wife went to restore an abandoned leprosy mission hospital in Makunda, Assam, India. They transformed it into an affordable yet self-sustaining hospital that continues to serve the poor in that region even today. Another doctor couple dedicated their lives to helping eradicate Malaria

in the Malto hill tribe region of Jharkhand while building the body of Christ there.

A few sought opportunities as professionals to live and serve not just in the West but in cities, remote places, or among hostile cultures across the globe. To take God's kingdom to where God sent them to disciple their neighbours. So, for example, a family who moved to Sydney introduced the practice of family prayer time in their local Australian church, which they don't practise nowadays.

There is a well-established movement among Indonesian believers who go to the West for education and desire to move back to serve their country and strengthen the church. Admittedly, Christians are a minority in that country, but their presence and contribution to the nation are well recognised. Similarly, believers who heard God's call returned to South Asia to serve the Church and the country in different ways.

Unfortunately, though there are many such beautiful testimonies, the number is almost negligible compared to the size of the South Asian Church, which still fails to see God's kingdom. Sadly the South Asian Church, by and large, has not taken part in preparing, sending, praying, or supporting the work of the gospel locally and to the ends of the earth, that is, to disciple all people in the way of the kingdom. Those committed to serving in unreached parts of South Asia rarely see their church partnering with them.

Do we seek to return to Christ and His kingdom?

Praise God if the Spirit of God

persuades you to seek His kingdom wherever you are or have moved. To understand what it means to seek God's kingdom first, we need to understand the context Jesus is teaching this. He is teaching this to his disciples about how we ought to live in His kingdom. (Matthew 5,6,7)

To seek first the kingdom is to prioritise our life to live in the way of the kingdom. Knowing we cannot serve the kingdom and mammon or sin or world.

It begins with putting Christ and our way of thinking and living according to Christ's teaching; His righteousness should be our priority. That is single-minded obedience to the will of God in all areas of our lives. So, no, it is not merely about being religious, giving money, joining the seminary, or doing evangelism.

So, as citizens of the kingdom, we don't worry about what we eat or wear; we don't pursue careers or status as the world does. Instead, we seek the kingdom and God's righteousness in all aspects of our lives and the rest of our needs He provides. (Matthew 6) Then the world will recognise us by God's righteousness and justice in us, not our name, status, or wealth according to worldly standards.

Here are a few critical actions we need to take.

- **Recovering the gospel of the kingdom:** The Church mostly buried the gospel; we think the gospel is about going to heaven if we believe in Jesus. No, it is about the triumph of Christ and the inauguration of his kingdom in heaven and on earth. It is about the reign of Christ in

- our lives and the His glory filling the earth. It is about redeeming and restoring us as His children to rule with him. It is about uniting heaven and earth as His dwelling place. Unless we relearn the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, we do not understand our role in it.
- **Rejecting the escapist eschatology:** We have distorted the gospel because we have distorted our eschatology to satisfy our itchy ears. (2 Timothy 4:3) Our eschatological views forced us to ignore the gospel of the kingdom. Instead, it focused on winning converts, the immanent doom, anti-christ, and our dramatic escape to the clouds. We must return to the Word of God, seeking to be taught by the Spirit of God and be transformed.
- **Recovering our call:** What does it mean to be redeemed as a child of God? Restored into His image and reign with him as kings and priests in His kingdom? What does it mean to live as a new creation while still in this body? What does it mean to become the body of Christ, which is the dwelling of God? Recovering our call to become like Christ by taking up our cross and following him so we can reign with him as kings and priests in this kingdom. That is to seek opportunities for God's will to be done in our neighbourhoods, workplaces, cities, government, schools & colleges etc., as it is in heaven.
- **Dismantle to rebuild the Church:** We must dismantle the churches we built on our

- idols: our pride, ego and self-interest to rebuild on Christ to serve His kingdom. So that we may disciple the world into God's righteousness, justice, holiness and love.
- **Rooted in fellowship and discipleship:** Rooted in the fellowship of the saints by sharing our lives in common as a local church. To serve one another as the body of Christ in the household of God. Giving to hospitality, prayer and giving. In doing so, we imitate Christ and disciple one another. Christ calls us to discipleship. That is to follow Christ in all areas of life and teach it in the household of faith and outsiders. Remaining as a lone Christians is not God's will.
- **Cultivate missional living:** Discipleship in the fellowship of the saints, building God's kingdom as we seek the welfare of our neighbours (Jeremiah 29:4-7), is missional living. That is to live, reflecting Christ and his righteousness in all our thoughts, pursuits and possessions led by the Spirit of God. That requires equipping ourselves to understand and engage with the local culture and its challenges so that we can contribute to the common good through discipling. The local church has an important role to play here.
- **Seek partnerships and opportunities:** When we focus on seeking God's kingdom, we need to partner with other local churches in our cities, villages, and distant countries because it is the kingdom that matters. Partnerships help us seek

- professional or economic opportunities to serve Christ in new areas. Again, not driven by our ambitions and plans but waiting on the Lord to provide opportunities.

A challenge

From the early 18th century, God sent his people from the West to show his love for South Asia, significantly transforming it through the church. In his book Renaissance, Os Guinness suggests three tasks for the global church in this 21st century. The first task is to "win back the west." If this is a reasonable proposal, does the diaspora in the West have any part to play? Do we see our role in God's mission to bless those nations where we have immigrated? But, on the other hand, is the Western Church willing to learn and partner? For example, a new movement called the "Third Education

Revolution" is gaining momentum in the West, pioneered by Christians in the diaspora and the Western Church. Its vision is to bring education back to the Church where it was first cultivated. I believe a faithful, spirit-filled Christian diaspora can bring new biblical thought and practice to revive the western Church. God has sent many believers to the West in the recent past. But do the diaspora and the western Church understand why? (Watch this inspiring story of a Jamaican pastor reviving a church in Europe)

Let us ask God's help to seek His kingdom and righteousness wherever we are. First, seek the fellowship of a local community of saints to serve and, through it, when God calls you to a different place, He will clarify it. Remember, our chief duty is to reflect God's kingdom in our

lives as kings and priests. Love our neighbours as we teach His righteousness and justice to the world so the world may obey Him.

May God restore His Church to take His kingdom to the ends of the earth!



Mark Raja is a digital product designer in the software industry. A graduate from the Fine Arts discipline. His passion is to help artists and professionals to recover their calling as priests and kings to reign with Christ in His kingdom. He with his wife Susan, children Nathan and Angela lives in Bangalore. He writes at markraja.medium.com

Friends, Greetings in the matchless name of Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge. I am really praising God for the new things that is being rolled on, especially this new initiative of Freedom and Justice Issue Network of Lausanne Movement. There are very less materials on the topic of Freedom and Justice within the Evangelical circles and hence, there was a felt and real need to create materials on this area and a journal seemed to be an ideal solution now. Hence a decision was made to start a quarterly journal from the Freedom and Justice Issue Network which can be circulated among the Lausanne contacts and Evangelical seminaries.

I therefore request dear readers to kindly send articles related to Freedom and Justice (any language is welcome) so that the global church can be blessed and be enriched with the knowledge on Justice.

*In His Vineyard,
Christie Samuel*

Join us for our monthly prayers on last Saturdays of every month

Write to us justice@lausanne.org if you wish to receive our journal regularly.