

New and Home-grown: A Postcolonial Approach to 'Theology in Context'

Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi

The paper focuses on the significance of 'context' to theology and how the postcolonial perspective could be deployed to reassess theology in context informed by praxis. The South Asian landmass and its people were subjugated by various regimes and nothing of it remained untouched by 'colonialism' and continues with its residue to this day. It enforced political contour and determined governance and land, from spices to religion, alliance, allegiance and loyalty to the powers that be in the distant theatres.

Theology became a 'handmaid' of the empire which framed history, creating new socio-political, religio-cultural domains close to their home but impacting upon the 'colony' and its masses they governed. There is an unfinished debate on the place, role, mode and model of theology since the end of the colonial world with freedom movements and the national quest for identity, a sense of 'peoplehood' as if 'lost and found'. However, theology being part of the historical development of the churches whose prime concern has been to be faithful to 'their context of splintered church doctrine and practice' with less or no regard to the 'new context of the heathens' where they 'pitched their tents' which prioritised 'planting of churches' and 'salvation of souls'.

Evolving a theology without a context could even leave 'God' endangered because God too gathers meaning in context. Therefore, contextual theology is not an option but an imperative for the churches of Asia to make sense of the 'difference' where 'oneness' and 'manyness' of 'religion(s)' require insightful reading and fresh understanding. Postcolonial perspective as a tool, critically pursues to recover, re-index and re-codify terms of reference and strategies of engagement, with the plurality of context of the Christians in Asia. It also helps provide content to theology in context and opens new frontiers to the Asian theological intellect.

Keywords: Contextual theology, post-colonial, Asian religions, Asian theology.