

# Today's Martyrs

*Resources for understanding current Christian witness and martyrdom*

**Document – August 4, 2017**

## **An Open Letter to the Heads of all Churches and other Christian Leaders**

We, as Indian Christians, are concerned at the steady shift we see in our country from a pluralist, secular, democracy to a Hindu Rashtra. What used to be fringe, has now become mainstream. There is a systematic design to undermine the Constitution. Official machinery often seems working in tandem with the 'vigilantes'. Street lynching, victims charged as accused, stage-managed trials; all on the basis of one's religious and caste identities. Media seems mute, silent in self-censorship, coerced by the state, or leashed by its corporate ownership. Fake News is the final straw.

What is at stake? The country risks a hierarchical order and an ideology eroding, containing and overwhelming the liberty, equality and fraternity bequeathed us by the Freedom Struggle as an 'idea of India' for the modern age. A new coercive culture, steered mob-inspired killers, is destroying lives and families amongst us. Fear stalks the land.

The spontaneous multi-city **#NotInMyName** upsurge of public revulsion was the ordinary Indian's cry against this hate and blood-letting.

The anger is as much over the killings as it is over our collective silence.

The government's double talk is apparent. It is right in its solidarity with the global challenge to international terrorism, but has minimized and dismissed the terror wreaked on the weak and the marginalized by the violent nationalism of the mob. Victims have been Dalits, specially their youth and their women, Tribals and religious minorities.

The number of violent acts against Christians alone during the last 3 years (2014-2016) are over 600, including an increasing trend at social boycott that impinges on the right to life, food and livelihood. This includes physical violence, stopping of worship in churches, attacks on churches, arrests of pastors and their companions, and rapes of Nuns. The National Crime Records Bureau documented 47,064 acts of violence against Dalits in 2014, up from 32,643 in 2010. The violence against Muslims is reaching an alarming peak.

The hate spewed not just by non-state actors and political functionaries, but even by Members of Parliament and sometimes by ministers forms the backdrop of this violence, as it also smothers voices seeking justice.

Inevitably, and perhaps deliberately, these divisive and emotional issues divert attention from the repercussions of radical changes in financial laws and economic policies that adversely affect workers, farmers and the youth who suddenly find themselves rendered unemployed.

The political process taking shape today is against every fundamental humane and constitutional principle of Equality and Dignity of every Indian, and preserving Common Good.

Indeed, it is evil.

And inherently calls upon us as individuals, community and people of Faith, to raise our voice against it.

The Christian community, despite its laudable heritage of the prophetic tradition of defending justice, human rights and freedom, especially of the oppressed and the marginalized, has not come out openly in support of the truth and its upholders. Many had looked upon the Church and expected it to protest these infringements, whoever be the victim of the moment.

This demands serious reflection. As Christians, we are called to be the salt of the earth. Jesus gave the two greatest commandments... loving our Lord with all we have and loving our Neighbor. We have professed obedience to these commandments, but perhaps not as visibly as we should have.

Our children, our youth, ask us if we are showing true Christian love today to our neighbors, manifested in the victims of injustice, the marginalized Dalits and tribals, exploited farmers and unorganized labor? Or have we compromised Kingdom values, for short term gains. Have we become lukewarm; are we the men of cloth who walk by the bleeding man on the road to Jericho?

The Church, guided by you, needs to act before it is too late. This is the lesson we learn from history. It is time to stand with the victims to be the voice of poor and marginalized; time to collaborate and partner with the civil society to spread the truth; and time to take bold initiatives and action to prevent further erosion of our humane and constitutional values.

We humbly call upon you, all Christian leaders and Heads of Churches, to reflect and lead the community in the path of truth, love and justice.

We offer a few points for your consideration, as a Charter of our Duty to our fellow Citizens and our nation.

- 1. Based on the Biblical values of justice, right, freedom, dignity and the well-being of every human being, the Christian community should be part of every civil initiative for truth, reconciliation and peace.**
- 2. Any erosion, dilution, infringement or violation of Constitutional rights to life and liberty must invite a response from the church as it does from the people. Speaking out is often the one response that is needed. Saying “Stop” to an act of injustice can often prevent tragedy.**

3. **Our educational institutions must assume their pristine role as crucibles for nation-building, as the Supreme Court has described them.**
4. **Our Theological institutions, Bible colleges, Formation Houses must in their pedagogy include familiarization with the rights and duties of citizens in international covenants and the Constitution of India to enhance knowledge and hone civic conscience.**
5. **In unison with members of all faiths, ideologies we should marshal India's tremendous spiritual resources in consolidating peace, resolving conflicts infusing a sense of values in the body politic.**

God bless our people

And God bless India

We are

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| 6. Anthony Cruz, Social Activist  | 22. Franklyn Ceaser Thomas, Advocate   |
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