

Contents

Editorial	1
1. A Search for Basic Christian Community Spirituality – <i>Dr. Selvister Ponnnumuthan</i>	3
2. Basic Human Communities – <i>Fr. M. J. Edwin</i>	25
3. BCCs and Hindu Christian Relationship – <i>Dr. A. M. David</i>	35
4. Challenges to the Basic Christian Communities – <i>Dr. N. John Damascene,</i>	49

Book Reviews

Introducing Feminist Theology.

by *Anne M. Clifford*. Maryknoll,
New York: Orbis Books. 2001.

– *Dr. T. Victor*

63

Ministry & Theology in Global Perspective.

ed. by *Don A. Pittman, Ruben L. F. Habito and Terry C. Muck*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans
Publishing Company, 1996.

– *Dr. S. Devaraj*

65

Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings.

ed. by *James B. Nickoloff*. Maryknoll,
New York: Orbis Books, 1996.

– *Fr. Alphonse Thainese*

66



BCCS: EMERGENCE OF THE PEOPLE'S CHURCH

Editorial

The rise and remarkable spread of the Basic Christian Communities is undoubtedly one of the most striking signs of the Church's present day vitality and future growth. It all began sometime in the 1960s when in some remote villages of south America some unknown, uneducated, unimportant and poor lay Christians started to meet together to pray, read the Bible and reflect in its light on their lives and problems. The rest is history. But none then would have even imagined that this initiative of those 'nobodies' would have in a few decades cascaded into a world wide movement reaching to even some of the farthest ends of Asia and Africa.

This movement springing up from the underside of history and from the grassroots of the Church has been recognized and recommended by the recent popes and many episcopal conferences as also a movement of the Spirit of God to recreate the Church and renew the face of the earth. In fact, no other measure launched by the Church's hierarchy or initiative promoted by any ecclesiastical agency after Vat.II can be seen to have infused so much of fresh energy, dynamism and hope in the Christian Communities or to contain so much of promise and potential to enable them to effectively carry out their mission.

Small communities, however, are not a novelty to Christianity. Its very beginning was only in the form of a small community of the male and female disciples of Jesus living and moving with him through the towns and villages of Palestine proclaiming the good news of God's Kingdom (Lk 8:1-3). The mission of this mobile model community was to establish similar, though more stable, kingdom communities gathering together all those who believed in the good news they preached. It is one such post-Easter community that we find described, though in an idealized form, by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles (2:43-47; 4:32-37). In the following centuries and particularly in and after the Constantinian era of freedom and prosperity for the Church, such communities got coalesced with the mass of people converted to

Christianity. But the original ideal of Christian life together in small communities of fellowship and brotherhood never died nor disappeared. For over 15 centuries that ideal survived and even flourished in the form of the communities of so many monastic orders and religious congregations.

Through the BCCs, the Church has rediscovered such an ideal as well as its real identity and is accordingly recreating itself. In them it is no more a congregation of anonymous persons who come together only to worship their God without really coming to know, care for and share with one another. Rather, the Church has become in them true communities of Jesus' disciples. In the BCCs when Christians come together as children of the same *Abba* God they also come close to one another as brothers and sisters; when they listen to the word of God they also open themselves up to one another and to the world; their worship of God expresses itself also as service to one another and common commitment to the transformation of society.

The BCCs have also admirably succeeded in concretizing the new vision of the Church as the people of God as proposed by Vat. II. In and through them the Church has moved away from being a top-heavy institution overly focused on its hierarchical structure and has truly become the people's Church. With the face to face encounter they provide, all distinctions of rank, class, education etc. tend to disappear and so do discriminations based on caste or gender. In them even the ordinary and uneducated men and women have started to pray by themselves, read and interpret the Bible as the Spirit moves them, discern and decide together on issues that affect the community, and are enabled to assume various roles of responsibility and leadership.

The BCCs are, thus, not merely a new way of organizing the Church but a new way of being the Church and a new way of living the faith in Christ and realizing his kingdom vision. What is implied and demanded in them is a new spirituality that includes others, even those of other religions or no religion, in the communion of Christ's love and in a spirit of dialogue (Basic Human Communities). But the BCCs are certainly not perfect communities which have fully realized that Christian ideal and they do have many limitations and face challenges from within and without. Despite all these they are the best signs of hope for a new Church and new humanity. So it is with much joy and satisfaction that we present to the readers this number of *Vaiharai* that is focused on some of the current issues related to the BCCs.