

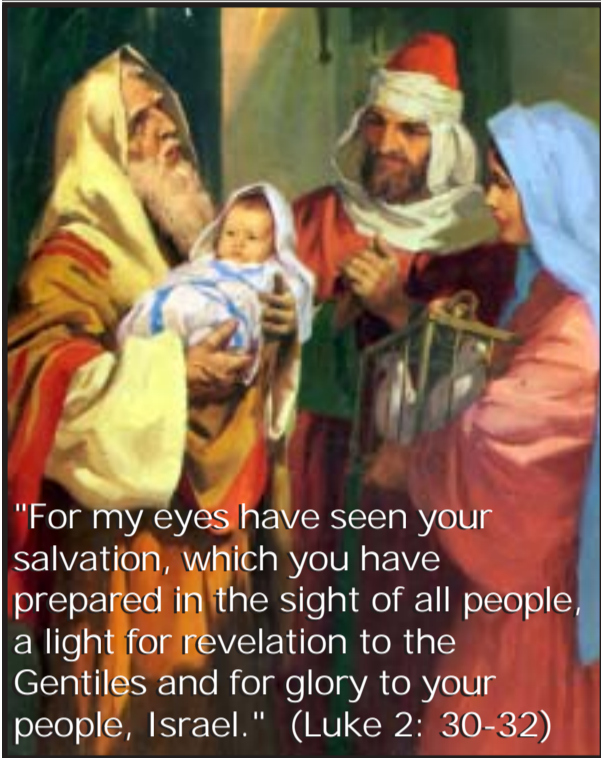
PRAISE THE ALMIGHTY

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"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people, Israel." (Luke 2: 30-32)

We are welcoming another Christmas season with its message of the free gift of salvation to mankind. Though Christians are going through severe persecution in Orissa and other states, Christmas should give us hope and strength that we are among the chosen few to see and experience His salvation. And beyond the sorrow and pain of the present world the joy of eternal life with Christ in heaven awaits us! We wish you a happy & meaningful Christmas!!

Stocktaking in Orissa



New Delhi: Three months after start of India's unprecedented anti-Christian violence, 118 Christian deaths in a list of reliable reports. Thousands will face Christmas in relief camps or hiding in forests.

Sparked by the murder of Swami

threats by Hindu extremists. Maoist militants claimed responsibility for the swami's murder, but rightwing Hindu groups blamed Christians and attacked them in 14 of 30 districts.

All India Christian Council (aicc)
(Cont'd.. on page 5)

Indian Christian Martyrs' Day

New Delhi: Various Christian leaders have proposed to declare August 25 as **Indian Christian Martyrs' Day**. Fr. Anand Muttungal has detailed the present situation of India with a list of many recent martyrs.

Religious plurality and tolerance has been the spirit of India. Yet instances of Christian martyrdom began with St. Thomas, the Apostle. After this instance we have some cases of priests, nuns and lay persons being murdered on the process of

setting up schools, social work centres or health services. Until the Orissa massacre we heard stray incidents where one is killed for preaching the word of God or chose to die to proclaim the faith in Christ. Probably after 2000 years the Church is returning to its beginnings where hundreds were killed for witnessing Christ.

The early Church made distinction between martyrs and confessors. The title martyr was only attributed to those who had suffered the extreme penalty to the point of death. The death too which exclusively proclaims and saves the faith in Christ. This also echoed the words of Our Lord, 'there is no greater love than offering ones life for the master.' Whereas the title of 'confessor was given to Christians who had shown



their willingness to die for their belief, by bravely enduring imprisonment or torture, but were not put to death.' We have both cases in Orissa.

As per the reports available the martyrdom began on August 25, 2008 with the burning of a handicapped Christian named Rasananda Pradan. Whole family fled to forest while he could not run due disability of legs. On this day we have around 25 persons offered their life for faith.

(Cont'd.. on page 5)

Church in India should dispense grace: Yancey

New Delhi: "The church in India should be a carrier of God's grace to others," said world renowned author, Philip Yancey. He was speaking in a meeting organised by All India Christian Council at Mt. Carmel School on November 20, 2008.

Referring to the continuing persecution of Christians in Orissa and other states, the author said that Christians are to be channels of God's grace and forgiveness to others as



both the oppressed and the oppressor are in need of God's grace.

Conceding the fact that the world does not run by grace, Yancey reminded that Christians are called to run by grace. Citing examples from animal kingdom, the author said that everyone needs

(Cont'd.. on page 2)

Peace rally conducted

Mumbai (Maharashtra): A mammoth crowd of about one lakh gathered at historical Shivaji Park, Dadar, on November 15, to participate in a peace rally called 'Sadbhawna Melawa'.

The rally was organized by the Bombay Catholic Sabha (BCS) and 45 other organizations to protest terrorism, the violence on Christians in Orissa and Karnataka, to demand enforcement of rule of law, and to urge for communal harmony and peace.

The star attraction of the rally was civil rights activist Teesta Setalvad of Citizens For Justice and Peace (CJP) and editor of 'Communal'

(Cont'd.. on page 3)

Mumbai victims condoled

New Delhi: Archbishop Vincent M. Concessao, the Archbishop of Delhi and the President of the National United Christian Forum (NUCF), which represents Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), has strongly condemned the terror attacks in Mumbai, one of the worst in the recent history of India.

Extending his heartfelt condolences to the relatives of those who have lost their lives in the violent attack on innocent people for no rhyme or reason, the archbishop along with other members of NUCF has offered



Taj hotel burning during the terrorist attack

prayers for the repose of the souls of those that departed from this world. He has also expressed his "get-well soon wishes", to the injured in these attacks.

Totally shocked at hearing the news of the unprecedented incident on unsuspecting victims, the Archbishop has appealed to all people of

(Cont'd.. on page 3)

Govt. to assist rebuilding

Bhubaneswar (Orissa): In response to a case filed by Roman Catholic leaders, the Supreme Court asked the Orissa Government on October 22, 2008 to assess damaged churches and assist in rebuilding them.

Also, they said the state must establish fast track courts to bring justice to victims who are mostly Dalit Christians. On November 16, 2008, the Orissa Government announced assistance ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 200,000 depending on the extent of damage and whether it was a church building or a prayer hall.

The All India Christian Council (AICC) has welcomed these developments because, previously, the state government would only give compensation to families of those murdered, owners of damaged houses, and destroyed educational or health institutions. Many of the 105 churches destroyed over Christmas 2007 were never rebuilt.

The AICC continues to lobby for compensation for numerous Dalit Christian businesses which were burned as well as essential items, like livestock, which were looted.

Annual meeting conducted

New Delhi: The annual meeting of Shalom Assembly of God Church, Munirka was conducted on November 13, 2008 at Mt. Carmel School. The meeting was to celebrate 16 years of its ministry and to thank God for His faithfulness.

Pastors Scott Martin (New Delhi) and Binu Gabriel (Orissa) were the chief guests in the meeting.

Pr. Scott exhorted the believers to continue to run the race of faith until the destination, which is eternal life in heaven, is reached. In his address, Pastor Binu urged the believers to live a life which pleases God "in the morning and in the evening",

that is, consistently.

During the afternoon session, Pastor Binu gave an eye-witness account of the pathetic situation of thousands of Christians and pastors in Orissa due to the continuing persecution in the state, especially in Kandhamal. He related how he is providing for 25 pastors and their families under his ministry in Chandpur by the support he is obtaining from Christians from other states.

Pastor Umanand Gaire briefed about the activities of the church. A Bible quiz competition, children's programmes, etc. were also conducted.

During the evening gospel meeting many people dedicated their lives



Pastor Binu Gabriel

IPC NR Rohini Convention

New Delhi: The annual convention of IPC Northern Region Rohini Church was conducted from October 31 to November 2, 2008 at the church, Sector-8, Rohini.

The inaugural session was presided by IPC NR Mission Director, Pastor Laji Paul, and the convention was opened by Pastor P.M. John.

In his address he exhorted believers to be the light of the world and help the downtrodden in the society.

Renowned convention preachers, Pastor Thomas George (U.P.) and Sister Anna Kandathil (Kerala) were the main preachers. Many people in Delhi and from neighbouring regions attended the convention.

Various committees under the leadership of Pastor P.C. Shaji and Bro. M. John worked for the convention.



Sr. Anna Kandathil preaching in the convention

for Jesus. The church choir lead the song and worship sessions. Around 300 people attended the meeting.

Bless Bihar Festival in Katihar

Katihar: Bless Bihar Festival 2008 was the first ever open air evangelical meeting to be held in Katihar, Bihar. Held at the Gaushala Chowk Community Hall, the festival was a Real Challenge Youth Camp by day and a gospel meeting open for the public by night. A few thousand men, women, and children attended the meetings held from 27th to 30th November, 2008. Combined worship service was held on the final day for which many local churches attended. This festival was a joint cooperative effort by the various local churches of Katihar and the Sacred Assemblies Fellowship church from Delhi.



Br. Jacob Simon speaking in Bless Bihar

Pastor M. K. Babu and Brother Jacob Simon were the main speakers for the festival. Other speakers included Bro. Martin Clarence from Kolkata, and Bro. Jones Thomas. A Choir of member from the local churches led by Pastor Sushil Tiga and the Sacred Singers led praise and worship sessions.

(Cont'd. on page 12)

"Give 'grace' a chance.."

(Cont'd. from page 1)

someone to look down on, and that is the reason for so many divisions and castes in the society. The big screen media presents the world opinion, which is often lies painted attractively. When the world opinion says: "Blessed are the rich," Christ said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Likewise, the Church should present truth to the world.

Quoting incidents in Lord Jesus' life, the author said that Jesus related to the high and the low, the rich and the poor and the oppressed and the oppressor in the right way. Jesus did not shy away from the prostitute who poured costly fragrance on his feet at the dinner in Simon's house. Jesus made poor Lazarus, who was at the door of the rich man's house the hero of one of his parables.

Jesus stopped on his way by the call of the blind beggar while others taunted him. Jesus also stopped on his way to talk to the rich but despised tax collector and invited himself for dinner in his house. He exhorted that the Church should be a haven for the poor and the needy.

To illustrate the way grace, which is "the most powerful force in

the universe," operates in the world, Philip Yancey related how the people reconciled in post apartheid South Africa. Nelson Mandela who rose to be President from prison cell, declared. "We have no time for justice!" The world was expecting a bloody civil war as the blacks got power. But it could see how God's grace can heal wounds and reconcile enemies and ensure peace when given a chance.

Concerning the Church in India, the author said that grace is already being poured out by God. He pointed out the way Graham Staines' widow forgave the murderers of her family, and continued his ministry is an example of God's grace and forgiveness. Regarding the present persecution the Church is facing in India, he said that the Church should continue to dispense grace to the nation. It should be a storehouse for the oppressed as well as the oppressor, as both need God's grace.

Earlier on the occasion, Dr. Joseph D'Souza (President of All India Christian Council) spoke about the challenges the society is facing due to polarization of society on religious/caste lines. Hundreds of Christians and leaders attended the meeting.

DECEMBER 2008

Christian Martyrs' Day

Bhopal (MP): Recently concluded two days "Isai Mahasangam 2008" passed a resolution to observe August 25 as "Indian Christian Martyrs' Day".

Archbishop Dr. Leo Cornelio, said that the sacrifice of the Christians of Orissa has to be remembered in a very unique way, and this is the most exceptional way," Fr. Anand Muttungal, Coordinator of the MPIM, said "it is on this day that maximum number of Christians sacrificed their lives in Kandamal. We want to honour their sacrifice and keep them remembered forever. It will strengthen our faith."

Over 500 office bearers of the M.P. Isai Mahasangam attended the conference. Mr. Kurishinkal Josy, President

of MPIM said, "the great sacrifice done by the Christians of Orissa has to be remembered by the people of India. We will commemorate this Martyrdom Day all over the state."

Mrs. Sheela Shantiago, the women wing president, said that we will also honour the women who faced rape, molestation and insults in-front of mad men. Their sacrifice is not less than martyrdom.

Mr. Richard D'Silva (Media Incharge) said, "MPIM will appeal to all Christian organizations and Church officials to declare August 25 as Indian Christian Martyrs' Day." He said that if this date is not suitable any other date can be fixed.

Real Challenge Youth Camp in Jharkhand and Bless Bihar

Sahibganj: For the first time in its history, a Real Challenge Youth Camp was held in Sahibganj, Jharkhand from 24th to 26th November, 2008. The camp, held at the local Town Hall, was very well received, all the more so since it was the first time such a camp was held in the city. Over 500 young men and women attended over the three days. Hundreds of lives were transformed with many youth deciding to take up a new direction and purpose in their lives.

Most of the delegates were amazed by the changes that had taken place in their hearts and minds after hearing and putting their faith on the Word of

God. For many, this was the first time they were attending a camp on Biblical ethics. They developed a real hunger and thirst for the word and repeatedly expressed their desire to hear and learn more.

The sessions were taken mainly by Pastor M. K. Babu and Bro. Jacob Simon. Bro. Martin Clarence and Bro. Jones Thomas also shared from the word of God in a few sessions. Dr. B. Marandi, Sadar Hospital, spoke to the youth about HIV/AIDS and health awareness and answered the questions that they had. The Sacred Singers, under the

(Cont'd.. on page 5)

BCS conducts mammoth rally

(Cont'd.. from p. 1)

ism Combat'. Other leaders also spoke on the occasion.

In her address Setalvad said that

history had been created with so many people joining the peace rally. She added that the metro had become the

Victims..

(Cont'd.. from page 1)

good will to come forward to extend all help to the victims and their families in the true Christian spirit of love and charity. He has also appealed to people of all sections of society to keep calm during this huge tragedy that has struck our nation as well as to offer their prayers both for those who have lost their lives and the injured as well as for a lasting peace in our country.

The Archbishop has also applauded the commendable work done by the security forces and expressed special words of appreciation for those 14 police personnel who lost their lives protecting the civilians from the brutal hands of terrorists, putting call of duty above anything else.

capital of hatred against human beings and people live in fear everyday. Setalvad accused the politicians of seeking to divide society on the basis of religion, and caste for the sake of garnering votes

In his speech, Dolphy D' Souza expressed pain and anguish over the attacks on Christians in different parts of the country. He said that 50,000 refugees were still in the jungles of Orissa and only 20,000 were in relief camps. He said that the state as well as the central government had miserably failed in protecting their citizens.

Other speakers also reiterated these views and stressed the need for a return to non-violence. There were also some patriotic cultural programmes performed on the occasion. Dolphy D'Souza read out the resolution and the rally concluded with the singing of the national anthem.

Real Challenge Youth Camp



Jones Thomas speaking in the youth camp and Pastor Sushil Tigga interpreting the message to Hindi



Momentum building for Dalit liberation



Mrs. & Mr. Joseph D'souza

It is humanity's longest lasting form of discrimination. It has held sway over its victims for three millennia; and though it has been officially outlawed for six decades, it continues to plague the lives of millions.

According to its critics, India's notorious caste system does its most severe damage to the 'untouchables' (now better known as the Dalits) at the very bottom of its long social ladder. Anti-caste advocates maintain Dalits are still being victimized in ways which would be considered unthinkable in a truly civilized society.

One of the leading activists on behalf of these unfortunates is Dr. Joseph D'souza, founder of the Dalit Freedom Network (DFN). The organization partners with groups such as Operation Mobilization to engender awareness of the problem, and to help Dalits in practical ways.

Dr. D'souza recently visited Canada, and spoke to CC.com about the organization's campaign. Asked how the caste system became so deeply entrenched in India, he replied: "Because it got fundamental religious sanction."

The origin of the caste doctrine, he said, was the sacred Hindu text, The Rig Veda, a collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns written approximately 1,000 years before Christ. Caste was determined, said D'souza, on the basis of chapter 10, verse 15, which describes the creation of humans by Brahma.

"To challenge that," he said, "is to challenge the whole religious structure." However, he noted: "Racism never got divine approval from God."

Historically, he said, the first major revolt against this aspect of Hindu tradition was instigated by the founder of another great religion.

Siddhartha Gautama, later known as The Buddha, was originally a Hindu; he belonged to one of the lower castes. "His writings defied the caste system, said D'souza, adding: "Caste was sufficiently dealt with under the first 100 years of Buddhism."

While there was no significant Western activism against the caste system until recently, the scourge did not go unnoticed. William Wilberforce, the great English champion of African slaves, once stated: "The institution of caste is a system at war with truth and nature."

The current defiance of the caste system takes much inspiration from a key rebellion which occurred 75 years ago. The climax of that revolt came just

over half a century ago, when noted activist B.R. Ambedkar - known as "the Moses of the Dalits" - officially chose Buddhism as his new religion, taking hundreds of thousands of Dalits with him.

In a 1936 speech entitled Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar delineated the systematic degradation inflicted on Dalits:

"The untouchable was not allowed to use the public streets if a Hindu was coming along, lest he should pollute the Hindu by his shadow. The untouchable was re-

By David F. Dawes

"I foresee the Dalit exodus and empowerment getting stronger and stronger. I also foresee the church being persecuted more, not less. Anti-conversion laws have been passed in seven states so far." This trend, he declared, "may push the Dalits into a civil war. They will not be kept as slaves."

quired to have a black thread either on his wrist or in his neck, as a sign or a mark — to prevent the Hindus from getting themselves polluted by his touch through mistake . . .

"The untouchable was required to carry, strung from his waist, a broom to sweep away from behind the dust he treaded on, lest a Hindu walking on the same should be polluted."

"Many of the Dalits want out of

the heinous caste system," wrote D'souza in his 2004 book, Dalit Freedom: Now and Forever. The reasons, he pointed out, are straightforward.

"Politicians have not delivered. Dalit atrocities are mounting by the day. In many places, the State is a mute spectator. What is written in the Constitution does not work itself out in the villages and towns of India, where Dalit women are raped, abused, tortured, paraded naked and humiliated." Caste, he told CC.com, is currently "a huge issue, which dominates all politics."

In recent years, there have been extraordinary reports from various Christian sources, regarding conversions of large numbers of Dalits.

These reports, he said, "are accurate, regarding the revolt of 250 million against the caste system." However, he hastened to add, "it is not accurate to say that all were immediately turning to Christ. But the exodus from low caste into Christianity was genuine, and it continues. An estimated 45 million have converted in the past 10 years. There is a genuine awakening of the Holy Spirit and New Testament Christianity, of massive proportions."

This revival, he emphasized, has come at great cost. "Hindu extremist opposition is directly related to the Dalit exodus from the caste system."

Last December, he said, in the State of Orissa, Christians suffered through what is now termed "Black Christmas." Some 700 homes were destroyed, and almost 90 churches

(Cont'd. on page 9)

The origins of the Indian caste populations

The origins and affinities of the approximately 1 billion people living on the subcontinent of India have long been contested. This is owing, in part, to the many different waves of immigrants that have influenced the genetic structure of India.

In the most recent of these waves, Indo-European-speaking people from West Eurasia entered India from the Northwest and diffused throughout the subcontinent. They purportedly admixed with or displaced indigenous Dravidic-speaking populations. Subsequently they may have established the Hindu caste system and placed themselves primarily in castes of higher rank.

To explore the impact of West Eurasians on contemporary Indian caste populations, we compared mtDNA (400 bp of hypervariable region 1 and 14 restriction site polymorphisms) and Y-chromosome (20 biallelic polymorphisms and 5 short tandem repeats) variation in approximately 265 males from eight castes of different rank to approximately 750 Africans, Asians, Europeans, and other Indians.

For maternally inherited mtDNA, each caste is most similar to Asians. However, 20%-30% of Indian mtDNA

haplotypes belong to West Eurasian haplogroups, and the frequency of these haplotypes is proportional to caste rank, the highest frequency of West Eurasian haplotypes being found in the upper castes. In contrast, for paternally inherited Y-chromosome variation each caste is more similar to Europeans than to Asians.

Moreover, the affinity to Europeans is proportionate to caste rank, the

Indo-European-speaking people from West Eurasia entered India from the Northwest and diffused throughout the subcontinent. They purportedly admixed with or displaced indigenous Dravidic-speaking populations.

upper castes being most similar to Europeans, particularly East Europeans. These findings are consistent with greater West Eurasian male admixture with castes of higher rank. Nevertheless, the mitochondrial genome and the Y chromosome each represents only a single haploid locus and is more susceptible to large stochastic variation, bottlenecks, and

selective sweeps.

Thus, to increase the power of our analysis, we assayed 40 independent, biparentally inherited autosomal loci (1 LINE-1 and 39 Alu elements) in all of the caste and continental populations (approximately 600 individuals). Analysis of these data demonstrated that

the upper castes have a higher affinity to Europeans than to Asians, and the upper castes are significantly more similar to Europeans than are the lower castes.

Collectively, all five datasets show a trend toward upper castes being more similar to Europeans, whereas lower castes are more similar to Asians. We conclude that Indian castes are most likely to be of proto-Asian origin with West Eurasian admixture resulting in rank-related and sex-specific differences in the genetic affinities of castes to Asians and Europeans.



(Prepared by Bamshad M, Kivisild T, Watkins WS, Dixon ME, Ricker CE, Rao BB, Naidu JM, Prasad BV, Reddy PG, Rasanayagam A, Papiha SS, Villems R, Redd AJ, Hammer MF, Nguyen SV, Carroll ML, Batzer MA, Jorde LB. Department of Pediatrics, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112, USA. mike@genetics.utah.edu).

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DECEMBER 2008

Would human cloning equate to the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy "a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son"

Cloning and the virgin birth

By John D. Morris, Ph.D.

Many essential doctrines of Scripture hinge on the virgin birth of Christ. To fulfill prophecy, the Messiah had to be both man and God, without genetic or personal defect, and be the rightful King of Israel in the line of David. Only such a One could fully atone for the sins of all mankind and assume the universe's throne for all eternity.

As far as science knows, there has never been a virgin birth of a man or a mammal under natural circumstances. Such life comes only from the union of a male and female. But now cloning technology seemingly provides an alternate explanation for Christ's miraculous conception. For the first time it is scientifically possible for Mary to have borne a child without a man. Is spontaneous cloning behind the virgin birth?

Reproduction without sexual union has been observed in some fish, amphibians, birds, and reptiles. In recent years, cloning in laboratories has even been successful with several mammals, although great care and advanced technology is required. Progress is being made, and we can

expect cloning to become mainstream practice before long. Even human cloning, while discouraged by many governments, is being aggressively explored by several labs. (I suspect the strident insistence for embryonic stem cell research has human cloning as an unstated goal.) Unless God intervenes, advances in cloning technology may lead to a brave new world of human clones, with Pandora's Box opened wide.

The birth of Christ was a miracle in every regard. He said of God the Father, "...a body hast thou prepared | for | Me" (Hebrews 10:5), free from any genetic defect and thus qualified to be a perfect sacrifice

But is this the same thing as the virgin birth? Would human cloning equate to the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy "a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son" (Isaiah 7:14)?

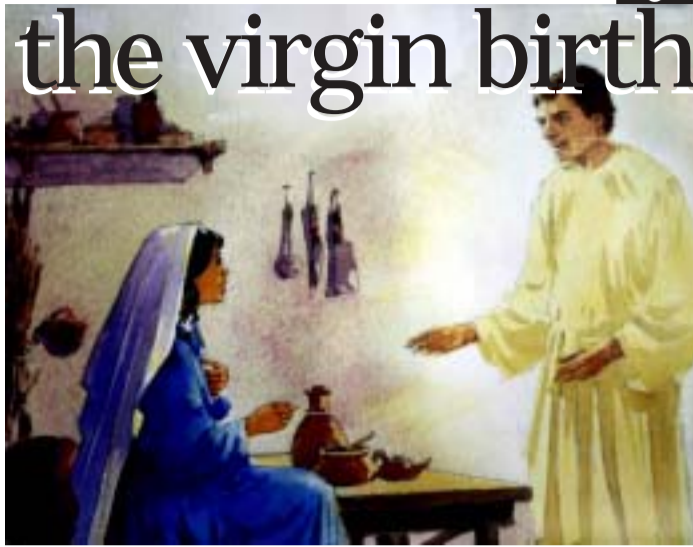
No, it would not. In humans, the DNA in each egg's nucleus contains

23 chromosomes, with the remaining 23 usually supplied by the father. In cloning, the original 23 chromosomes are stripped from an unfertilized egg, and a full complement of 46 from

a donor is inserted. The child would possess identical DNA to the donor, with a minor exception—a small segment of DNA present in the cells' mitochondria is passed from mother to child, undiluted by the father.

Is cloning a possible explanation of Christ's birth? If Mary's nuclear DNA was used, the child would have been female. If another source was used, the offspring would have carried Mary's imperfect mitochondrial DNA, mutated over the generations since Adam, and thus could not have been the perfect "lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19).

Cloning is not the answer. While much remains a mystery, the birth of Christ was a miracle in every regard.



He said of God the Father, "...a body hast thou prepared for Me" (Hebrews 10:5), free from any genetic defect and thus qualified to be a perfect sacrifice. And then, "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman...to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4: 4-5).

At Christmas we have so much for which to give thanks, especially that God "gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Our thankfulness will continue throughout all eternity.

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Real Challenge youth camp

(Cont'd. from page 3)

leadership of Pastor Samuel Soren, led the praise and worship sessions.

"I'm glad the camp was a success and that so many young men and women openly received and embraced the word of God," said Pastor Samuel after the camp. The Sacred Assemblies Fellowship team

in Sahibganj, which bore the grunt work in preparation from the camp, consists of Pastor Samuel Soren, his family, and four co-workers: Evg. Bhagwan Das, Evg. Sunil Soni, Evg. Nirmal Murmu, and Bro. Sunil Murmu. The Sahibganj team was assisted by the SAF teams from Delhi and Katihar, Bihar.

Indian Christian martyrs

(Cont'd. from page 1)

In Tiania village four Christians namely Mr. Vikram Nayak, Dasharathi Pradhan, Surendra Nayak etc. were killed while trying to protect the Church from demolition. Pastor Masuel Nayak in Bakingia village stood before a mob with swords and other arms telling them that he will not allow the Church to be destroyed till he is alive. He was cut into pieces.

Sidheswar Digal, a Hindu, was killed for sheltering the Christians. A seven month pregnant lady Mrs. Kamalini Naik refused to abandon her faith along with her husband. In front of the whole village and family the fanatic mob cut her into pieces. Adding to the exceptional cases of martyrdom we have Fr. Bernard Digal on 28th of October 2008. As per the known source of information so far we have around sixty persons who sacrificed for Christ. Let us also remember the number of laypersons, priests and nuns who died for their faith since St. Thomas the Apostle.

We have another large number of confessors who stood with all kinds of sufferings, the thousands who live in camps refusing to abandon their faith and return to their vil-

lages, those seriously injured, those raped, paraded naked, letting their houses and everything to be burnt and looted. There are thousands who wandered in the thick, dark forests taking the name of Lord Jesus. Many days and nights they had no food, no water, no shelter but Lord Jesus.

There are also a good number of Hindus who saved the life of many Christians by sheltering them in their houses. The great sacrifices made by these exemplary persons are never less than the martyrs. They endured suffering to proclaim Jesus. These numerous martyrs and confessors have added their share to the suffering of our Lord Jesus and the countless Christians who shed their blood to safeguard the faith. So it may be befitting to declare 25th August as the day of Indian Christian Martyrs' Day. It is this day maximum Christians were martyred. The Indian Church can adopt this day as the day to remember the martyrs and confessors who stood for their faith. We have great martyrs like Fr. Antony of Jharkand (1964), Fr. Herman of Bihar, Fr. T A Thomas of Bihar, Sr. Rani Mariya of Madhya Pradesh, Dr. Gram Stains of Orissa, Fr. Aruldoss of Orissa, Pas-

118 martyred in Orissa

(Cont'd. from page 1)

announced on November 25 of reliable reports of 118 murdered Christians. Names, locations, and details are available for 91; the remaining 27 are confirmed by reliable sources but bodies haven't been identified. Previously, the confirmed death toll was 60 people. However, a fact finding report a political party estimated 500 deaths after interviews revealed many bodies were not recovered by authorities and some were cremated or buried clandestinely by attackers.

Dr. Joseph D'souza, aicc President, said, "Greater than the tragedy of violent attacks on innocent Christians is the ongoing travesty of justice in Orissa, Karnataka, and other states. We have not seen any ringleaders punished, and both the state and central government refuse to prosecute rightwing Hindu ultra-nationalists who incite violence against minorities. This impunity is disgraceful for the world's largest democracy."

The aicc hosted a fact finding visit by Baroness Caroline Cox of Queensbury in Greater London, a member of the British House of Lords, from October 30 to November 4, 2008. She initiated a debate on India's anti-Christian violence in the United Kingdom Parliament on November 17.

tor Botlaratnam of Andhra Pradesh, Satira Toppo, a lay person, of Chattisgarh etc. with a number of persons who died for Christ can also be remembered as Indian martyrs. So it is apt for the Church in India to call this day as the "Indian Christian Martyrs' Day" to honour their great sacrifice.

Dayal said, "The legal status of the Kui people, classified as Scheduled Tribe by the government, and the demands of the Pano people, a Kui speaking tribe classified as Scheduled Caste or Dalit by the government, needs to be resolved. These are critical identity issues exploited by rightwing Hindu leaders in the region."

Christian leaders are concerned over the progress of investigations by two state-appointed "commissions"

Each is comprised of a single retired Orissa High Court judge. Basudev Panigrahi continues to investigate the December 2007 violence, and Sarat Chandra Mohapatra started an inquiry into the killing of swami Saraswati and subsequent communal violence. At the national level, the National Commission for Minorities issued a report in mid-September. India's National Human Rights Commission sent an investigative team to Kandhamal, Orissa, from Nov. 12-18, 2008, although a public report is not expected.

Since August 23, the aicc recorded: 315 villages damaged, 4,640 Christian houses burnt, 54,000 Christians homeless, at least 6 pastors and one Roman Catholic priest killed, 10 priests/pastors/nuns seriously injured, estimated 18,000 Christians injured, at least two women (including a nun) raped, 149 churches destroyed, 13 Christian schools and colleges damaged. Attacks mostly stopped in mid-October, but sporadic violence continues. On November 12, local aicc leaders said a Catholic church was attacked in G. Udayagiri by a mob of about 200 people.

What does Christmas speak?



By Yesunatha Das, New Delhi

At the birth of Jesus, the Angel informed the shepherds "Christ is born for you (Luke 2:10)." It is, indeed, an unusual declaration at the birth of a child. The birth of Christ is a gift for the entire humanity. Why did God give this message to the shepherds first? The immediate audience of this declaration was strangely wonderful. Historically, from the fall, human beings were oriented with the practice of sacrifice in the religious affairs. People considered that by making an offering, they could appease the Almighty and receive favours. From Animism to Judaism, sacrifice was considered as the immediate remedy of their guilt and punishment. Probably, these shepherds at Jerusalem used to provide sacrificial lamps to the altar of Jerusalem temple. Now, the angel candidly conveying them, "Christ is born for you". These shepherds and sheep were religious oriented, representing the miserable human beings who are so guilty and conscious of the need of sacrifice. However, the loving God assigned His angel to disclose that their religious guilty consciousness and attempt of remedy is superfluous because Christ is born for you.

Why is Christ given for us?

First of all, God knows the tragedy of human depravity and sinfulness. Almost all religions, regardless of their differences, agree together that all are inners. Sin has marred the human dignity and original glory. Holy Scriptures indicates that sin has four-fold effect on man. Sin polluted human mind (Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Proverbs 15:21; Isaiah 59:2; Psalms 10:4; 14:1; Romans 1:21-28; Colossians 1:21; Ephesians 4:17). Even the wisest and greatest scholar is psychologically and intellectually influenced by sin. None can think sublime or present pure thoughts except God, for our human mind is polluted. Even the holiest insight of man is corrupted before God because our mind and thought pattern are defiled by sin. Many Great sants and saints could not control their thought even after rigorous religious observances. They were enslaved to the human passions.

Because of sin, man is lost (Psalms 119:176; Isaiah 53:6; Jeremiah 50:6; Luke 19:10). Man has lost proper relationship with Creator. He has created vague and fraud ideas about his Creator. Why do religions are fighting about the concept of God? Some feel

God is only one but others think He is many. Few consider God is in every creation while others argue that He is apart from creation. Due to the lost relationship of man with God, people are framing different dispositions of God according to their imaginations.

Because of sin, man became blind (1Corinthians 2:14; 2Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:18; 1John 1:6; 1Peter 2:9; Colossians 1:14). Human blindness has not only keeping him ignorant but also perverted in his knowledge. Perversion is in a greater degree that people are not only open to the faulty but camouflage truth also. The truth has been misrepresented or misinterpreted. Ironically, people are volunteering to embrace defective or superstitious traditions because they are blind to the truth and falsehood dominates the truth. No wonder, why people follow various funny and ridiculous superstitious beliefs and abnormal practices in the name of religion because sin has made people blind.

Sin has made man dead (Ephesians 2:1-5; Luke 15:2; John 5:25). Death

Christmas tells us that God cares for us. Despite human failures, God continues to love human beings. The Bible tells that, for God so loved the world (John 3:16). Christmas is the supreme demonstration of the love of God

identifies separation. People are separated from their creator in more than one way. Human beings insist an independence from God and His rule. Man demands freedom from the laws and regulation of the creator. To the worst, human beings are identified as God Himself. It is the terrible sin that man takes the place of God and claiming as Bhagavan. The Holy Scriptures stated that God would not share this glory to any one (Isaiah 42:8).

God had sent His son to the world because He realized the pitiable deprived condition of human beings. He understood the inability of man to reach God directly. God knew well that the wretched humanity needs salvation. Because sin has broken them thoroughly, the process of salvation should originate from the divine side. So God did send His son. Christmas indicates that God ac-

knowledges our sinful condition and wants to save us.

Secondly, Christmas tells that man cannot afford salvation himself. Because of sin, man has lost his right relationship and standing with God. His thoughts and actions are against God and His plans. Even the most devoted religious person cannot maintain a right relationship with God unless his sins are forgiven. No sinner can save himself or others. Here comes the need of a sinless saviour. Jesus is the only human who was born without sin (2Corinthians 5:21; 1Peter 2: 22; John 8:46). The power of virgin birth of Christ is the unique testimony of the saving plan of God. He prepared Jesus eternally for the salvation of mankind so that people should not be perished. After the birth of the sinless Saviour Jesus, human efforts of salvation are futile.

Thirdly, Christmas tells us that God cares for us. Despite human failures, God continues to love human beings. The Bible tells that, for God so loved the world (John 3:16). Christmas is the supreme demonstration of the love of God (1John 4:9-10). More than the provisions of life essentials like air, water, life, health and material blessings, His love is manifested through the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. Because of Christ-

mas no one can say that God does not love me. Even the worst dejected person or criminal can experience the love of God by accepting Jesus Christ. Many people are still searching for God's love, but Christmas presents the immeasurable love of God to humanity.

Fourthly, Christmas tells that only Jesus can save humanity (Luke 2:10-11; John 3:36; Acts 4: 12; 1Timothy 2: 5; 1:15). Unfortunately, it has become a fashion among the theologians to believe that Jesus is one of the saviours. If there were any other saviour, Jesus would not have abstained the celestial glory and become a man and gone to the cross. God knew that unless His Son is sent, religions would crash humanity by imposing huge demands of work for salvation and many would claim as saviours. Christmas discloses the truth that Jesus is the only Saviour of the mankind.

Next, Christmas brings us the good news that man cannot attain salvation himself so God gives it as a gift (Ephesians 2:8). What a sinner can pay for his salvation? Nothing can appease the Holy God. The Bible says that sinner's 'righteous acts' (efforts for salvation) are like filthy rags before God. Therefore, God Himself made the way by the offer of the gift of salvation. None can buy or claim eternal life because it is the gift of God (Revelations 7:11). When we enjoy the blessing of Christmas never bother about merit or work for our salvation.

Christmas again tells us that salvation is absolutely personal - "is born for you (Luke 2: 10)." No church or family can offer salvation to any one, based on their merit because it is purely individual. Each person should receive the gift of salvation, which is offered through the birth of Christ. God considers each person as important and recognizes his or her personal worth. No one is insignificant in His plan.

Finally, Christmas warns that you are responsible for your salvation (John 15: 22; 2Thessalonians 1:10; Acts 18:6; 20:26). Jesus warned that if I had not come, and spoken to them, they would have no sin. His coming opened the way of salvation. Therefore, we cannot blame any one for our lapse of salvation. People should be wise enough to make use of the opportunity and avail it for their personal benefit.

As we celebrate this Christmas, let us acknowledge God's consideration on our lives and accept the purpose of Christmas and propagate it to others. Wish you all a happy and Christ-centred Christmas.

(The writer can be contacted: dasbless@yahoo.co.in)

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"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

(Pator Saju Mathew John of Jesus Mission shares his experience in Khandamal).

This I write to you after my second visit to the afflicted villages of Khandamal district, Orissa. Last time I could visit only Ruydangia, our church and the relief camp. This time God helped me to stay more days and visit more places, including Raikia, one of the most afflicted place in this area. James and Pastor John Mathai were also with me. In Raikia, we stayed with Pastor Thomas Varghese. Pastor Babu P John joined us in Ruydangia.

In villages, all the small houses are burnt, and big houses the destroyers bombarded, to make sure that all the houses are made irreparable. There is none left in the once populated Christian habitation. As I was walking between the ruins of the former occupancy of those Christians, I was wondering how humans could act so beastly! Everything has become void and shapeless! Only God can rebuild the thing. I pray, let the Spirit of the Lord move over the darkness, as in the beginning, and spell out: "let there be light!" Only the Lord can bring back light to the chaos created by the dark spirits of fanatics.

Even in the midst of tumult and turmoil, we have rays of hope that brings back joy to our hearts when we see these poor Christians still hold their faith firmly. You might have seen the picture of Namratha, an eleven year old girl who was burned very badly. Many News magazines who featured the Orissa atrocities have given this picture as their cover page (including Thehalka and Revive.). This time I met the girl personally. God has healed her completely.

"Are you not upset with Jesus, Namratha?" I asked her.

"Why?" she stared at me?

"Look, How much suffering you had, all for Jesus sake. Still you love

I could hear it only with tears in my eyes. Yes! Jesus is a reality to that eleven-year-old girl. Not just for her; for hundreds of Christians who suffered during this massacre.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is

"When we consider the sufferings of Jesus, what is big in our suffering?" I could hear it only with tears in my eyes. Yes! Jesus is a reality to that eleven-year-old girl. Not just for her; for hundreds of Christians who suffered during this massacre.

written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:35-39).

According to government records, the 'riot' afflicted more than 5,000 families and the number of people should be around 20,000. (This doesn't include thousands of people who already fled to outside Khandamal- to cities like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Berhampur, and even to other states of India).

Government runs seven relief camps in different parts of Khandamal district. It is almost three months people are staying under this polythene tents with little facilities of a home. You can

see the small tents in big number, where 30 to 40 people stay under one tent. 2000 to 4000 people stay in one camp, may be inside a school compound!

By God's grace, we got permission from the District collector to visit the government-run relief camps for five days. (It is a miracle as none of the Christian organizations was getting permission to do so!) This helped us to have personal contact with more people inside the camps. The government has deployed CRPF for the protection of the people living inside the camp. However, their life is not secure outside.

Government somehow wants to disperse the camps by 31 of December. (The Supreme Court asked the government to give protection until New Year.) "If they are ready to return to

their homes," says the collector, "We are ready to give them some rice, Dal and other things like utensils to start their living.

Also we can provide some money to rebuild their houses, to start with, Rs 10,000." However, the Hindu organizations declared that they would not allow any Christian to return.

"Only those who embrace their old Hindu religion are welcome", they say.

When we said that the collector wants you to return, the Christians inside the camp looked blankly at our face and said; "Who doesn't want to go back to their own homes and villages, brothers, but tell us how we can go, as they are still making more guns and swords to attack and kill anyone who returns.

What we need is security, not some rice and Dal." We had no answer for that. Government is providing food for people inside the camps

run by them directly. Other private camps (Government calls it temporary camps) like the one in Ruydangia, government provide protection, but food and other needs we have to meet. However, we have freedom in those camps to conduct worship meetings.

As entry of people from outside is restricted, spiritual meetings are rare in government camps. This has ended up in a spiritual decline in the life of people inside. We need to be very serious about this situation. If the sufferings they undergo continue for a longer time, Satan may take advantage of it and inject revenge in the

I could not understand the joy my son had when he left his job for the service of the Lord. True, I lost my material possessions, but I am joyful because now I am part of God's kingdom."

minds of the youngsters. Moreover, most of the campers are from nominal churches and they never received adequate teachings in Christian character and Christian response to atrocities. Therefore, we need to take brave steps to intrude in to the camps somehow with spiritual teachings. We give Bibles to all who failed to take it when

they were fleeing and now we are praying and planning to enrich them with every available books and literature in Oriya language. We are encouraging the inmates to give leadership to con-



him?" I asked.

"Of course I love him." She said. "Should I not love and serve him even when we undergo all kind of trouble? Didn't Jesus say that we will have trouble in this world?" That eleven-year-old girl was challenging me.

"Sure, daughter!" I said. "We have to suffer for him. Even Jesus suffered for us.

"Ngha," the small girl intervened. "When we consider the sufferings of Jesus, what is big in our suffering?"

duct meetings inside the camps, where outsiders are not allowed to conduct worship.

God is enabling us to take every step possible to see that all the material needs of the campers are met reasonably. We provide mats, warm cloths blankets and sweaters (for kids) wherever it is necessary. What all things the government fails to provide, we try to give them. I thank God for all those who are backing us financially and I assure you that the money you spend is not in vain. However, we strongly believe that God wants us to be concerned about the spiritual needs of the people and look for their spiritual future.

James took all the pain of visiting all the camps and he conducted spiritual meetings wherever we got permission. In other places, we met them personally. We urge people to stand for the Lord and ask them to dedicate their lives for the service of the Lord. We plan to recruit those who commit the rest of their life for serving the Lord in other districts of Orissa, gather them in Bhubaneswar or some other place, and gradually rehabilitate them to other districts. It is a huge task and a long process.

I would like to share some glad tidings in between. Biswajit Naik was the first fruit from his family. His brother and father were continuing as Hindus even after years of his conversion. When the fanatics attacked Ruydangia, they also had to flee for their life. We thought Biswajit's father would be furious against Biswajith for taking this "trouble" to his family and village. However, the ways of the Lord is mysterious. Biswajith's father Thrilok Naik confessed Jesus as his Lord and he took baptism on Sunday, November 16, 2008.

His house was the biggest house in the village. The fanatics bombarded it and destroyed it completely. Their car also was burned. However, this did not put the man down. "I am so happy today," he says. "I could not understand the joy my son had when he left his job for the service of the Lord. True, I lost my material possessions, but I am joyful because now I am part of God's kingdom." That old man testified in the church. Four people took baptism on next Sunday.

Christmas offer for Yoga lessons!



Modern day life is full of stress and struggles. Every day we are faced with situations that make us sick in our body and soul. Everyone wants to enjoy and live a stress-free life. People do so many things to de-stress themselves. Some people try several ways and in the end get stressed about releasing their stress. One of the common ways of de-stressing that has been advocated by the eastern philosophies is meditation. There are several types of meditation and several grades of meditation. This is particularly true that eastern religions have like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. They practice and advocate some form or the other of meditation.

Everyone is impressed by the term yoga. It is popular not only in the east but also in the west. They say that every world-view has some form or other of meditation. They quote several verses from Bible and say that even Christianity advocate meditation (Several verses from Psalms). Some argue that the word 'meditation' is synonymous with 'prayer'. They also say that Isaac practiced meditation and Jesus himself practiced some form of meditation. And so they say, yoga which is an eastern form of meditation is good for the well being of people and society. In some western countries even Churches advocate Yoga.

Many youngsters ask... Is it compatible with the Christian world view? Is it right for a Christian to do yoga? What does Bible say about this meditation? ...etc. The very fact that people ask such questions makes me think that a Christian somehow deep within him or her feels that something is fishy. Obviously, decision making process for going or not going for yoga class is different from the decision making process... say of attending painting or craft or gym training courses. Why is it so? Think about it honestly. I tried to find out more about this.

Yoga teaches some very good principles like discipline, physical exercise, sitting in silence, reflection on one's self etc. However, I think that it is mixed with lots and lots of things that are contrary to the Christian point of view. The ultimate aim of Yoga is to attain 'illumination' or 'mukthi' or 'salvation' or 'Nirvana'. It also starts with an assumption that you are part of the creator and all creation and the creator is one and the same, which I think is just an extension of the pantheistic (God is all and all is God, God is personal and non-personal at the same time) point of view. It strives to achieve an 'inner harmony' or becoming one with the 'universal good' and so on. This is an utterly wrong sense of 'communion' which is an illusion far away from the principles of Bible. So the starting point itself is in contradiction with Bible. The origin of yoga is attributed to some of the many Hindu gods.

Bible clearly distinguishes between the creator God and His creation. Creation and creator are never and can never be the same. Human beings are created beings and we can never become God! God has given us son-ship through His son Jesus Christ. So we are all children of God but not God. Further, we cannot attain salvation by our works. Bible clearly tells us that Salvation is given to us as a Gift for the mankind from God and is free because Jesus Christ has paid the ransom for us. We cannot receive salvation by doing some physical and spiritual exercise like yoga. But yoga is considered as a means to receive salvation which is in

If a coded message is present right in front of us in the form of DNA, it is not considered as an evidence for intelligence behind it, but if it comes from outer space then, it will be interpreted as being produced by an intelligent being in space!

contradiction to the Biblical principle of 'Salvation by Grace'.

To start yoga is to empty your mind! Sounds strange...but that's what they teach! I think that this is a dangerous beginning. Mind can never be emptied; it will always be filled with something else. This is where the trouble begins from now on it is no more playing around with mind but with spirit. They say the essence is to get rid of all 'desires' and this will relieve people from unnecessary burdens and day to day stresses. But this is ridiculous...one can never get rid of desires. People who want to get rid of 'desires' essentially have a desire to get rid of his or her 'desires'! So having a desire in some form or the other is inevitable. Bible talks about controlling your desires with the help of the creator and encourages us to pursue



good desires and even adds that He will grant the desires of our heart, if we delight in Him! Well everyone think that yoga is meditation. May be they are correct

but meditation of what? (The object of meditation.). How is this meditation performed? (The process or means of meditation.). In Bible the word 'meditation' used by psalmists is not the meditation that yoga advocates. Biblical meditation always revolves around the word of God. It simply means the dwelling upon and understanding the word of God, His laws and His statutes. It is way of assimilating the truth of God's word into ones being. This ultimately leads to Worship of the living God...the giver of law. We see this process in action many of the Psalms. Yoga advocates chanting of different 'mantras' as a means to enter into meditation. Most of the mantras are not in

By Blesson C.S.

May be yoga is meditation, but meditation of what? (The object of meditation)



conformity with Christian scriptures.

Doing physical exercise is obviously is the most attracting feature for youngsters and even medical science. This aspect is just the outer shell of yoga which leads to deeper things that fiddles with soul and spirit. I would suggest one can go to a gym and have a nice work out and keep oneself fit. The beautiful

and fulfilling experience that I have noticed and experienced is to walk around the woods, smelling the sweet aroma of nature, listening to the chirps of birds, flooding the eyes with the beautiful colors of flowers, walking through the mountains and valleys. This process has time and again made me awestruck with wonder and made me appreciate the creator leading to the worship of creator God.

In a bottle full of honey if you add a tiny little drop of poison, you won't call it honey any more...will you? It is called poison. Why meddle with something where truth is mixed with lies. Is it not better to stay away from slippery ground? Is it not wise to move away from a path with provokes one to elevate oneself to the level of God? Is it not what Lucifer did? Don't you think that it is better to move away from a way that leads to idol worship?

So, if you find an advertisement saying Christmas 'offer' for a yoga lessons, remember it is the Christmas that has to de-stress you give you a new life and not yoga. Jesus Christ was born to offer a beautiful new life saying 'Cast your Burden upon me, I will give you rest'. The Christmas 'offer' given by God the Father is His son Jesus Christ! It was not a discount offer but a free exchange offer! Throw away the old tiring ways and stressful life and get a brand new, peaceful and eternal life...FOR FREE. Let Him be born in your heart this Christmas 'Happy Christmas'.

Becoming best friends with God



The key to friendship with God is not changing what you do, but changing your attitude towards what you do.

By
Grace
George



God wants to be your best friend. Your relationship to God has many different aspects: God is your creator and maker, Lord and Master, Judge, Redeemer, Father, Saviour and much more! But the most shocking truth is this: Almighty God yearns to be your friend!

In Eden we see God's ideal relationship with us: Adam and Eve enjoyed an intimate friendship with God. There were no rituals, ceremonies, or religion - just a simple loving relationship between God and the people He created. Unhindered by guilt or fear. Adam and Eve delighted in God, and He delighted in them.

We were made to live in God's continual presence, but after the Fall, that ideal relationship was lost. Only a few people in Old Testament times had the privilege of friendship with God. Abraham and Moses were called "friends of God", David was called "a man after God's own heart."

Unlike the Old Testament priests who had to spend hours preparing to meet Him, we can now approach God any time. The Bible says, "Now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God - all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God."

Friendship with God is possible only because of the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus. "All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends." The old hymn says, "What a friend we have in Jesus," but actually God invites us to enjoy friendship and fellowship with all three persons of the Trinity: our heavenly Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I no longer call you servants, because a

servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." The word for 'friend' in this verse does not mean a casual acquaintance but a close, trusted relationship.

Knowing and loving God is our greatest privilege, and being known and loved is God's greatest pleasure.

It is difficult to imagine how an intimate friendship is possible between an omnipotent, invisible, perfect God and a finite, sinful human being. It is easier to understand a master-servant relationship or a creator-creation relationship or even father-child. But what does it mean when God wants you as a friend?

From the lives of God's friends in the Bible we learn two essential factors of keeping friendship with Him. And that will work out only when you choose to be honest with God, obey God in faith, value what God values and desire friendship with God more than anything else.

Through constant conversation

You will never grow a close relationship with God by just attending church once a week or even having a daily quiet time. Friendship with God is built by sharing all your life experiences with Him.

Of course, it is important to establish the habit of a daily devotional time with God, but He wants more than an appointment in your schedule. He wants you to include Him in your daily activities, every conversation, every problem and even every thought. You can carry on a continuous open-ended conversation with Him throughout your day, talking with Him about whatever you are doing or thinking at that moment. "Praying without ceasing" means

conversing with God while shopping, driving, working, or performing any other routine tasks.

A common misconception is that "spending time with God" means being alone with Him. Of course, as Jesus modelled, you need time alone with God, but that is only a fraction of your waking hours. Everything you do can be "spending time with God" if He is invited to be a part of it and you stay aware of His presence.

The classic book on learning how to develop a constant conversation with God is practising the presence of God. The key to friendship with God is not changing what you do, but changing your attitude towards what you do. What you normally do for yourself you begin doing for God, whether it is eating, bathing, working, relaxing or taking out trash.

Today we often feel we must "get away" from our daily routine in order to worship God, but that is only because we haven't learned to prac-

You will never grow a close relationship with God by just attending church once a week or even having a daily quiet time. Friendship with God is built by sharing all your life experiences with Him.

tise His presence all the time.

The Bible tells us "pray all the time". How is it possible to do this? One way is to use "breath prayers" throughout the day as many Christians have done for centuries. You choose a brief sentence or a simple phrase that can be repeated to Jesus in one breath: "You are with me," "I receive Your grace," "I want to know you," etc. Just be sure that your motive is to honour God not to control Him. Practising the presence of God is a skill, a habit you can develop. Just as musicians practise scales every day in order to play beautiful music with ease, you must force yourself to think about God at different times in your day.

Through continual meditation

A second way to establish a friendship with God is by thinking about His Word throughout your day. This is called "meditation," and the Bible repeatedly urges us to meditate on who God is, what He has done, and what He has said. You can't love God unless you know Him, and you can't know God without knowing His Word.

While you cannot spend all time studying the Bible, you can think about it throughout the day, recalling verses you have read or memorized and mulling them over in your mind. Meditation is often misunderstood as some difficult mysterious, ritual practised by isolated monks and mystics. But meditation is simply focused thinking - a skill anyone can learn and use anywhere.

When you think about a problem over and over in your mind, it is called 'worry'. When you think about God's Word over and over in your mind that's meditation. If you know how to worry you already know how to meditate! The more you meditate, on God's Word, the less you will have to worry about. Friends share secrets, and God will share His secrets with you if you develop your habit of thinking about His Word throughout the day. God told Abraham his secrets and did the same to Daniel, Paul and other friends.

When you read your Bible, hear a sermon or listen to tape, don't just forget and walk away. Develop the practice of reviewing the truth in your mind, thinking about it over and over. The more time you spend reviewing what God has said, the more you will understand the 'secrets' of this life that most people miss.

The Bible says, "Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence him, with them alone he shares the secrets of his promises."

Start today by practising constant conversation with God and continual meditation on His Word. Prayer lets you speak to God; meditation lets God speak to you.

Both are essential to becoming a 'friend of God.' God bless you!

People being liberated out of the strongholds of caste system

(Cont'd. from page 4)

burned. There were also several cases of rape. Nevertheless, he noted, "some 100,000 people have turned to Christ as a result," in that region of India.

Asked to speculate on the years ahead, D'souza stated: "I foresee the Dalit exodus and empowerment getting stronger and stronger. I also foresee the church being persecuted more, not less. Anti-conversion laws have been passed in seven states so far." This trend, he declared, "may push the Dalits into a civil war. They will

not be kept as slaves."

Asked whether the battle against caste is gaining momentum, D'souza asserted: "Yes, there is hope. The global community is more aware that caste is alive and well in India. International forums in the U.S., the U.K. and at the UN have brought up the issue. The church of Christ has responded worldwide."

So, too, has the head of India's government. Manmohan Singh, a Sikh, is "the first serving prime minister to compare untouchability to

Apartheid," said D'souza. "He has called it 'a blot on humanity.'"

The interview ended on a personal note, when it was pointed out that D'souza literally practices what he preaches. For him, Dalits are anything but untouchable - as he proved to himself three decades ago, when he married one. Most significantly, he did so as a member of the very highest caste, the Brahmin.

While he was raised as a Roman Catholic, his family nevertheless took pride in its cultural status. "I was fre-

quently made aware of what it meant to be in the highest caste."

So, just how challenging was it for a Brahmin to marry a Dalit 30 years ago, decades before the current awakening? "It was a revelation of how caste has governed Indian life. I had no idea what had been taken away from these people." Along with this social re-education he underwent a spiritual transformation. "It forced me to re-evaluate the gospel's application to this situation. As a result, I rediscovered the tenets of the gospel."

Church of God pastor attacked

Mumbai: Around 20 men from the VHP barged into the Church of God prayer hall at Bhayander at 12.30 pm on November 15, 2008 and stripped and thrashed Pastor Philip Fernandes in the mistaken belief that he was converting people to Christianity. The attackers also damaged the prayer hall and confined 20 persons attending the prayer meeting.

Raj Jaiswal, a real estate broker who attended the prayer, told that 20 people, including 15 women, were in the prayer when someone knocked at the door. "We opened it presuming that more people may have come for the prayer," he said.

A mob of about 20 rushed in, shouting slogans such as, 'Jai Hind,

Jai Maharashtra,' said Jaiswal. "They claimed to be from the VHP and said they had information that conversions were happening here. They hurled filthy abuses at us and beat us up," he added.

Although a Hindu, he attends the prayer meetings for the past seven years since he believes the prayers cured of persistent body ache when doctors failed.

Jaiswal said that he then phoned a TV channel for help. "The reporters came in 15 minutes with police officials from the Kanakia police chowkie and Navghar police station who resolved the matter," he said. Reports say that eight men have been arrested for the attack.

Church vandalized

Dehra Dun (Uttarakhand): An angry mob of about 30 Hindu extremists barged into the worship hall of Bethesda Church, accused the Christians of forceful conversion, and damaged the Holy Bibles, gospel literature and furniture. They also took the church offering and donation boxes along with important documents.

Fearing for his life, members of Bethesda Church hid Rev. Hemant Gurung. In the meantime, Pastor Asher Wasker from the Assembly of God's Church from Rajpur, a neigh-

bouring area, went to the spot to help the believers. On his arrival, the assailants mercilessly beat him up.

The pastor suffered internal injuries and his right ear drum was seriously affected. Bethesda Church caretaker and Pastor Asher Wasker lodged a police complaint with the help of area Christian leaders. The police arrested three extremists under various sections of Indian Penal Code. The extremists were released later. Atrocities against the Christians in Dehra Dun are on the rise.

Pastor, believer arrested

Bangalore (Karnataka): Police arrested a pastor and one believer on the basis of a complaint lodged by the RSS and VHP activists of forced conversion in Hosur Road here.

According to source, the extremists barged into the house-church worship meeting conducted by Pastor Sujnanamm, who is a student of Bhirian Baptist Bible College and his ministry is also supported by the Bible College. The radicals beat up the pastor and dragged him to the police station where he was charged with forceful conversion.

The police filed a First Information Report (FIR) against the pastor and Dr. Advin S. Chilly, President of the Bhirian Baptist Bible College under Section 295A and 506 of the In-

dian Penal Code for malicious acts to outrage religious feelings and punishment for criminal intimidation respectively. The Christians remain in Jail at press time.

Reward offered for violence

Bhubaneswar (Orissa): According to various sources, Hindu militants in the state are offering compensation in money, clothing, or basic necessities for those who succeed in killing Christians, destroying their property, or burning down churches.

A reward of approximately Rs.15,000 is being promised to those who kill a pastor. Women are also being recruited by the militants and

Christians arrested, assaulted in Karnataka

Bangalore (Karnataka): Police arrested three Christians on charges of alluring slum dwellers to convert to Christianity on November 12 in Cox Town here. According to sources, three believers identified as Chandrasekhar and two ladies, Kamamma and Sandhya went to a slum area in Jeevanahalli to pray for a sick couple. On their way back, they were attacked by about 20 RSS workers.

Mr. Gowda, employer of the slum dwellers has also filed a complaint against the Christians of inducing people to convert to Christianity. The extremists snatched their bags and verbally abused them and called up the police. The Frazer Town Police then took the three believers to the

police station and arrested them.

The two ladies were taken to a remand home and Mr. Chandrasekhar was sent to a jail the next day. The three Christians were produced in a court on November 13 and will remain in police custody.

Occurrence of such incidents has been frequent of late. In the past three months, eight districts suffered Hindutva attacks, causing damage to 32 churches and prayer halls with about 70 Christians being assaulted and 20 nuns beaten by the police.

In an earlier incident, in Chamarajanagar District a believer identified as Benjamin, staff of Manonidhi Institute of Nursing, was arrested on charges of "forced" conversion on

Police disrupt meetings

Bangalore (Karnataka): Police on November 2, 2008 disrupted the Sunday worship service based on the accusation of "forced" conversion against the Christians in Thimannakatte village in Haveri district.

According to Christian Legal Association, the police personnel barged into the house church of Dheiwah Ministry and stopped the worship service of Pastor Nagaraj.

The police also warned the pastor to take prior permission to conduct future worship meetings. However, one Inspector disclosed that the pastor can continue to conduct worship meetings under police protection adding that normalcy has returned to the area. No arrests had been made.

In another incident, also on November 2, 2008 police stopped a worship service and warned Pastor Basappa Adapur not to conduct another worship meeting without prior permission in Bagalkot.

The police entered the Shalom Full Gospel Church amid the worship service and urged the pastor to stop the meeting. The police further informed him to take prior permission from the Deputy Commissioner for conducting worship services in the future.

Pastor Adapur has been pastoring the Shalom Full Gospel Church for ten years and is also looking after Shalom Girls' orphanage in the same area.

Priest and aides attacked

Dehradun (Uttarakhand): Three Christians, including a priest, were attacked on November 3, 2008 by around 50 Hindu extremists at Choela Buttuwala village on charges of trying to convert local residents.

The activists reached a makeshift church and started gathering the literature kept there. "Then they quarrelled with priest Hemant Guru and his two associates, Suraj Kumar and Suresh Kumar. They beat up all three," said Neeraj Thapa, a local resident.

The scared trio somehow managed to escape. The angry mob then

collected the pamphlets and literature from the church and reached Patel Nagar police station to lodge a complaint. When the police refused, the mob went to the Clock Tower area and burnt the pamphlets.

Three persons were arrested by the Kotwali police for disturbing peace. later a BJP leader, accompanied by other party members secured their release.

Villagers said the church was constructed a year back where regular discourses and prayer meetings were conducted.

Killing continues in Orissa

Bhubaneswar: A Christian woman identified as Lalita Digal (45) was murdered on November 25 in Dobali village, Kandhamal district.

She was staying in the relief camp, and went to the village to harvest the paddy on November 21. She was staying at her friend's place. On November 25, she was allegedly dragged out from the house and murdered. Her body has not been recovered yet.

Death in a relief camp

Leunsio Digal died due to lack of

being trained in secret locations to use swords and clubs to attack believers. The interior minister has called for the creation of a special police division to protect those under threat of violence.

proper medication in the Daringbadi camp on November 24. He had an unattended fever for a week.

Digal was a catechist for 25 years under Simonbadi parish, Archdiocese of Cuttack- Bhubaneswar

Priest dies after being beaten by Hindu militants

On October 28, Father Bernard Digal (48), died after succumbing to injuries he suffered in an attack by Hindu militants in Kandhamal in late August.

Thousands of believers attended the funeral for the martyred priest on October 31, commending his courage, his tireless commitment to working with persecuted Christians and his willingness to forgive those who brutally beat him.

Christian women on November 9.

Pastor Ravi Charles of Jesus Prayer Hall was summoned to perform the funeral of the believer, identified as Girijama. As the pastor, his wife and other believers reached the spot, there was an argument among the family members on how the funeral was to be accorded. The relatives who preferred the Hindu rites informed the VHP extremists.

The extremists arrived at the scene, accused the pastor of forced conversion and started beating him up. The Christian women were also verbally abused. The extremists called up the police and the believers were taken to the police station where they were detained for four hours.

In another incident in Banavara, Hassan District VHP activists accused a pastor of 'forced' conversion, beat him up and also verbally abused

Relief workers arrested

Bhubaneswar (Orissa): Seven Christians working for the Discipleship Centre relief agency in Bhadrak district were arrested by police for forcible conversion on November 4.

According to a November 6 report from the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the workers were travelling to their office by motorbike when a collision occurred with another cyclist.

A mob of approximately 50 peo-

Law to restrict religion passed

Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan): A restrictive religion law passed its final reading in Kyrgyzstan's parliament on November 6, sparking concern among the Christian minority.

The new law, if approved by President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, requires religious organizations to have a minimum of 200 members whose identities have been confirmed by local authorities, bans the distribution of religious literature in

House-church leader sentenced

Beijing (China): On October 30, house church leader Pastor Zhu Baoguo was sentenced to one year "re-education through labour" on charges of being an "evil cult" leader, according to delayed reports.

Pastor Zhu and four other leaders were detained by authorities during a church gathering in Dushu village, Henan province on October 12. While the other four leaders were sentenced to five days of administrative detention, Pastor Zhu was sentenced to 15 days.

House-church banned

Beijing (China): House churches in Yichun city, Heilongjiang province, China were banned in mid-October, according to a delayed report from China Aid Association.

Verbal orders to halt and end all house church activities came from both provincial and central government agencies.

Acquitted

Algeires (Algerian): On October 29, a court in Ain El-Turck, northwestern Algeria acquitted Rachid Muhammad Essinger and two other Christian leaders who were charged with blasphemy in February.

According to a report from Middle East Concern, the men were declared innocent because the evidence brought against them was fabricated by their accusers.

The Christians were informed that they could bring their accuser to court for his slanderous accusations, but they chose instead to forgive him.

Local Christians hope that the ruling will set a legal precedence for other wrongly accused Christians in the country. In recent months, negative international attention on the discrimination of Christians in Algeria has reportedly improved the government's treatment of believers.

ple then gathered around the Christians and began to attack them. The mob swelled to approximately 400 people after it was joined by members of Hindu militant groups who shouted anti-Christian slogans.

The police eventually arrived on scene and took the Christians into custody and charges of forcible conversion were brought against them. At the time of the report, the Christians remained in detention.

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Glenn Penner, Voice of the Martyrs' CEO, states, "This law makes it impossible for smaller churches to function legally. Even larger congregations will have difficulty getting 200 members to sign the necessary documents. History shows that these believers have good reason to be nervous about registering their names with the government."

Two days after Pastor Zhu's release from detention, he was sentenced and taken to a labour camp in an unknown location. There is considerable concern for his health as he suffers from heart disease.

Son of martyred pastor on bail

Teheran (Iran): Concerns are swirling regarding the health and safety of Iranian Christian Ramtin Soodmand as he awaits trial promoting anti-government propaganda. He is the son of martyred Iranian Pastor Hossein Soodmand.

Soodmand was released on bail on October 22, 2008 after more than two months in a Mashhad prison, having originally been charged with proselytizing. A family member expressed frustration that the court repeatedly changed the bail amount before finally settling on the equivalent of US\$22,000. His in-laws put up the deed to their home to ensure bail.

Christians jailed

Mexico City: On November 16, 2008 four Christians in the community of Santiago Teotlaxco, Oaxaca State were jailed for refusing to participate or help pay for a festival that blends traditional native religions and Catholicism, according to reports.

Evangelical Christians throughout southern Mexico, especially those in indigenous communities, are living in fear of being expelled from their homes or having their utilities cut off by officials attempting to pressure them into conforming to local religious practices.

Church destroyed

Abuja (Nigeria): Two church buildings were destroyed within days of each other in the northern Nigerian town of Yelwa, Bauchi state.

On November 16, 2008, the foundation of the Church of Christ build-

Christian dies in prison

Asmara (Eritrea): Eritrean Christians continue to be targeted by authorities and imprisoned for their faith, according to delayed reports.

Teklesenbet Gebreab Kiflom (36), a member of the Full Gospel Church who was detained for a year at the Wi'a Military Confinement Centre, died recently of malaria. He reportedly suffered harsh military punishment and was denied medical attention.

Authorities have arrested 65 believers belonging to house churches in recent weeks. Officials made the arrests in five different locations, working off of a list of names that sources believe were provided by informants around the country.

Christians denied faith: Court

Teheran (Iran): The Court has claimed that recently released Christians, Mahmood Matin-Azad and Arash Basirat, who were acquitted on charges of apostasy on September 25, have learned that their release was based on the false claim that they denied their Christian faith in court.

According to an October 30 report from Compass Direct, the court claims that the men denied converting to Christianity from Islam. However,

Mother and two daughters martyred

Baghdad (Iraq): The mother of two women killed by a gang of teenaged assailants in Mosul on November 12, 2008 died recently from injuries she sustained in the violence. A funeral was held for the three martyred Christians on November 19.

Earlier, on November 12 the two daughters of the woman were martyred. The gunmen shot one of the sisters as she was waiting for a bus outside of her house. They then stormed into her home and killed her sister and injured her mother. A bomb placed by the assailants at the entrance of the house detonated as the police arrived on the scene, injuring several officers.

both men vehemently maintain that they openly professed their Christian faith throughout the trial

Although they have been exonerated of the charges, they fear they will be re-arrested once they resume their Christian activity or that believers who associate with them will also face pressure. Some believe that they were released to appease international pressure and that they might be punished outside of the law.

awaiting trial

Soodmand questioned his treatment while in prison. One source said he asked about the man's health on three separate phone conversations. The government cut off the phone three times, the source said.

A source closely following the case said that when he asked Soodmand about his treatment in prison, he responded, No place on [my] body is hurting. That source believed Soodmand was saying that he had recovered from being tortured. His father was executed by the state in 1990, and there is speculation that Soodmand may have been singled out because of the relationship.

More restrictions

Almaty (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan's draft religion law was amended with further restrictions on November 7, 2008. The amendments to the law include mandating a fixed fine of 50 times the minimum monthly salary for those found guilty of worshipping, building or opening places of worship, or publishing or distributing religious literature without government permission.

The proposed amendment would also require both parents to give permission before a child can attend a religious event and would ban believers from expressing their faith beyond their "own circle."

ing was dismantled by local Muslims. Although authorities subsequently placed a guard at the premises, another church building only two kilometres away was burned to the ground on November 18.

Chapel attacked

Hanoi (Vietnam): A group of communist party activists attacked the St. Gerardo chapel on the property of the Thai Ha parish here on the evening of November 15, 2008.

At 10:00 p.m., hundreds of activists arrived at the monastery and asked for an urgent meeting with believers. They began shouting, throwing stones at the building and trying to provoke the believers.

Local Christians were quickly alerted to the attack by fellow believers and within an hour, a large group of Christians were on the scene. The attackers were eventually intimidated by the growing number of believers present and fled before they could cause serious damage to the premises. Local Christians suspect the attack is related to their ongoing battle for restitution of parish land seized by authorities.

Bless Bihar Festival

(Cont'd. from page 8)

Pastor Sushil Tiga was the chairman for the program committee, being constituted by local pastors and workers. They were assisted by Pastor Samuel Murmu and team from Katihar.

The four days of meetings were truly a blessing for Bihar and

especially for Katihar. Many lives were touched and many were healed. Even many of the dignitaries and chief guests expressed their joy at the occurrence of such a meeting. Once known as the graveyard of missions, God is now raising up some Ezekiels in Bihar as he blows the breath of life into the dry bones.

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