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## **Fostering Holistic Freedom for All**

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**Abstract:** In this article, adapted from his online homily on 72<sup>nd</sup> republic day of India (Jan 23, 2021), to the staff and students of Jnana Deepa, Institute of Philosophy and Theology, the author urges all Indian to ensure justice and freedom for all, especially the poor. He also challenges the Christian theologians to take care of the holistic needs of the people, which includes physical and spiritual. Finally, drawing inspiration from Pope Francis, he urges all of us to work for total and holistic freedom, that ensures justice, harmony and reconciliation.

**Keywords:** Integral Freedom to the Poor, Challenge to Theologians, God-Centric Leaders, Poor-Centric Leaders.

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## Introduction

Although India gained freedom on 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1947, she was declared a republic with her own constitution only on 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1950. Hoisting the National Flag, singing the National Anthem, and parading of diverse tableaux we are reminded of the significant moments of our shared history that had its share of joys and jubilations, pain and pathos, differences and distinctions, successes and shadows. It is indeed a time to remember with grateful hearts those who strove to restore freedom to our countrymen. One can't admire and appreciate the numerous people, scholars, scientists, advocates, humanists, leaders who formulated a constitution that paved the way for a fully democratic system in which the administration lies at the hands of the people and in and through their elected representatives.

## Ensuring Justice and Integral Freedom to the Poor

This year, however, we celebrate this historic moment against the background of 2020, a year of great tragedies and violence. To cite a few, we witnessed the outbreak of a monstrous coronavirus that played havoc on all fronts of life. It rendered many jobless and homeless and some even lost their precious lives. We saw the farmers' legitimate agitation on the streets along the borders of Delhi. We read and heard about people being charged with false and baseless allegations, illegal imprisonment of humanists and social activists, solitary confinement of senior people including our Fr Stan. All these unfortunate events have shaken our souls.

When we cast a bird's eye view of our country, India looks so fragile. Pugnacious Pakistan and confrontational China make our borders look insecure. The ravaging inter-community, inter-religious or international conflicts and tensions have made our social fabric look vulnerable. In the name of development, the poor are made homeless and hopeless. Our media has become spineless and the politicians directionless. Hence, naturally, as we celebrate the republic day of our country many questions crop up in our

minds: How secure are we in our country? Do we have the tools to deal with the inter-community, inter-religious or international conflicts and tensions? Can we ensure justice to the poor? (See Esteves & Service, 2020)

It is not merely political freedom but integral freedom which ensures the growth of all. Hence, the framers of the constitution propounded holistic development. However, the tragedy is that even during the pandemic, when the poor went jobless and hungry, the corporates made huge profits becoming 35% richer. Can democratic India become so insensitive and indifferent to the cries of the poor? Does the government listen to their woes? Do we Christians and theologians listen to their voices? It is our God-given responsibility.

### The Challenge to the Theologians

Theologians have a great role in such a scenario. They are called to bring out the meaning of the Word of God communicated to humankind as a gift, to the fore and guide the people. We all have heard of Victor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 2020). Meaning is essential for human life. The word of God, which is a lamp to our path, gives meaning to our life. Theologians need to present it to people with all its nuances.

Pope Francis is a prophet of our times. Basing himself on the Word of God and the Christian tradition, he calls "all those at the helm, in politics, economic affairs, media and public institutions to collaborate and keep ruthlessness at a distance"

In this ministry of the Word, Pope Francis is a great inspiration to us. He is a prophet of our times. Basing himself on the Word of God and the Christian tradition, he calls "all those at the helm, in politics, economic affairs, media and public institutions to collaborate and keep ruthlessness at a distance" (Bent, 2019).

The Christian perspective provides a holistic view of reality in all spheres, including political participation. Joseph and Daniel of the Old Testament served in governments wielding influence. Jesus' holistic ministry involved not only preaching and teaching but caring for the physical needs of the people as well.

At the heart of evangelization lies the task of sharing what we hold as precious, the person and the good news of Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Galatians Paul exhorts: "As we have the opportunity, let us do good to everyone" (Galatians 6:10). In his letter to Timothy, St Paul urges Timothy to pray for everyone including kings and all those who are in high positions. It is Christian to do good, and one of the good things all can do is to pray. True prayer gives energy and direction. As we know, power is good and it is required to do good things. However, we also know that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Indeed, power can be cancerous. It can destroy persons, institutions and democracies completely. It is in this context, that we need to pray for our leaders to be God-centric and poor centric.

### **Fostering Total Freedom**

To make our prayer powerful and fruitful we need an encounter with Jesus, we need to believe in him and become his disciples. We sit at his feet and listen to him; sit at his feet to see him and learn from him. In other words, a disciple is not called to be the best version of himself or herself but to become the reflection and representative of Jesus. Hence, it is important to be with him. It is the secret of all freedom. No one becomes free by being born in a particular caste or clan as the Jews believed. Freedom is a choice to be with and for Jesus. We need to foster this total freedom.

Let us be honest. The year 2021 presents a polarized scenario. Secularism in the Indian republic seems to be in crisis; its space is shrinking. Issues like the reconversion (*ghar wapsi*), derogatory speeches, the pseudo 'majoritarianism' are rattling our country. The rights enshrined in the Constitution are thwarted to satisfy the

whims and fancies of a few. So, we need to say a definite “no” to the culture of disintegration (Landgraf, 2005), which is diabolic, divisive, and say a convinced “yes” to the culture of hospitality and communion, which is close to Jesus’ work of reconciliation (Gatz, 2020).

Denouncing unjust structures and transgressions have always been a part of the Christian prophetic tradition. Prophets unequivocally denounced kings and the people when they were in error. They considered reproving evil and announcing the holistic liberation as their mission. Of course, they paid the price for the prophetic positions they upheld. Jesus paid the price as well. In fact, he himself warned us that if the master was treated so brutally and unjustly, we His disciples certainly would not be spared. Treading the same pathway, people like Fr Stan Samy remind us of this vocation and invite us to walk that untrodden path (Shantha, 2020).

## Conclusion

As we celebrate the republic day of our country let us open our eyes and see the reality. Let us storm heaven with our prayers. Let us awaken the flame of Christ and Christian values buried in our hearts and become beacons of light and heralds of hope for our countrymen and women in these difficult and dangerous times. Let us also fan the sparks of freedom, faith, fairness and fellowship in our hearts. Of course, We cannot fight alone. Let us collaborate with the other sturdy and saintly stalwarts of our times. May Christ who invited us to be his disciples and companions guide our path and make us the heralds of his love, joy and peace in our country.

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