

VAIHARAI

(The Dawn)

A Theological Half-Yearly

Vol. 12 No.2

Jul - Dec 2007

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Year of Paul

In response to the call of Pope Benedict the XVI, the Church is preparing herself to celebrate the year of Paul (Oct 2008 to Sept. 2009) who has been a figure of controversy ever since he met the risen Lord on the way to Damascus. For Jews he is an apostate but for Christians an apostle. Understandably his theological enterprise has won admirers as well as critics among the Christian thinkers. Admirers appreciate him on different scores: for his ecclesiology, Christology, Pneumatology and so on. The critics accuse him of weakening the potency of the Christian message by laying more importance to the messenger than the message. Thus even today Paul remains a controversial personality. The debate, however, on the theological positions of Paul and their implications for our time should go on to make him more relevant to our milieu.

The uniqueness of Paul in giving contours to the basic tenets of the Christian faith lies more in the process than the product. He articulated the basic tenets of Christian faith neither sitting in a library nor confining himself to a secluded place. In other words, it was not the fruit of his speculation on the revealed truths. Instead he did it in his interaction with the Christian communities. He founded the early Christian communities, nurtured their faith and encouraged them to grow in the Spirit. He, in this animation process, identified the basic problems and issues the communities were facing and helped them to find resources in their faith experiences to address those issues and problems. He deepened their faith experiences and challenged them to live up to the demands those experiences entail. He was constantly and consistently applying the Christian message to the demands of the time and came out with new meanings and richness of the Christian

faith. Thus, the uniqueness of his contribution to the development of fundamental Christian thoughts lies in his creativity and innovation in applying the basic faith convictions to the daily problems and issues of Christian communities.

Paul was able to do this most demanding task, because he was more committed to the cause of Jesus Christ. Explaining in brief the basic themes Paul has dealt with in his letters, Hans Kung concludes thus in his book titled *Great Christian Thinkers* (1994:39): "In all that I have said I have not grasped Paul, but simply come nearer to him. If one is to get to know all his themes... then one must read Paul oneself. Then it is possible to understand why Paul, tested by suffering and militant, weak yet strong, was a great theologian, a great Christian thinker. It was because with body and soul, in pride and humility, he was utterly devoted to the cause, the Christian cause, the cause of Jesus Christ."

Beside his theological acumen, the very person Paul remains a great challenge to the leaders of the Church today. His passion for Jesus Christ, his missionary zeal to take the gospels to the ends of the earth, his courage to endure sufferings of different kinds for the sake of gospel and his love for the incipient Churches remain a soul-stirring challenge to the ministers of the gospel.

The year of Paul is an invitation given to us to augment our effort to make our faith in Jesus Christ more relevant to the community we animate by interpreting the problems and issues, successes and failures of the community in the light of our faith experiences and vice versa. In this way, as Paul did, we can also empower the people with a faith vision to look at the realities of life. Faith vision is one of the resources available to the individuals and community with which they can enrich their life. The Church should take every effort to mobilise this resource. Towards this purpose the articles published in this issue of *Vaiharai* only introduce the person Paul and some of the themes he dealt with in his letters so that they may trigger one's interest to read and reflect on the letters of Paul further.

Fr. S. Sebastian
Editor