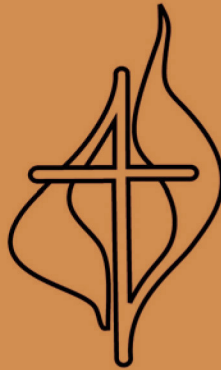


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Groaning and Accountability in a Christian Workers Life

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Editor

**Prof. G.P.V. Somaratna, Director of Research,
Colombo Theological Seminary**

Contents

Ajith Fernando

GROANING AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN A CHRISTIAN WORKERS LIFE 5-18

Mano Emmanuel

'OH GOD, YOU HABE DECEIVED ME': THE CONFESSIONS OF HEREMIAH, A MODEL FOR US? 19-38

Ivor Poobalan

WHO IS 'THE GOD OF THIS AGE' IN 2 CORINTHIANS 4:4? 39-52

G.P.V. Somaratna

THE SUPERFICIAL SUCCESS OF THE REFORMATION AND THE TRIALS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH 53-147

Contributors

**Ajith Fernando, Dr. Ajith Fernando, B.Sc., M.Div, Th.M. D.D.
President of CTS Council, President of YFC (Sri Lanka),**

Mano Emmanuel, B.A, Lecturer at Colombo Theological Seminary

Ivor Poobalan, B.A., Principal of the Colombo Theological Seminary.

**G.P.V. Somaratna, BA, MA (Theology), MA (Missiology), Ph.D (History),
Postgraduate Diploma in Demographic Studies, Director of
Research at Colombo Theological Seminary.**

GROANING AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN A CHRISTIAN WORKERS LIFE¹.

Ajith Fernando

I spoke at a conference of Christian ministers in Sri Lanka last year about the need for those in ministry to have friends to whom they are accountable and with whom they could share their struggles and joys. The overwhelming response to what I said was that this is good theory, but it is impossible to practice. Many said they have been so hurt as a result of confiding in others that they will not do it again. For days I grappled with this question: Why is it that so many Christian workers, who strongly believe in the total authority of Scripture, do not have close friends though Scripture clearly shows that it is a necessity for the Christian life?

NO THEOLOGY OF GROANING

While I was studying a book on ministering to drug addicts (more on that later) a few days after this conference I suddenly realized that the growing church in Sri Lanka may be having a theological problem. We may be presenting Christianity in such a way as to have no place for the biblical concept of groaning.

The typical growing Evangelical church today has a strong theology of the necessity for *growth*. This is surely a biblical concept when the growth intended takes place through the lost coming to Christ. The book of Acts rejoices over those who are saved, often talking about the numbers of those added to the church, showing that God is concerned with the numerical growth of the church (2:42, 47; 44:4; 6:7; 11:1; 14:1).

The church also has a strong theology of *praise*. So testimonies are given to what our powerful God has done in people's lives, and affirmations are made about what the Bible says about the blessings that God gives people. The result is exultant praise. This too is biblical. Does not the Bible have a whole, large book, the Psalms whose Hebrew title is *tehillim* meaning "songs of praise?"

Then our churches have a strong theology of *power* – of God's ability to meet the needs of people and to defeat people's foes. This too is a biblical concept. We see in the Gospels and Acts and an isolated references in the Epistles that God arrested people's attention and made them receptive to the gospel by meeting, often miraculously, the needs of individuals.

But theologies of church growth, of praise and of power can give rise to serious aberrations if they are not balanced with a theology of groaning. I have taken the term "groaning" from Romans 8:23, which says, "... we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Earlier Paul said, "the creation was subjected to futility" as a result of the Fall (8:20). So we do not get everything we want nor do we experience the fullness of perfection that God intends to give us in heaven. But we have a foretaste of it, for we "have the first fruits of the Spirit" (8:23). So things will go wrong in our lives, we will be harmed by accidents, we will get sick and we will have persons who dislike us and hurt us. Despite our desire to be like Christ, who was perfect and sinless, we will make mistakes and sin. Our thirst coming from the foretaste of heaven will clash with the reality of living in a fallen world and the result is that we will groan sometimes.

¹ This article is excerpted from the author's book, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002; Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), chapter 9.

In the Bible groaning can coexist with praise. In fact the Bible has a whole genre (category of literary style) called the lament, to give expression to this groaning. These are raw, painful expressions of hurt and sorrow. In fact fifty to sixty of the 150 songs in Psalms (the book of praises) are classified as laments. Laments are found in other Bible books like Lamentations and Jeremiah too. Old Testament scholar Chris Wright describes the content of a biblical lament like this: “God I am hurting; and God everyone else is laughing. And God, You are not helping very much either; and how long is it going to go on?”²

Another Old Testament scholar, my friend Dr. Davis Baer of Costa Rica, told me of a helpful distinction that some scholars are making between laments and complaints. Laments are said to represent the hopeless cries of devastated people. But complaints are the cries of those who believe that God is good and cannot now see this goodness in what they are experiencing. They cry out to God, but these are cries that are passages that we have called laments should more accurately be termed complaints.

Biblical characters, then, were not afraid to groan. If the Holy Spirit inspired so many laments (or complaints) to be recorded in the Bible, then groaning must surely be part of the Christian life too.

Those who have a theology of lament will have a place for emphasizing honest expressions of struggle. And that can exist alongside an emphasis on growth, power and praise. I think that sometimes we get so eager for growth that we have become like advertisers who give only the positive side of the product and avoid talking about some of the unpleasant sides. I find that nowadays advertisers are required by law to read out the negative aspects of the product they are advertising. And they usually do it softly and fast. I think many churches have not caught on to that practice yet! They know that people will be attracted to the church if the message presented shows all the wonderful things that God can do. For marketing reasons the problems Christians face are neglected. And that has happened for so long that many people do not have a place for groaning in their understanding of the Christian life.

When some talk about their problems in this environment, the other Christians don't know what to do. Sometimes those who share could face rejection and blame for not being good Christians. Therefore they learn to live without talking about their problems, unless it is the type of problem that could become a prayer concern which is exposed through prayer to God's wonder-working power. So they will ask for prayer for healing and guidance and provision of a job or funds, but not for overcoming a hot temper or a bad habit or discouragement.

In a sense this gives evidence of a defective understanding of grace. The biblical understanding of grace is so great that Christians do not need to fear facing up to their sins. Indeed sin is never justified in the Bible and therefore must always be condemned. But grace is greater than sin and grace cannot be applied unless we admit that we have sinned. Therefore if we desire the fullness of God's grace in our life we will be eager to confess our sin so as to open the door to a rich experience of grace. This is not done in a flippant or light way, for we are grieved by sin. But we are so eager for cleansing that we will eagerly face up to the sin and seek for forgiveness.

1 John 1:5-2:3 presents this paradox powerfully. John says, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin” (1 John 2:1a). SO sin is never condoned. But he goes on to say, “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1b-1). God's grace in Christ is so great that we do not need to fear to face up to sin. In fact we fear not facing

² Chris Wright, “Personal Struggle and the Word of Lament,” *Truth on Fire: Keswick Ministry* 1998, edited by David Porter (Carlisle, Cumbria: OM Publishing, 1998), 29.

up to it for we know that “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sins=” (1 John 1:7). We dread the prospect of losing the fellowship and the cleansing by not walking in the light. So we will be eager to “confess our sins” (1 John 1:9).

Defective theologies of groaning and grace can join to cause a church where people are afraid to express their deep hurts and struggles to other Christians. So, for example, when there are fellowship problems between members, they do not talk about it. They do not have the assurance that God’s grace is sufficient for this challenge and they do not have a theology of groaning that can accommodate the temporary unpleasantness that will arise from bringing up the issue. So they choose to ignore it. They continue to praise God, and, through concentrating on God’s goodness, have very satisfying experiences of worship. Because of the emphasis on power this church will also attract many needy people and thus grow. Outwardly the leaders may hug and smile at each other, but inwardly there will be hidden frustrations and anger over unresolved problems. They will work together until the problems get so big that they can’t bear it any more. Then they burst out in very unpleasant confrontation. Often the church breaks up and a group leaves.

NEW TESTAMENT TEAMS: LIFE IN THE RAW

What a contrast to the above scenario in the description in the Gospels of the life of Jesus and his twelve-man team of disciples. There we find what I am calling “life in the raw.” There is no hiding of the problems of the disciples. Not only did the disciples face up to the problems, the Holy Spirit also saw it fit to have these problems recorded in Scripture so that we could learn something from them.

We find them asking foolish and selfish things. At the transfiguration Peter says he wants to build tents for Jesus and Moses and Elijah, and Luke adds that he didn’t know what he said (Luke 9:33). James and John, instigated by their mother, ask to sit on either side of Jesus when he enters glory (Mark 10:37). The other disciples heard this episode prompts the rich and deep discourse by Jesus about the nature of servant leadership and about him being the servant who came to give his life as a ransom for many (10:42-45).

Elsewhere we are told that they argued among themselves about who was the greatest among them. Yet that argument elicited from Christ the statement, “He who is least among you all is the one who is great” (Luke 9:46-48). They argued about this even during the Last Supper, after dispute triggered a wonderful discourse on true greatness and on the rewards of service (Luke 22:24-30).

The disciples rebuked the persons who brought children to him, even though Jesus wanted them to come to him so that he could lay hands on them. But from that episode came the memorable words, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). The disciples “were indignant” when the woman poured the expensive ointment on Jesus’ head and their protests prompted Jesus to elaborate on the “beautiful thing” she did to Jesus (Matt. 26:10-13).

This was a community where the members were not afraid to admit their ignorance and their doubts. After Jesus has told them that if they see him they see the Father, “Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us’” (John 14:7-8). This prompts a gentle rebuke from Jesus followed by a mastery and irrefutable defense of his absolute uniqueness (14:9-11).³ When the disciples tell Thomas that Jesus has risen from the dead he refuses to believe without more tangible evidence.

³ See my, *The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1995), chaps. 2-4.

But that incident also elicits a gentle rebuke and an important comment about saving faith (John 20:24-29).

In the Garden of Gethsemane the disciples are found to be sleeping when they should have been praying as crucial preparation for the arrest to take place soon which would be followed by the terrible events leading up to his death. But out of that embarrassing incident came the famous statement, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt.26:41). And when Jesus is arrested "all the disciples left him and fled" (Matt.26:56).

Peter, the leader of the first church, does not fare well in the Gospels. He is called Satan by Jesus when he tried to rebuke him after he talked about his death (Matt.16:23). That prompts the great statement by Christ on the cost and rewards of following Christ (16:24-28). After bravely launching on a sea walk, he suddenly got afraid and cried out, "Lord, save me." But that incident prompted one of the first acknowledgements in the Gospels of the deity of Christ when the disciples worshipped him and said, "Truly, you are the Son of God" (Matt.14:28-33). Only a handful of incidents are mentioned in all four Gospels, and one of them is the denial of Christ by Peter. But the denial and Peter's subsequent remorse gives the rise to the beautiful way in which he is restored and re-commissioned. When the angels ask the women to tell the disciples that Jesus is risen, only Peter is mentioned by name (Mark 16:7). John chooses to close his Gospel with a description of the touching conversation where Jesus talks to Peter about his love, the call to feed Christ's sheep, his martyrdom and the call to follow Christ (John 21:15-23).

What a long list this is! We can make up a similar list for the leaders if the early church too. Mark left the team of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13) in what Paul viewed as a desertion (Acts 13:38). Paul and Barnabas have "a sharp disagreement" over whether to take Mark on their next journey and they part company (Acts 15:36-40). But they seem to have become colleagues again later on (1 Cor.9:16), demonstrating that people could work together even after big disagreements. Towards the end of his life Paul, writing from prison, tells Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim.4:11). Mark, of course, became the author of the Second Gospel and probably pioneered the preaching of the Gospel in Egypt. Egypt was soon powerfully how people who fail at first could make a comeback and can be used powerfully by God.

Then there was the sad situation in Antioch where both Barnabas and Peter gave into pressure from the circumcision party and withdrew from table fellowship with the Gentiles. This resulted in a public rebuke of Peter and Paul (Gal.2:11-14). But this situation and other events surrounding it prompted Paul to write his great letter to the Galatians. 2 Corinthians (like Galatians) includes raw, painful expressions of hurt and sorrow like the laments/complaints. But out of the pain and its healing came a matchless and lengthy reflection on the glory of the ministry (2 Cor. 2:14-6:13). Paul faced up to problems and grappled for solutions without giving up on some people and giving room for division in the church.

The beautiful thing is that after each of these blunders wonderful insights into the mind of God emerged. The first Christian churches were communities that blundered a lot. But by facing up to their blunders without sweeping them under the carpet, they gave an opportunity for God to minister to them deeply. The result is deep theological insight and also depth in spiritual and community life. A community that does not come to grips with the shortcomings of its members will always be a shallow community.

The New Testament then has raw representations of the first teams of disciples. They and the New Testament writers were not afraid to acknowledge their weakness. But this practice of

acknowledging weaknesses fits in with the teaching of Jesus. He showed that the one who accepts his or her sins and weaknesses is great in the kingdom. His kingdom manifesto begins with four statements extolling the value of acknowledging one's need. It says that the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are the ones who are truly blessed (Matt.5:3-6). He tells the story of how a self-righteous Pharisee and a sinful tax collector went to the temple to pray. After the Pharisee had waxed eloquent on his faithfulness to God's law, "The tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" (Luke 18:13). Yet Jesus said that it was this man and not the Pharisee who went home justified (18:14). He said that the greatest in the kingdom are those who turn, humble themselves and become like children (Matt.18:3-4).

Jesus is the only one in the Bible who is without sin. But the Gospels show even Jesus struggling at times. We see him weeping at the funeral of Lazarus (John 11:35). Later as he contemplated his own death he confessed, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour" (John 12:27).

The Gospels do not hide the fact that Jesus really struggled with the will of God in the garden of Gethsemane. Matthew says he was "sorrowful and troubled" (Matt.26:37); Mark says he was "greatly distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:33). Luke is the most expressive on this: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). The reason for his agony is that he is finding the will of God for him (bearing the sin of the world on a cross) so difficult to accept. He prays, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Strengthened by the results of this struggle, Jesus marches so triumphantly to the cross that those who came to arrest him "drew back and fell to the ground" when he introduced himself to them (John 18:6)!

Do we not also often wish to avoid something that we know we should do? Well, Jesus' frank confession of his feelings to God gives us the courage to express our apprehensions. And when we do so, the others in the community should not judge us but sympathize with us and help give us the courage to be obedient. Those who never express their fears sometimes end disobeying God, because they have not really grappled with the problem and also because they have no one to encourage them at their time of need.

So a healthy team encourages its members to be open about their faults and fears. Their desire for all of God, and their belief in the sufficiency of grace will urge them to confront sin and problems fearlessly and to look for God to use that to purify, teach and deepen the community. A community that deals with problems openly and biblically will become a community with a deep spirituality because God is able to minister and teach his deep truths through the grappling that takes place to solve the problem.

Now it is time to tell you how this train of thought was triggered by my study on how to minister to drug dependents. I was reading about how drug dependents resort to drugs when they have difficulty with handling what the author calls "heavy emotions." Heavy emotions include emotions like anger, discouragement, pain, sorrow, remorse and jealousy.⁴ These emotions should be a signal that tells us of a situation that could be addressed with proper responses and relationships. But they see that step as too painful and, fearful of taking it, they opt for relieving their unease by the much quicker method of resorting to drugs.

⁴ The book I was studying was Jeff VanVonderen, *Good News for the Chemically Dependent and those who Love Them* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1991), chap..

Most drug rehab programs use group activity and therapy in their attempts to help drug dependents avoid this process of going back to drugs. They become part of a group where they bare their soul and express their hurts and fears without fear of being rejected. The hope is that through this means they will learn to use positive and helpful relationships and responses when feeling down without resorting to drugs. Most drug rehab programs use recovered and recovering drug dependents as the members of these groups. These fellow sufferers; they will understand and will not reject the persons who share the terrible things that are going through their minds.

Many drug rehab workers have despaired of trying to incorporate their members into outside groups as they feel that the Christians in these groups do not make an effort to understand these people and do not have the patience to try to learn what they are going through. Therefore when they share their problems they feel the others judge them and they get hurt and withdraw from the group. Because of this some ministries are starting their own churches which consist almost exclusively of recovered and recovering drug dependents. I believe we must work really hard to incorporate these people to regular churches. At the same time we can have small groups for them where they know they will be understood and not judged and rejected when they share their problems.

I think this is the same problem that Christian workers have. They have a peculiar set of problems, and no one seems to understand them. They are expected to help suffering people, but they do not have anywhere to go when they suffer. If they do share their problems with other Christians these people would be so surprised or upset that they could cause a lot of damage.

The drug rehab workers are afraid to send their members to regular churches as they could face rejection there. In the same way Christian workers are afraid to share their problems with the groups they are a part of as they have had painful experiences of rejection when they have done so. We need to have groups that enable Christian workers to share their problems without fear; groups that they are accountable to. I believe that these are groups that have such a strong theology of grace and of groaning that they will be able to accommodate what I have called "life in the raw."

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE CHRISTIAN WORKER

A "serious man" told John Wesley early in his Christian walk, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them." This is what I would urge all Christian workers today. *Find* companions or, if you can't find them, *make* them. Wesley followed this advice for himself and for the Methodist movement he founded.

Wesley developed a community life that had four different types of groups. The first was the "society," which is the equivalent of the modern congregation. This is where Bible teaching and worship was done. The next type was the "class meeting," which was a neighbourhood group consisting of about twelve people from the same neighbourhood. This was a heterogeneous group consisting of men and women; married and single people and people of varying ages. The function of this group was to apply the teaching they had received to their daily lives. The fourth type were the "specialized bands" which were groups of people with a common goal who met to be helped to achieve this goal. For example, there were groups for backsliders seeking restoration and for believers seeking entire sanctification

The third type of group is the most significant to this discussion: He called this group the "band," which was equivalent to an accountability group. It was a homogeneous group, with groups divided according to sex, age and marital status. By restricting the groups in this way Wesley was able to encourage the members to share private things about their personal lives. Wesley's "Rules of the Bands"

states: “The design of our meeting is to obey that command of God, ‘Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another that ye may be healed’ (James 5:16)”. Here Wesley listed six things that they intend to do at this meeting. Some have to do with when to meet and close and about prayers to be said and hymns to be sung. Two are of special concern to us:

4. To speak to each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word and deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting...

6. To desire some person among us to speak his state first, and then to ask the rest in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.⁵

I believe that all ministers should be part of the equivalent of a band: a group of people to which they are accountable. Today there is a tendency among Christian leaders to have, as members of their accountability group, people who do not work together with them. This can be effective if the different members of the group can be frank and can confront another in the group with weaknesses, sins, and other challenging issues. It has the advantage of not having the members see each other in the natural setting in which they work.

Those who live or work close to each other are able to see what is really happening in each other’s lives. This can be a great asset, given our natural tendency to rationalize our faults and be not quite truthful when reporting about our own weaknesses to others. We can give our accountability groups a very different picture to the real one, and they would have no way of knowing whether we are giving them the whole story. This is a problem that Boards with members who are not actively involved in a ministry have. Usually the only worker on the Board is the leader, and what they will hear at the meetings are the leader’s perspectives in the issues.

Besides other people observe some weaknesses though the person with the weakness may not sense he or she has such a weakness. Those working together have a much better opportunity than those working in other places to observe the other person and thus discover his or her weaknesses.

For the above reasons I think the ideal accountability group consists of the members of a team. This is the group that Jesus developed with his disciples. I know that many pastors and Christian workers today do not have people in their congregation or organizations with whom they can share their deepest thoughts. I believe they must pray and work to build such people: they must *make* friends. And the way to do this is by investing in people, just like Jesus invested in the disciples.

I think that friends who have a long history together can also constitute a good accountability group. This is because, even though they may not work together, they have over the years developed openness with each other which makes accountability possible. It is difficult to bluff people who know you so well. They know the weaknesses of these good friends and therefore can be alert to these weaknesses in their efforts to help them. I have seen some effective groups of this type consisting of longer youths, but deep ties developed in those young years, and that made it possible for them to help each other in their adult years too.

Ideally all ministers could have the other ministers of their denomination or organization who work in the area as an accountability group. This is what John Wesley did with his preachers. But sadly most Christian workers today are afraid to share their problems with the fellow workers of their denomination or organization, as they cannot be sure that they won’t use this information in a way that will hurt them. All I can say about this is that it is a terrible tragedy. Jesus would surely not have

⁵ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 117-8. This book provides a helpful introduction to Wesley’s small groups.

intended the leaders of his body to have such an attitude towards each other. We should pray and work to remedy this situation.

Today we are seeing like-minded pastors and Christian workers, who belong to different organizations but serve in the same geographical area, meeting for prayer and fellowship. This is a wonderful development and should be encouraged everywhere. Some of these groups have become the accountability group of these workers. This too is very good, especially if these workers do not have people in their own groups to be their friends. But it is not the ideal accountability structure for the reasons given above. While such a workers should continue to meet, they should also work on developing trusted friends from within their own ministries.

I have two groups that I am seriously accountable to. I say “seriously” because there are other groups that I am accountable to. I say such as the leadership team in my church. In fact in my travelling ministry I consider the church or group I am ministering with at a given time as a group I am accountable to.

But, for help with many personal decisions and activities of my life, I have two groups I am accountable to. The first is a group of five friends who grew together in Youth for Christ (YFC). We have been close friends for over thirty-five years. Two of them are former YFC staff colleagues and are now in other ministries. One is still a YFC staff colleague, and the other is the person who has been my Board Chairman for the twenty-six years I have served with YFC. All five members are Board members I YFC. We meet about once a month.

The other groups consists of my fellow leaders in YFC, and we usually meet once in two weeks. The members of this group are much younger than I am, but they are the ones I works closely with and therefore in a sense are the most important group in my life.

When we meet we ask each other the following questions, which were selected and adapted from a larger list of questions that one of my colleagues got from a website.⁶ They are more appropriate for men, but I believe they will give guidelines for women who seek to develop such a group.

1. Have you spent time with God on a regular basis?
2. Have you compromised your integrity in any way?
3. Has your thought life been pure?
4. Have you committed any sexual sin?
5. Did you put yourself in an awkward situation with a woman?
6. What significant thing did you do for your wife and/or family?
7. Have you shared your faith this week? How?
8. Have you been truthful in everything we have discussed?

I cannot adequately describe how helpful these group have been. We pray about our weaknesses. We discuss our struggles and challenges, our joys and discouragements. We talk and pray about our children. We sometimes talk theology and politics. I give them a report of my behavior after each trip I make abroad. They know the areas. And how many times the wisdom of these friends has saved me from some very foolish things!

I should say something about teams that include both men and women. It is certainly possible for such teams to enjoy friendship and most of his blessings of team life. The one area where they will need to be careful is about the sharing of intimate details, which when shared to a member of the opposite sex often, foster emotional ties that are not healthy. What I have seen is that if the women are in a minority in such teams, they often miss out on having people with whom they could share some of

⁶ www.menofintegrity.org

the private struggles that they cannot share with the men in the team. The leaders must ensure that they are adequately ministered to. When there is a personal problem that needs to be talked about, I usually will have a first appointment and then do one of three things. I may meet the person along with my wife; I may ask my wife to meet the person; or I may hand over the person to the care of another trustworthy woman. These are situations where we must overcome our messiah complexes and accept the fact that others would do a better job than we can with helping these people.

Whatever the constitution of the group may be, one person in the group has to be responsible for ensuring that the group meets regularly. Most ministers have so many urgent demands on their time that it is easy to overlook this meeting. This is the age-old battle between the urgent and the important. And victory comes by someone being proactive to ensure that the meeting is held.

Before I close this article I must say that for those of us who are married, our spouses are our most important accountability partners. This is a relationship that had to be nurtured, and, as with any other deep relationship, that takes time to do. These are few things as important in the life of married Christian worker as unhurried time spent talking with his or her spouse. Married Christian workers who are too busy to have long chats with their spouses are simply *too busy!*

Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." We are in a people profession. Therefore our work requires that we have many acquaintances. But that can make us lonely people. And as this proverb warns us we could ruin our lives. May we all find or make friends who will stick closer to us than a brother.

'Oh God, You Have Deceived Me'

'OH GOD, YOU HAVE DECEIVED ME': THE CONFESSIONS OF JEREMIAH, A MODEL FOR US?

Mano Emmanuel

The book of Jeremiah spans the reign of five kings and describes the terrible events leading up to 587 BC when Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonians. Although it would be possible to understand and explain the events of the time in terms of political powers and weak leadership, Jeremiah gives the situation a theological perspective. So. Though Babylon's power is not denied, it is incorporated into and is firmly subordinated to the great purposes of Yahweh. Since Yahweh's power is not questioned to the greater purposes of Yahweh. Since Yahweh's power is not questioned, it is his justice, his concern for his faithful people that is under scrutiny in the book. It is those questions, still haunting people today, that we want to explore.

JEREMIAH THE MAN

Jeremiah appears as a complex, realistic human being, displaying emotions of grief, joy, and despair; torn between his love for God and his love for his people, seeing both points of view, accusing both, weeping with both.¹

Jeremiah had been called to proclaim God's judgment on his people. However, in spite of his repeated warnings, he was ignored. The fact that there seemed to be no sign of impending doom for decades, meant Jeremiah was scorned as a false prophet by some. Later on in his ministry, some acknowledged his calling even if they ignored his words (21:2, 37:17, 42:2-3). Jeremiah's whole personality was absorbed into the prophetic task, so that he has no 'private' life². When he was first called, he delighted in God's word, he extolled the virtues of the living water (15:16, 2:13). How could he know that the words would turn to ashes in his mouth, that the living water would become a deceitful brook, offering neither refreshment nor sustenance (15:18)? Throughout his career, there was a constant tension between Jeremiah's deepest desires and the life he lived as a consequence of his calling. He desired companionship, he was isolated and rejected, forbidden even to marry and betrayed by his own family (12:6, 15:7, 16:1-4, 20:7). He loved his people and his land but was forced to preach judgment and recommend surrender to the enemy (39:20). He was even told not to continue in his intercession for them (7:16, 11:14, 14:11). During his ministry as a prophet he was plotted against, repeatedly beaten, put in stocks, imprisoned, accused of treason, had his writings destroyed and was left in a cistern to die

¹ There is a wise debate about whether the texts relate to the historical Jeremiah, a literary theological 'Jeremiah' or the collective community in which case the feelings expressed might not be his at all. Chrenshaw, for instance, argues that their similarity both to the psalms of lament and the book of Job (e.g. Job 3:1-26 cf. Jer 30:14-18) suggests that they describe stereotypical afflictions of the whole community rather than the private afflictions of Jeremiah. See James L. Chrenshaw, *Whirlpool of Torment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 34-35. Historically, scholars have attributed more and more of the text to the work of redactors, reflecting the concerns of the post-exile community with very little reliable biographical detail about the prophet himself (See Walter Brueggemann, 'The Book of Jeremiah: Portrait of the Prophet', *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 130-45, citing p131). See also Sheldon Blank, 'The Prophet as Paradigm', in James L. Chrenshaw & John T. Willis (eds.), *Essays in Old Testament Ethics*, (New York, KTAV Publishing House Inc., 1974) for a full argument. This essay uses the Narrative Criticism approach which treats the text as we have it now, as a literary whole. See also Joep Dubbink, 'Jeremiah: Hero of Faith or Defeatist? Concerning the place and function of Jer 20:14-18', *JSOT* 86 (1999) 67-84, citing p71 who argues that the personality of Jeremiah is an important consideration.

² Chrenshaw, *Whirlpool*, 37

(6:8, 37:13-15, 38:6ff). He was a 'man in the middle.'³ He had to both represent the people of God and God to the people (21:2, 40:1-6). As such he is open to the pain felt by both parties. He also feels opposed by both. He sits alone, racked by the pain of his people's rejection of him and their blindness to their situation, grief at the knowledge of the fate that awaits them (8:22-9:2), and bewilderment at his God's apparent deceit and betrayal of him. When the city fell, he was given the choice of exile in Babylon, under the protection of Nebuzaradan but chose to go to Mizpah (40:4-6). After Gedaliah's assassination he was forcibly taken to Egypt against what he knew to be Yahweh's will (4:7ff, 43:6-7). Presumably he ended his days there surrounded by his unrepentant countryfolk.⁴ At the end of his life, there seemed to be no remnant to continue as God's people, no fulfilment of God's promises. How could this happen to Yahweh's faithful servant?

Some stress the weakness of the prophet who 'does not live up to the majestic task he is called to perform.'⁵ But Jeremiah's bewilderment is one that is common to many faithful servants of God, both in the Bible and throughout history, and an honest exploration of his questions will pay rich dividends for our own faith in troubled times. Jeremiah's experience forces us to face the ambiguity of human existence. It destroys the facile acceptance that righteousness is always rewarded in this life. Jeremiah's story from one perspective at least, is a 'tragedy'.⁶ There is no happy ending, no resolution of perplexities, no rationalizing of the irrationalities of life. God himself appears as a complex, even dangerous character.

JEREMIAH CONFRONTS GOD

Jeremiah voices his feelings in a set of prayers which come close to blasphemy (11:18, 12:1-5, 15:10-11, 15-0, 17:14-18, 18:18-23, 20:7-11).⁷ In form, they are similar to the psalms of lament.⁸ They are also prayers, in which Jeremiah voices his deepest concerns to God, pleads for action and waits for a response.⁹ We cannot be sure why these seemingly private prayers are made public. Perhaps the author knew the same despair and reproach would be on other minds, other lips (Jer.45).¹⁰ Amongst those sent into exile would have been those who had stayed faithful to Yahweh, who had themselves wondered why the wicked prospered while they suffered.

³ This is disputed by some scholars who insist that the form-critical approach must be applied and the voices of the redactors identified. See Erhard Gerstenberger, 'Jeremiah's Complaints', *JBL* 82 (1963) 393-408.

⁴ A Christian tradition has him stoned to death by his own people. Daniel Berrigan, *Jeremiah- The World the Wound of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 176.

⁵ Gerstenberger 'Complaints', 406.

⁶ Not used in the literary sense but referring to a way of viewing reality with an attitude of doubt and uncertainty, an acknowledgement of the dissonance in human existence. J. Cheryl Exum *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 5.

⁷ The laments cannot be incontrovertibly linked with specific experiences in the prophet's life though in some instances there are clues. E.g. Jer.20:7-12 may have reflected Jeremiah's anguish over the incident described in 20:1-7. Michael Fishbane points to the link made by the reinterpretation of Pashur's name 20:3, used in 0:10, which could be redaction. *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979) 92.

⁸ This does not necessarily mean that one was dependent on the other since the lament, in form and intent predates both the psalmist and the author of these laments are found in Babylonian and Ugaritic literature. Blank, 'Prophet', 116

⁹ Blank, 'Prophet', 115.

¹⁰ Blank, 'Prophet', 122-23

The language of Jeremiah's laments is imprecise so they cannot easily be identified with specific events in his life. This open-endedness enables them to be used by others who find that they express aptly their own plights.¹¹ As part of the canon, it portrays the nature of the human condition and also the God to whom we appeal.¹²

THE CHARGES AGAINST GOD

He allows evil to prosper

Why do the wicked prosper (12:1)? What is Yahweh's response to those who threaten his servant's life? The questions are concerned with more than the wellbeing of one person. They are dealing with questions about the moral shape of reality (12:4).¹³ If 'the tradition of Jeremiah is a stunning reflection on the power of Yahweh's word to order historical events'¹⁴ how does it come about that this 'order' seems so arbitrary? To take some examples from Jeremiah's own lifetime, Gedaliah's governance offered hope that Jeremiah's promised consolation (30-33) was being fulfilled. Where is God then, when Gedaliah is slain and the hope withers? Or, when Jeremiah is persecuted for his prophesying, why does God hide Jeremiah from his adversaries in one instance but not in another (36:26 c.f. 37:15)? Why is the faithful prophet Uriah killed (26:20f)? The bottom line is, can God be trusted?

God is righteous (12:1). Therefore it is to him Jeremiah turns in times of trouble. Jeremiah voices Israel's belief that Yahweh is a God who vindicates the righteous and ensures they are fairly treated (11:20). The phrase 'judges rightly' (cf. Gen 18:25) indicates that Jeremiah expected such a judge to actively intervene on behalf of the faithful.¹⁵ Commentators point to the judicial language used (evil/right, judge, test) in the plea (12:1, 3). What is required of God is not capricious favouritism but justice.¹⁶ Jeremiah refuses to accept the evil he encounters as just the way things are. He has a belief in a moral coherence to the universe, a confidence that declares that justice and righteousness cannot be violated without consequences.¹⁷ But not only does Yahweh allow evil to prosper (12:1-2, 18:20), he seems to be actively involved in their prosperity. Using the language of the tree planted by the water, reminiscent of Ps 1, Jeremiah points out that it is the wicked whom Yahweh plants by the waters and allows to take root (12:1-2). Carrying on with the imagery of water, Jeremiah depicts Yahweh first as the living water (2:13) but later as a deceitful brook (15:18), that promises refreshment and sustenance but delivers neither.

He abandons his faithful servant

God is all knowing, Jeremiah does not have to protest his innocence (15:15, 17:16, 18:23). But that very statement of faith is an accusation for it means God know and still does nothing. Has God forgotten him (15:15b)? Is God testing him? Jeremiah lays the blame for his predicament squarely on the shoulders of Yahweh (15:18). 'God to whom Jeremiah confidently turns for help, is also the source of the prophet's

¹¹ E.g., the call narratives as well as the confessions would have been understood as applicable to the exiles. Robert M. Paterson, 'Reinterpretation in the book of Jeremiah', *JOT* 28 (1984) 37-46, CITING P37-8. BLANK ARGUES THAT Jeremiah is a paradigm for all who question God's faithfulness, 'Prophet', 111

¹² Bracke, 'Jeremiah 15', 176.

¹³ Brueggemann, *Exile*, 119

¹⁴ Brueggemann, *Exile*, 23

¹⁵ Brueggemann, *Exile*, 116

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *Exile*, 116.

¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Hope Within History*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987). 60-61.

despair.¹⁸ Even when Jeremiah begins to doubt Yahweh's care for him it is to God he turns. 'God will be his undoing if God has really abandoned him; but God is also his only hope and to him he must turn.'¹⁹

The prophet declares that God has 'seduced' him into preaching his message and then abandoned him. Strong language is used to accuse God of violating the prophet's vulnerability by persuasive words, an act akin to rape (20:7,9) and on the other, a sense of abandonment (20:8). He struggles with the tension between Yahweh's 'sending' (1:7) and 'being with' (1:8,19) him.²⁰ He is helpless both to resist God's initial call and to desist from speaking his words. Does God use his power without integrity? Jeremiah wants to refuse to speak on Yahweh's behalf but he cannot remain silent. Yahweh's message burns uncontainably within him (20:9). But that does not mean he does not have a choice. When in response to his lament, Yahweh tells Jeremiah to return to his work, Jeremiah could have walked away. But he returns and so walks the painful path and takes him into exile.

GOD ANSWERS BACK

In response to Jeremiah's bewilderment and despair, Yahweh speaks twice, but not according to the conventional mode of response to a lament. There is no direct assurance of deliverance or compassion. There is no reassurance or proof that God is who Jeremiah thinks he is. If Jeremiah is uncertain about God's justice, righteousness and reliability, the answer is that he will have to live with that uncertainty. In the meantime obedience in the case of increasing difficulty is required (12:5ff).²¹ The prophet is warned that he can trust no one. In such a situation, where the reality of public life is that no one can be trusted, even those who are meant to uphold law and order, a person is driven into isolation and/or into life with God.²² Yahweh's trustworthiness must not be undermined by his servant or his office would be futile.²³ In 15:19-21 Yahweh appears to rebuke Jeremiah's words as unbecoming a prophet.²⁴ If he wants to keep his office he will have to repent (15:19). Yahweh does not promise that obedience will lead to any special benefit. There is no promise to end Jeremiah's isolation or struggles. Obedience must be its own reward. All he is promised in return for greater obedience is greater strength to endure, that he will not be overcome (15:20).²⁵

JEREMIAH'S CONSOLATION – the presence of God

Since God's words can be trusted, Jeremiah is able to demand of Yahweh what Yahweh has promised.²⁶ (a caveat for us today would be that we need to know what promise are ours to claim). Both Jeremiah's disappointments as well as his demands stem from his intimate relationship with Yahweh. Jeremiah turns to Yahweh in his distress even if his words are accusation. He is convince that the God whose hand

¹⁸ Bracke, 'Jeremiah 15:15-21', *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 174-78, citing p174.

¹⁹ Bracke, 'Jeremiah 15', 175.

²⁰ J. Gerald Janzen, 'Jer 20:7-18', *Interpretation* 17 (1983) 178-183, citing p179.

²¹ Brueggemann, *Exile*, 119

²² Brueggemann, *Exile*, 120

²³ Crenshaw, *Whirlpool*, 49

²⁴ Jeremiah is rebuked for his attempted renunciation of his vocation as prophet, not for his despairing questions. Deryck Sheriffs, *The Friendship of the Lord*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996) 231.

²⁵ The similarities between 15:20ff and 1:8,18ff have caused some to see this as a second experience of call after Jeremiah almost gives up on his prophetic ministry. John Bright, 'A Prophet's Lament and Its Answer'. *Interpretation*, 28 (1974) 59-74, citing p73.

²⁶ Brueggemann, *Exile*, 146

has been so heavy on him is the one from whom blessing comes. Yahweh had promised to be with Jeremiah (1:8, 19, 15:20). What does that divine presence mean in practice? It is not always what we expect. 'While time lasts the promise must be taken as ambiguous, dark, all but impenetrable to the logical mind... If the power of the "Most High" is with us, how comes it that such power often takes the form of – powerlessness?'²⁷ The presence of God with people is at once the most wonderful promise and terrifying threat. When humans were created they knew God's presence as intimate reality. When humans sinned they were terrified at the thought of God's proximity (Gen 3:8). God's presence is the Christian's ultimate expectation, for in heaven we shall see him face to face (1 Jn.3:2, Rev.21:2). Being cast out of God's presence in judgment, both temporal and eternal (Jer.15:1, 52:3, 2Thess.1:9). Hard as it may be to comprehend, God is with his people and their enemies will not prevail, in any sense that counts for eternity. However bitter life seems for the child of God, consider how evil and bitter it is for those who forsake the true God and do not fear him (2:19), how terrible it is for those on whose hearts sin (17:1) and not God's law are engraved (31:33). God's nearness is a terror for them. However dark our circumstances, how deep our despair, our deliverance is to be found in relationship with God not apart from him.

But the promises of God have never been guarantees of deliverance from suffering. As in Jeremiah's case, 'the outcome of God's sovereign will is not coterminous with the fate of the prophet.'²⁸ God's presence with his people will enable them to stay faithful to him. Jeremiah, like one far greater than him, learned obedience through suffering, and though he was weak in God's presence he was strong in the face of human opposition. In 20:11-12, momentarily, despair seems to be replaced by hope. Perhaps Jeremiah's reflection on God's domination over him reminded him that he was not abandoned (1:10).²⁹ By revealing his case to God Jeremiah is enabled to recognise that his underserved torment did not mean the absence of God. 'God's protection is spiritualized: it is the confidence he gives his servants that their heart and service are seen and accepted.'³⁰ Jeremiah has been promised that his enemies will not 'prevail' against him (20:11) and though he might have felt powerless, though still vulnerable to his enemies, he does not prevail. He is bold (26:14), he is faithful and as the demands increase he is able to remain faithful... only because Yahweh is with him? The inference is that Yahweh's presence serves to bring about Yahweh's purposes, not necessarily to deliver Jeremiah from his earthly foes.³¹ But Jeremiah is delivered from apostasy, a far worse fate for a follower of God than death. In the midst of Jeremiah's suffering. Yahweh's presence ensures in his servant 'moral, coherence, consistency of word and behaviour, undeviating patience, faith and trust.'³² Beaten, imprisoned, dead or alive he is 'blessed' (17:7).

The mystery of the presence of God may be better understood when we consider the character of the God who is with us. Who is this God who is with Jeremiah? He is the one who having called his people into the intimacy of the covenant love finds himself abandoned (Jer.2:1-6,13), and suffers alone in divine

²⁷ Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 4.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *Exile*, 117

²⁹ Fishbane, *Text*, 100-101

³⁰ Fishbane, *Text*, 102

³¹ God's nearness in no way allows his people to manipulate him. Werner Lukmke, "The Near and Distant God: A Study of Jer.23:23-24 , in s Biblical Theological Context', *JBL* 100/4 (1981)541-55 citing p.555

³² Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 4

grief (8:18-9:3). Only in the stark sense of isolation from both God and his people can Jeremiah fully enter into an 'incomprehensible fellowship' with God in suffering for the people.³³

God is also grief stricken by the behavior of his people (12:7-13). The 'why' questions are not limited to Israel's repertoire. God too asked Israel why she acted this way (2:5, 14, 31, 8:5). He has done nothing to deserve this treatment. He would be justified in leaving her forever but instead he pleads with his people to return (3:12-18). They do not listen, they never have. He withdraws his blessing, his *shalom*, his *hesed*, his *rahamim* (16:5). The result is curse (12:13), the undoing of creation (4:23-28). Yahweh is portrayed as the grieving parent helpless in the face of the drift towards death.³⁴ He is the spurned lover, the cheated husband (2:2, 21, 3:1-5). The imagery is one of pathos rather than of threat or judgment. God's people have turned on him (12:8) and caused him to hate those he first loved. God suffers anguish over evil, especially the evil of his beloved people. He weeps over their destruction (8:23).³⁵ The tears reveal his vulnerability to his people's actions (8:21). God is presented as passionately involved with his world. He longs to be able to bless but his people will have none of it (3:19-20). Still, Yahweh cannot bring himself to discard Judah completely. Still he pleads with them to return, to choose life. In spite of his suffering God still loves. His sorrow does not turn to bitterness, neither does it overwhelm him or cause him to lose control. 'In this respect, God offers the supreme example of what to do with suffering.'³⁶ God absorbs the pain himself. God is not just—he is far too lenient. He is willing to forgive again and again (3:12,14,22). Judgment falls when all his overtures are rejected (Jer.9:7). But though God may give them up, he does not give up on them. 'Intro the midst of those suffering judgment God returns.'³⁷ The law does not require this but 'after the requirements of Torah are acknowledged, there is the unfinished business of the relationship that the Torah cannot contain.'³⁸ God's love does not allow him to view the world with a detached objectivity, render justice with equanimity and be glad that justice is done. Healing is possible because 'God draws near, abandons fury, leaves aside honour and joins in the people's suffering.'³⁹ God's faithfulness comes in ways not understood or expected; not as the end of persecution but as the promise of strength and enduring care to enable his servants to continue in his service, in spite of difficult circumstances.⁴⁰ God cannot be constrained by human expectation. The people expected him to stay faithful in spite of their disobedience. He did not (14:7f). they expected to be cast off forever (24:4). They were not. God promises newness (31:22)⁴¹—a new city (31:38), a new David (23:5-6, 33:15) and a new covenant (31:31-34). Yahweh complained that those who swore 'as the Lord lives' took his name in vain (4:2,

³³ Janzen, 'Jer 20', 181

³⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 58.

³⁵ There is no consensus over whether the weeping in 8:18-9:22 is Jeremiah's or God's. see Kathleen M. O'Connor for convincing arguments that the speaker is Yahweh. 'The Tears of God and Divine Character in Jeremiah 2-9', in A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor & Louis Stilman (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah*, (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

³⁶ Terence E Fretheim, *The Suffering of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 124.

³⁷ Fretheim, *Suffering*, 126

³⁸ Brueggemann, *Exile*, 50

³⁹ O'Conner, 'Tears', 400

⁴⁰ Bracke, 'Jeremiah 15', 177

⁴¹ The verb *bara*, used here for create, is used in the Old Testament only for the creative activity of God (cf. Gen 1:27).

5:2).⁴² He promised that the day would come when Israel would swear by the God who not only brought her out of Egypt but out of exile too (23:7). The people think that this is impossible for Yahweh (32:17). With hindsight, we know that it was not.

JEREMIAH OUR MODEL:

in honest inquiry

We might be forgiven for thinking of Jeremiah as a pawn in the hands of more powerful characters including God. But he, as the voice of marginality is what Brueggemann calls a history maker.⁴³ He proclaims an alternative way, opposed to the dominant ideology. He refuses to accept the way things are. He will not settle for whitewash or papering over the cracks. He confronts the people. He confronts God. It is the Jeremiahs rather than the Nebuchadnezzars who inspire us. It is they who, even if killed, ultimately triumph, who 'offer and irreplaceably truthful version of history' and give us a portrait of true humanity at its best.⁴⁴ We do not know what Jeremiah might have said to us at the end of his days about his God. Would he have been disappointed by Yahweh's treatment of him? Had Yahweh his refuge, really been a terror to him (17:17)? Or would he say that while life have been terrifying, Yahweh was faithful to his servant?⁴⁵

As we have seen, Jeremiah's confessions are prayers for answers, for rescue. Many of them appear to be unanswered. The laments reveal the depth of honesty and intimacy that are appropriate in prayer. They are the prayers of one who will not accept the view that suffering is always linked to sin and demands repentance. Of course, if the pray-er is not to blame for his situation, the question arises—who is? His laments are an appeal to God against God.⁴⁶ God's response that things are going to get even harder is no comfort (12:5-6). But Jeremiah will not be silent in his protest, even if God will not answer him.⁴⁷ The importance of divine-human dialogue even in, or especially in, despair is highlighted by Jeremiah's refusal to be silent. The laments 'arm one for the day when pain presses one to speak what one feels, not what one ought to say.'⁴⁸ They stress human freedom to engage in dialogue with God, to play a part in his ordering of the world. They allow us to believe that human prayer is taken seriously by God.

Confrontation is a part of intimacy, 'albeit a hazardous one'.⁴⁹ In our Asian culture, confrontation is not something we are good at. We might excuse this by saying we do not want to make trouble or that we are merely being polite, but Jeremiah's conversations with God show us that confrontation can or even must, be part of the Christian life. When we confront God we show that even in our darkest hour or

⁴² Cf. the same oath on Boaz's lips (Ruth 3:13) where it is used within the context of faithful covenant life, by one who chose to remember Yahweh, it empowered the speaker to keep his oath, and contributed to the health of society. E. John Hamlin, *Ruth: Surely There is a Future*, (Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1996) 49.

⁴³ Walter Brueggemann, *Hope Within History* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987) 56.

⁴⁴ Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 179

⁴⁵ Philip Yancey reflects that we tend to think life should be fair because God is. But God is not to be equated to life. Where is God when it hurts? He is you, not in whatever is causing the pain. *Disappointment with God* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1988) 183.

⁴⁶ Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 195.

⁴⁷ Balentine points out that in spite of 12.19ff Jeremiah continues his laments. *Prayer*, 160-61. He does not 'repent' of his honesty, as Bright suggests he should, in 'Lament', 59-74.

⁴⁸ Balentine, *Prayer*, 193

⁴⁹ Sheriffs, *Friendship*, 210

deepest doubts, it is to him we turn. We acknowledge our need of him, a need nothing and no-one else can satisfy. In fact, Jeremiah's shows that this confrontation with God will result in our ability to avoid taking out or frustration on other people. Of course there is also a time for confrontation with other believers. When we confront another brother or sister in honesty and with the right motivation, we show what real Christian love is – a refusal to allow another to get away with being less than he or she could be. In many cases though, we ignore wrongdoing. Sometimes blatant sin is ignored, even in Christian leaders. The result in disillusionment and confusion among believers and well-deserved mockery among non-believers.

Honest Weeping

The confessions tell us that even in the life of faith, there is a time to weep—in our land, for those who partake in and incite violence, for those who hold life cheap, for those who are innocent victims in a fight they did not want, nameless, faceless, forgotten, except by those to whom they were infinitely precious. Sometimes endings have to be embraced so that God can bring about new beginnings. 'Only grievors can experience their experiences and move on.'⁵⁰ But while everyone can despair, only Christians can ask 'How long?' for we know how the story finally ends: Jeremiah's conversation with God tell us that it is acceptance to mourn. Faith in supremacy of God does not mean we trivialize the pain of the present. Grief must be expressed and losses mourned. There is no place in Christian realism for facile cries of 'peace' or denial of pain. For us, in a country where corruption and injustice are rife, victims deserve the dignity of having the truth made public. For Christians there is the comfort that this too will pass. It might last for the rest of our lives, but not for ever. To deny our grief, to refuse to protest, stifles hope. Jeremiah shows us that God accepts our laments and questions. Christians need not be ashamed to weep both individually and corporately for the pain of living in a fallen world.

THE UNCHANGING GOD: THE STORY CONTINUES

The writers of the Old Testament were convinced of the sovereignty of God. They believe he had created the world and would bring it to a climax and his purposes to fruition. In between those two events, day to day experiences were harder to analyze. 'The fixed points of the biblical view of history are at the beginning and at the end.'⁵¹ In between there is the confident assertion that God is Lord of the nations and of history. Nothing of importance happens without his knowledge, but many possibilities exist before the final promised end. The only way to see moral order in the universe is to look at the big picture, subsuming the dissonance. While this may be helpful at times, if we deny the tragedy, we deny a part of human existence.⁵²

Broadly speaking, historical interpretation was influenced by the shape of the covenant which promised blessing for obedience and the revers for disloyalty. But as we have seen, the Biblical narrative itself included voices raised in dissent against such a simplistic deduction, as events stubbornly refused to fit into these neat categories. Also, on the one hand the Bible proclaims the inevitability of God's purposes being worked out in history (Is.14:24-27). On the other hand, the inscrutability of God's purposes is

⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *Imagination*, 60

⁵¹ David Noel Freedman, *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation (Vol. 1)*. (Michigan/Cambridge: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997)227.

⁵² The Bible resists neat systematization firstly by its multiple authorship reflecting many viewpoints and secondly by its ambiguity about the origins of evil. Exum, *Tragedy*, 9.

portrayed in the stories of individual lives (e.g. Joseph, Esther, Ruth). Both these positions are held in tension and can only be articulated within certain texts rather than as any grand pattern.⁵³

THE NEW TESTAMENT STORY

As we open the pages of the New Testament we discover that one central character dominates, who also bears many similarities to Jeremiah (Mt 16:13f). Fourteen generation after the exile, a redeemer was born (Matt 1:5,7). Someone who mourned and wept over Jerusalem and the wilful blindness, and deafness, of God's chosen people, and longed to take them under his wing (Matt 23:37, Lk 13:34ff). Someone who prayed for his people but had to acknowledge that many were choosing a path that would put them outside the blessings of God. Someone who shocked the respectable and religious by the lengths he would go to, to incorporate the marginalized, be they lepers, children, the poor, Gentiles, woman or the despised Samaritan. Someone who denounced hypocrisy and evil (Matt 13-33, Mk 11:12ff) and forgave sins, who gave up his home and security to become one who had nowhere to lay his head (Lk 9:58). Someone who redefined 'family' to include all who did God's will (Mk 3:31-35). Someone who was admired and respected by many, as one sent by God, yet was also scorned, rejected, betrayed by friends, falsely accused of treason and blasphemy and tortured and killed by government forces. Someone who reversed the old ideas of blessings and curse. He said that those who were blessed were those who were poor, those who suffered for righteousness' sake and he, who had never rebelled for his murderers. 'Why have you forsaken me?' he cried out to God on the cross. In his darkest hour, he fought the greatest temptation to despair, by turning it into a prayer to his Father.⁵⁴ His blood ratified the new covenant promised to Jeremiah (Mk 14:24 cr. Jer 31:31ff). Uncoerced, he stepped into history to be humanity's redeemer. Jeremiah identified with God's pathos and mirrored the treatment of God's word in his life.⁵⁵ In the New Testament God speaks for himself through his only Son, the Word made flesh (Heb 1:1ff). he speaks in the words of an itinerant preacher who lived as part of an oppressed people in an occupied land; who, because of divine intervention (Matt 2:13-18) escaped being a victim of an ethnic slaughter reminiscent of Babylon's atrocities towards Judah (Matt 2:17-18), but who was not delivered from draining the bitter cup of the cross (Matt 26:39-45).

Jesus promised his followers peace that the world could not give (Jn 14:27) and warned that the world would hate them (Jn 15:18-19). He promised them rest and an easy yoke (Matt 11:28-29), and a cross they must take up daily (Lk 9:23ff). He told them not to fear those who could destroy the body, but he could destroy body and soul in hell. He rejoiced with them in their victory over Satan but said they should rejoice most that their names were written in heaven (Lk 10:20). He told them to love their enemies and pray for them (Lk 6:27-28). Jeremiah had recognized that human beings could never change the deceitfulness of their hearts (12:2, 13:23, 17:9). Yahweh himself would have to do something to bring about a fundamental reorientation of the human mind and will (Jer 31:31-34, 24:7, 32:39-40). Now, this greater intimacy of knowing God, and his word, the ability to live in covenant faithfulness would be available to all through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers (Acts 1:5).

⁵³ Brueggemann, *Hope*, 2.

⁵⁴ Jean-Claude Sagne, 'The Cry of Jesus on the Cross', *Concilium* 169 (1983) 52-57, citing p55.

⁵⁵ W. Lee Humphreys *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 90.

Jesus' life, death and promises were vindicated by his resurrection. The resurrection is merely the beginning of the final chapter of history. It is God's contradiction of suffering, death and evil.⁵⁶ From New Testament times to today his disciples have experienced both the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering. Paul declared that nothing would separate believers from the love of God but that love might have to be experienced through trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword (Rom 8:35).

REFLECTIONS ON THE CHRISTIAN'S WALK WITH GOD

Belief in a righteous and powerful God leaves us with questions about the flourishing of evil and injustice. But such a belief also empowers us. It causes us to question and struggle against the way things are, for those who weep and toil under inequality and injustice have no stake in the status quo. Those with no belief must eventually conform to the world around them. They are trapped within the 'tyranny of an absolute present'.⁵⁷ Such acceptance of the way things are will also lead to cynicism, resignation and even inhumanity, such as is seen in terrorism and other acts of brutality. If things are never going to change, why should we? Belief in a God of justice should enable Christians to critique the way things are, and work for change. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with the reality the way it is, but begin to contradict it. '...For the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.'⁵⁸ To be Christian is to be set free from having to conform. It is the freedom to be truly human—to do what we know to be right. Like Jeremiah, our condemnation of injustice in God's name will make us popular, even with some churches. In recent history many people who have been unafraid to denounce evil have paid the price, some with their lives. But more often than not, their lives make an impact. They are the true 'history-makers'.

The question that gets an answer in the Bible seems not to be 'Why suffering?' but 'What now?'⁵⁹ Our Christian pilgrimage leads to a maturity that acknowledges that suffering is part of the calling of the disciple of Christ. In the rising tide of materialism, God too easily becomes the one who exists to make life easier. Triumphalistic proof texting does not help when they tell only half the story. For example, God has promised that all things will work for the good of those that love him, but the greatest good is that they become conformed to all the likeness of Christ, and that can hurt (Rom 8:28, 29). 'If... we accept the obligations of the divine covenant as the burden of obedience, it can only be in the knowledge that suffering is the badge of service, and that those who obeyed best suffered most. It is only in the prospect of ultimate consequence that proclamation and commitment are joined to hope.'⁶⁰ Do we feel unable to face the challenge? Carrie Ten Boom, who spent many years in a Nazi concentration camp, recalls in one of her books that as a little girl, she sobbed to her father that she was afraid of death. He reminded her that when they travelled together on the train, he only gave Corrie her ticket just before they got on. In such a way, he said, her heavenly Father knew she needed things.

⁵⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM, 1967) 21.

⁵⁷ Richard Bauckham & Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999) 54.

⁵⁸ Moltmann, *Theology*, 21

⁵⁹ Philip Yancey, *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990) 105. E.g. Job, Lk 13, Jn 9. What is important is not the cause but the response.

⁶⁰ Freedman, *Divine*, 232

‘When the time comes... you will look into your heart and find the strength you need—just in time.’⁶¹ Or as the Bible puts it more succinctly, ‘your strength will equal your days’ (Dt 33:25).

In exile, Israel remembered God’s mighty acts of creation and deliverance (Jer 32:17-22, Ps 136). In partaking of bread and wine, Christians remember that their God, who might seem hidden, is the God of creation and the exodus, the God who raised Jesus from the dead. They remember... until he comes. The story is unfinished. ‘Miracles are recited in loss, as a refusal to forget or succumb to defeat.’⁶² This same God has worked to save, heal and empower his church today.⁶³ We must not forget in the darkness what we have learned in the light.⁶⁴

Christians are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. That power is often understood in terms of spectacular gifts and signs. But the Spirit is also given that we might endure. In the New Testament, hope is often linked to patience or perseverance (Rom 8:25, 1 Cor 13:7, 2 Cor 1:6,7). The certain hope of the fulfilment of all God’s promises produces endurance in affliction (1 Thess 1:3, Rom 8:25). Also, in some way, perseverance gives rise to hope (Rom 5:4, 15:4).⁶⁵ In the Old Testament too, patience as well as trust and reliance was an ingredient of hope. Believers ‘waited’ on the Lord with hopeful expectancy (Hab 2:3, Ps 40:1, 69:3, Dan 12:12).⁶⁶

There is a thin line between Christian realism and cynicism and despair. Despair is felt when there appears to be no possibility of change in our circumstance. It is the ‘premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope for from God.’⁶⁷ Sometimes what we present to ourselves as realism is in reality ‘the worst of all utopias—the utopia of the status quo’ which has no room for possibilities.⁶⁸

But when we cling to God in trust, we are striking a blow at all the powers that seek to thwart God’s purposes. As the fictional demon Screwtape writes to his nephew, ‘Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of him seems to have vanished, and ask why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.’⁶⁹

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⁶¹ Corrie Ten Book, *The Hiding Place* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971) 31-32.

⁶² Walter Brueggemann, ‘Suffering Produces Hope’, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 28 (1998) 95-103, citing p97.

⁶³ As we have seen in our study of Jeremiah, remembrance both sustains faith and is the source of doubt when God appears to change from the person we thought we knew.

⁶⁴ Yancey, *Where*, 229.

⁶⁵ D.R.Denton, ‘Hope and Perseverance’, *SLOT* 34 (1981) 312-20, citing p313-317.

⁶⁶ Denton, ‘Perseverance’, 319.

⁶⁷ Moltmann, *Theology*, 23.

⁶⁸ Moltmann, *Theology*, 23 citing R Musil

⁶⁹ C.S.Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: The Centenary Press, 1942) 47.

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'Oh God, You Have Deceived Me'

WHO IS 'THE GOD OF THIS AGE' IN 2 CORINTHIANS 4:4?

Ivor Poobalan

Introductions

The phrase {} (2 Corinthians 4:4), 'the God of This Age', is unique in the New Testament. Over the past few centuries it has become more established, almost beyond dispute, as a classic reference to Satan. The literal reading being ambivalent, the latter interpretation has largely been based on the Jewish apocalyptic understanding of 'This Age' as one in which wickedness, darkness or evil was expected to dominate the affairs of the world until the 'New Age' when God would reverse the fortunes of His people. Consequently it has been argued that Paul could not have referred to God as the 'God of *This* Age'.¹

The meaning that we attach to this brief, isolated phrase has significant theological and missiological implications. First, however, it is necessary to point out that most English translations render {} as 'god',² while the free translations take the view to its logical conclusion and use titles such as 'Satan' or 'devil'.³

¹ See F.F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1971; R. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Augsburg Publishing, Minneapolis, 1976; J. Calvin, *Commentary to the Corinthians (Volume)*, Eerdmans, Michigan, 1948; V.P. Furnish, *2 Corinthians (Anchor Bible Commentary)*, Doubleday, NY, 1984; C. Kruse, *2 Corinthians (Tyndale)*, IVP, Leicester, 1987; R. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word, Texas, 1986; M. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians (ICC)*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994.

² F. Young & D. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, SPCK, London, 1987, p.115: "The majority leap to the conclusion that the phrase must refer to Satan not God and texts and translations forbear to use an initial capital".

³ The *Youth Bible*, Nelson Word Ltd, 1993, 'devil'; *J.B. Philips*, 1958, 'the Spirit of this age'; TEV, 'the evil god of this age'; *Living Bible*, 'Satan'.

Theological Implications

1. The Christian Doctrine of Satan

If Satan is 'the God of this age', this certainly would be the loftiest title accorded to the enemy of God in scripture. Nowhere else is {} used for Satan, although he is called, 'prince of this world' (John 12:31). D.G. Reid, in his article 'Satan' reflects on this title and arrives at the following conclusion:

"The underlying point is that *Satan is vested with a sovereignty*, however limited it might ultimately be, that is powerful, compelling and clearly opposed to the work of God" (italics added).⁴

This view of the 'limited sovereignty' of Satan (which might well be a contradiction in terms) finds great acceptance within the present context of interest in spiritual warfare. Nevertheless the fact that such a theological position could be arrived at on the basis of just one verse at least warrants careful re-examination of the text.

2. Theology of Mission

If 2 Corinthians. 4:3-4 is a reference to Satan it suggests that whenever Christian missionaries encounter a people-group that is non-receptive to the good news it is possible to conclude that such people have been so completely blinded by the devil that they have no opportunity to even *see* or *perceive* the light of the gospel.⁵

But, is this understanding true to the New Testament? Does not the NT envisage rather that the people-groups of the world may *choose* either to believe or reject *on the basis of having received illumination about the gospel?*

It is heartening to note the missions-history has many examples of quite a positive response by missionaries when communities have rejected the gospel. Instead of declaring the hopelessness of attempts to reach certain unreached-peoples – now that Satan has 'blinded' them – missionaries and mission organizations have persevered, and proved some of Paul's other assertions regarding the evangelistic ministry such as, '[the gospel] is power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes' (Romans 1:16), and 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth' (1 Cor.3:6).

In what follows we shall agree that a careful exegesis of 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 shows that Paul's use of {} refers to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he arrives at such a title because he is forced to engage theologically with the obduracy of contemporary ethnic Israel when confronted with the message about the messiah. Israel that expected to participate in the messianic celebration of the '*age*

⁴ Hawthorne, Martin, Reid (eds.) *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, IVP, Leicester, 1993, p.868.

⁵ Assumed for instance in Susan Garrett, 'The God of this World and the Afflictions of Paul (2 Cor.4:1-12)' in D.Balch, E Ferguson, W.Meeks (eds.), *Greeks, Romans and Christians – Essay in Honour of Abraham J, Malherbe*, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1990, p.104: 'As 'god of this age' Satan blinds the minds of some of Paul's hearers lest they perceive that Christ died to rescue them from the age's domination'.

to come has been unable to comprehend that good news when it was proclaimed within *this age*! What has caused this blindness? Who is responsible for such a hardening?

By limiting Paul's thought to Jewish apocalypticism alone, and by failing to affirm Paul's characteristic ability to articulate spiritual truth (in this case the sovereignty of God in making ethnic Israel obdurate) using concepts familiar to contemporary thought (in this case the reference to *this [evil] age*) exegetes have failed to appreciate the full force of this unique phrase as a climax to an argument that Paul begins back in 2 Corinthians 2:14.

'The God of This Age' in Christian Thought

Although very nearly all post-Reformation writer interpret the phrase as a reference to Satan, such a view is relatively recent. Early Christian exegetes and preachers, participating more closely with Paul's thought-world, commonly understood the phrase to be a *reference to God*. Pelagius is a lone voice in considering the possibility that it is Satan, while he too remains at best ambivalent:

'The god of this world may be understood to be the devil, on the ground that he claimed to rule unbelievers or, on account of the heretics it may be understood to mean that *God has blinded the minds of the unbelievers* precisely because of their unbelief (italics added)'⁶

Ambrosiaster is more settled in his views:

'Paul is saying that God *dims the sight of worldly people* because they are hostile to the faith of Christ. He is giving them what they want, since it is because they are hostile and tell lies that they move further toward not being able to believe what they do not want to believe what they do not want to believe (italics added)'⁷

Chrysostom offers the more definite position:

'The 'god of this world' may refer neither to the devil nor to another creator, as the Manichaeans say, but to *the God of the universe, who has blinded the minds of unbelievers of this world*. In the world to come there are no believers, only in this one (italics added)'⁸

Our present common interpretation of 2 Cor. 4:4 owes more to the influence of John Calvin than to careful biblical exegesis. Notice how by the use of few strong words he sweeps aside centuries-old tradition to establish his own:

'*Nobody of sound judgment* can have any doubt that here the apostle is speaking of Satan. Hilary, who had to deal with Arians who misused this passage in support of their view that Christ was a god, *twist the text to mean* that it is God who has blinded the understanding of this world. Chrysostom later followed this rendering in order to avoid conceding to the Manichaeans their dualistic view of two first principles. Why Ambrose also accepted it is not clear but Augustine's

⁶ Thomas Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – New Testament (Vol. II)*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1999, p.228

⁷ Oden, *Ancient*, p.228

⁸ Oden, *Ancient*, p.228

reason was the same as that of Chrysostom's for he also was involved in the dispute with the dispute with the Manichaeans. *This is an example of what can happen in the heat of controversy for if all these men had read Paul's words with a calm mind it would never have occurred to them to twist them into a forced meaning in this way* (italics added).⁹

The Literary Context of 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

2 Corinthians 2:14 – 4:6 is the literary unit within which we must examine 4:3-4. Martin sees the links between 4:1-6 and 2:14-17 as evidence that Paul is using a literary device called 'ring composition' where, 'the closing thoughts revert to his earlier statements and complete the circle of ideas'.¹⁰

Bultann highlights the clear points of contact between 4:1-6 and 3:7-18.¹¹

Thrall treats 2:14-4:6 as the first subsection of three in 'Paul's Apologia' (2:14-7:4). Although other commentators offers alternative possibilities for the structure of these chapters, this view, according to Thrall, 'does appear convincing, and the analysis has the added advantage that it is based on formal elements clearly visible in the text'.¹²

J. Lambrecht proposes that 2:14-36; 3:7-18, and 4:1-6 form a A-B-A' structure respectively, with the first and third constituting 'framing sections' to the 'central unit' (3:7-18). He points out that in a A-B-A' structure the A' section is rarely a pure repetition of A, partly because 'the author must harmonize the A'-part with the content of B'.¹³

The above consensus provides sufficient confidence for the exegete to read 4:3-4 within the literary context of 2:14-4:6.

Grammatical and Historical Comments on 4:3-4

'And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, among whom the GOD OF THIS AGE has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so it will shine forth; the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God'

{} 'And even if it has been veiled'

The opening clause, {} is concessive (as in 4:16; 5:16; 7:8 and 12:11) and may be translated, 'And even if'. A number of commentators take this to be a clue that Paul is here responding to pointed criticism of his

⁹ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Tr. By T.A. Smith; Eerdmans, Michigan, 1964, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰ R.P.Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word, Texas, 1986, p.75.

¹¹ R.Bultann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Augsburg Publishing, Minneapolis, 1976, p.99

¹² Margaret Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians (ICC)*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994, p.190

¹³ J.Lambrecht, 'Structure and Line of Thought in 2Corinthians 2:14-4:6', *Biblica* 64, 1983, pp.344-80 A sample of the more impressive list of links Lambrecht note between A and A' are: **1** {} (3:6), {} (4:1); **2** {} (2:17), {} (4:2) **3** {} (3:1), {} (4:2) and **4** {} (2:15, 4:3) As for A' and B some points that reinforce integrity are: **1** {} (4:1) summaries what has been discussed in 3:7-11. **2** In 4:2-4 the opposition between manifestation and being hidden was suggested by the veil motif of 3:14-16. **3**) The 'numerous connections between 3:18, 4:4 and 4:6.

ministry. Although diverse opinions have been ventured as to the source and the content of the criticism,¹⁴ the majority hold that Paul is countering the charge that is *his message* that is so obscure and 'veiled'. This latter point, they would strongly argue, is proven by the failure of the message so often to effect conversion, 'especially in the case of Jews, God's own people'.¹⁵

In the previous section (3:1-18) Paul had impressively argued for the sheer superiority of the Apostolic ministry over and against the Mosaic ministry.¹⁶ A number of reasons could be adduced:

- The 'ministers of the new covenant' are *like* Moses sent 'from God' (2:17, {}), but speak and act with boldness *unlike* Moses who covered his face (2:17; 3:12).
- Whereas Moses mediated the ministry of 'death' and 'condemnation' (3:7,9), Paul exercises the ministry 'of the Spirit' and 'of righteousness' (3:8-9).
- Granting that the Mosaic covenant came in glory, Paul insists therefore that the coming of the gospel was *more abundantly glorious*.¹⁷
- The apostolic ministry, called by Paul {} (2:17, 4:2) was not written in 'ink on stones', but 'by the Spirit on human hearts' (3:3).
- The manifest-truth of the gospel, evidenced in the life of the apostles, is ultimately commended to *the conscience of everyone* ({}).¹⁸

The above cumulative argument ought naturally climax with Paul's report that therefore *everyone believes* and has been converted consequent upon the transparent authenticity and glory of Paul's ministry. This however was hardly the case in Corinth. Acts 18:4-6 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 show that the opposition from the Jewish community there was particularly severe. Their unbelief is all the more remarkable in view of the claim that the New Testament stood *in continuity* both with the Mosaic covenant ({}), and Judaism per se- albeit superseding and replacing the old.

{} ... {} 'our Gospel... it is, it has been veiled'

{} is emphatic and the construction confirms the scholarly hypothesis that Paul is in fact responding to a pointed criticism by saying, "I agree. The gospel is veiled!" But, Paul has so far argued that such a 'veiling' is by no means on account of the apostle, or their message, nor due to any lack of thoroughness in its presentation.

¹⁴ See Thrall, *Corinthians*, 303-4

¹⁵ Thrall, 304

¹⁶ Linda Bellville, 'A Letter of Apologetic Self-Commendation', *NovT* 31 (1989), 142-163, demonstrates by comparison with the epistolary conventions of the day that 'self-commendation' was in fact the central thought of 2 Cor. 1-7

¹⁷ He describes it as, {} (3:9) and, {} (3:10).

¹⁸ It has been suggested that 'conscience' ({}), came into the NT via the Corinthian church where it was a catchword. The Corinthians appealed to conscience, the ultimate seat of human decision-making, to justify their actions. See, C.Brown, 'Conscience' in Colin Brown (eds.), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Vol. 1), Paternoster, 1976, pp.348-353.

{ } takes us back to 3:13-18 when the veil-motif is introduced and fleshed out:

- The *veil* remains over their minds or hearts at the reading of the Old Covenant or Moses (3:14,15).
- The *veil* is removed or taken away only in Christ i.e. only when one ‘turns’ ({}) to the Lord (3:16).¹⁹
- Paul and others like him, by implication, have ‘turned’ to the Lord, and therefore now have ‘unveiled’ faces (3:18).

The use of {}, in any case, is associated exclusively with a discussion about *Judaism* and Paul’s *Jewish* contemporaries. Therefore when Paul uses it just a few verses later (4:3) the same ethnic group must be in mind.

{ } ‘to those who are perishing’

The Gospel is veiled to *the perishing*. The identity of this latter group must now receive our attention.

{ } (perishing) occurs four times in Paul (2 Cor.2:15; 4:3; 1 Cor.1:18 & 1 Thess.2:10).

In 2:15 they are contrasted with {} and the whole statement translated ‘among those who are being saved and those who are perishing’ (NRSV). The world is now divided between ‘the perishing’ and ‘the being save’. These *two* groups are also mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:18ff, which therefore provides us a more appropriate starting point for investigation.

The ‘perishing’ are those who cannot make sense of the Gospels. The perishing Greeks find it *folly*, the perishing Jews find it a *stumbling block*. Those ‘being saved’ are those to whom the Gospel is *the power of God*. In vv. 22-24 we see that both categories, those who are perishing and those being saved, are similarly constituted of Jews *and* Gentiles (or Greeks). To us far removed from the first-century setting, and mainly conscious of the believe-unbeliever divide²⁰ Paul’s habit of referring to both Gentiles *and* Jews as equally either condemned or eligible for salvation²¹ may appear labored and redundant. But then we fail to appreciate the admission by *Paul the Jew* that now among the Jews, the very people of God there is a category he is compelled to describe as {}.

Regarding ‘the perishing’ in 4:3 Thrall says, “The unbelieving Jews of Corinth (cf. Acts 18:4-6) may be chiefly in view”.²²

¹⁹ Martin’s discussion (WBC, p.70) on this verse turns only on the possibility that Paul models his statement on Ex. 34:34. However Paul’s *deliberate* change from {} (Ex.34:34, ‘went in’) to {} (‘he turns’) provokes the reader to reconsider the allusion. Later we will argue that strands of thought from Isaiah 6:9-10 (LXX uses {}) are woven into the fabric of 2 Cor.2:14- 4:6.

²⁰ So Thrall, *Corinthians*, p.202

²¹ Cf. Romans 1:16; 2:9-10.

²² Thrall, *Corinthians*, p.202. That this is so is further supported by the fact that in 2:14-16 God has made Paul a fragrance (or stench!) of Christ ‘in every place’ ({}). Furnish (p.176) notes, “Various synagogue inscriptions... attest

{ } ‘among whom the GOD OF THIS AGE has blinded the minds of the unbelievers’

NRSV translates { } as ‘in their case’ thereby equating { } with { } (unbelievers). NIV disregards { }, starts a whole new sentence, and does away with the grammatical link between the verses. The grammar requires the translation, ‘among whom’. Furnish explains that this reading would see ‘unbelievers’ as a subgroup within the more general category of those who are perishing.²³

Who then are the unbelievers? Furnish goes further to suggest, “... given the reference to the Israelites who have been hindered from seeing the glory of the new covenant, *unbelieving Jews* may be chiefly in mind (italics added)”²⁴ Lambrecht is in no doubt that the { } *are* the unbelieving Jews!²⁵

{ } ‘He has blinded their minds’

‘Blinded is the aorist active of { }. Although the adjective { } occurs 50 times in the New Testament, the verb is used only thrice (4:4, John 12:40 & 1 John 2:11), of which only in on either instance is an individual held responsible for causing blindness. Thus, John 12:40 offers a remarkable parallel to the use of { } in 4:4.

John 12:35-41 marks the conclusion of Jesus’ public ministry among *the Jews*. Having revealed himself to ‘his own’ through many signs Jesus utters one final warning, “the light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you”, and then ‘he departed and *hid* himself’. John then reflects on how, having seen ‘so many signs’, the Jews ‘did not believe in him’. He concludes by quoting Isaiah 6:10:

{ }

He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts so that they might not look with their eyes and understand with their hearts and turn and I would heal them.

If we were to pose the question about who, in this instance, causes the ‘blinding’ and the ‘hardening’, we would without dispute concur that the actor is God. Echoes of Isaiah 6:9-10 are heard in 2 Cor.2:14-4:6 as well. The two verbs { } and { } found in the rendering John uses are found in the context of our passage as well – in 3:14 and 4:4. However Paul’s clever use of { } (minds) in both latter verses performs two functions:

1. It substitutes for both ‘eyes’ ({ }) and ‘hearts’ ({ }) in the Isaiah quotation above.
2. It links the verses in such a way as to clue the reader to regard 3:14 and 4:4 as mutually interpretative.

to the idiomatic use of *place [{}]* by Jews to refer to a synagogue”. We know that it was Paul’s habit to first visit the synagogue when such a place was present, and scholars confirm that the use of { }, as a reference to Christian centres (ex. 1 Cor. 1:2) indicates the borrowing of a popular idiom (Furnish, 176).

²³ Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, p.220

²⁴ Furnish, p.221

²⁵ ‘Structure’, *Biblica 64*, p.363

Isaiah 6:9-10 in the New Testament

A study of how Isaiah 6:9-10 has been used in the New Testament yields a fascinating result. All four Gospels reflect the text as the clear grid by which Jesus interpreted the Jewish rejection of the Messiah (Mt.13:14-15; Mk.4:12; Lk.8:10; Jn.12:40). This precedent appears to have prompted the Early Church to develop an apologetic based on this text.

Many commentators would treat {} as a theological passive, and an allusion to Isaiah 6:9-10.²⁶ But what are we to make of the fact that 'harden' does not strictly occur in the LXX? Although it does not, John's rendering of Isaiah 6:9-10 uses it, and this suggests to Furnish that, 'Paul is dependent on some familiar Christian apologetic formulation'²⁷

Regarding Isaiah 6:9-10 Craig Evans argues that in the Gospels of Mark and John (unlike Matthew and Luke who mitigate Mark's force), 'the quotation is presented in the telic sense... that is to say, *it was God's purpose to render the people obdurate* (italics added)'.²⁸

Again in the closing periscope of Acts (28:17-29) Luke narrates Paul's meeting with the *Jewish leadership* in Rome. 'Some were convinced... but others refused to believe'. Then in the face of this *unbelief* (cf. Romans 11:20,23) Paul turns to Isaiah 6:9-10 which, Luke states emphatically, was Paul's 'final word' ({} on the matter!

{} 'so as not to shine forth the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God'

{} is a NT hapax and is rare in the LXX. It can have three possible meanings: 'to shine forth'; 'illuminate' and 'to clearly'.²⁹ Although most commentators opt for the last 'as fitting in with the contrast of Satan as blinding human minds'³⁰ the most likely meaning is 'shine forth'. The latter meaning assumes the subject of the verb to be that which follows i.e., 'the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.' On the other hand the popular meaning assumes 'the unbelievers' to be the subject of the verb.³¹

Our translation has the advantage of harmonizing with the parallel sentence in 4:6:

4:4 – 'to not shine forth, the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God'

4:6 – 'who shone... the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'

A few significant points may be highlighted from Paul's deliberate parallel statements:

²⁶ Thrall, *Corinthians*, p.262

²⁷ *2 Corinthians*, p.208. It is most significant that the only other instance Paul uses {} is when he expounds his *theology of Israel* in Romans 9-11 (see esp. 11:7 & 25).

²⁸ 'The Hermeneutics of Mark and John', *Biblica 64*, 1983, p.163

²⁹ Martin, *WBC Corinthians*, p.79

³⁰ Martin, p.79

³¹ 'The overall context requires one to interpret the verb as a synonym of 'gaze' in 3:13 and of 'beholding' in 3:18', Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, p.221

1. Two identifiable groups in mind- one on whom the light *has not* shone and the other on whom it *has* shone.
2. The first statement is associated with the GOD OF THIS AGE, and the second with THE GOD WHO SAID, "LET LIGHT SHINE OUT OF DARKNESS". How easy would it have been for Paul to set Satan in antithesis to God within the space of a few words, and yet choose to refer to the former (in a manner unique to Paul) as {}, with no hint that he is speaking of Satan except the association with 'this age'? Are we here to assume Paul has yielded his theology to such a dualism that he asserts that Satan has power to prevent people from even perceiving the light of the Gospel, while God could only hold sway with a few such as Paul?

It is interesting that in discussing Paul's 'complex Old Testament mixture' in Romans 11:8 Steve Motyer explains how, "... from Isaiah 6:9 [Paul] gives the sentence its shape... so that the Lord actually gives eyes that do not see (rather than not giving eyes that do see)".³²

We suggest that although Paul may well have been full informed of contemporary apocalyptic dualism in terms of the two ages, his theology is anchored in Scripture. The concentration of allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures [Ezek. 36:26 (3:3); Jer.31:31 (3:6); Ex. 34(3:7-18); Is 6:9-10 (3:14,16 &4:4); Gen.1:3 (4:6)] militates against any suggestion that compromises divine sovereignty. On the contrary Paul is clearly reflecting the well-attested OT idea of God's prerogative both to illumine *and* to blind.

Conclusion

'God of This Age' is a unique title. In every known instance when 'this age' is mentioned it carries a characteristic negative connotation in keeping with an apocalyptic worldview. How then could Paul associate God with 'this age'?

First, such an association is not as implausible as some exegetes may make out. 'Paul could well describe God himself as the God of this Age'.³³ As we have seen, a number of prominent exegetes living close in time to Paul thought us too.

Nevertheless {} must allude here, as elsewhere, to the apocalyptic notion of this evil age. But the association of the latter with God is deliberate as it serves Paul in reaching the climax of his well-structured argument commenced in 2:14.

While attempting to defend his apostolic ministry Paul was painfully compelled to reflect on the impenetrability of ethnic Israel by the Gospel. Romans 1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, etc. confirm that the impact of the reality of Jewish unbelief has caused a shift in Paul's orthodox theology – he now equates unbelieving Jews with ungodly pagans (see Romans 3:9). Therefore, in Paul's thinking, the unbelieving

³² *Israel in the Plan of God*, IVP, Leicester, 1989; For a treatment on how 'Scripture echoes lend resonant overtones to Paul's prose' see, R.B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989: 'Quotation, allusion and echo may be seen as points along a spectrum of intertextual reference, moving from the explicit to the subliminal' (see pp.21-23)

³³ Thrall, *Corinthians*, p.302

Jews with ungodly pagans (see Romans 3:9). Therefore, in Paul's thinking, the unbelieving Jew is *assimilated as part of this age*, just like all other pagans. However this in no way compromises the notion of God's sovereignty. As in Roman 9-11, so in 2 Corinthians 2-4, the failure of Israel to appropriate the purposes of God does not mean God had failed – 'It is not as though God's word had failed' (Romans.9:6).

'This Age' is indeed evil. It makes the world wrong side up – Gentiles believe the Gospel while Jews reject the Messiah. But nothing happens outside of the scope of God's sovereignty. Even the difficult doctrine of the rejection of ethnic Israel is rooted in the unyielding assertion that God – who leads us in triumphant procession and makes us both an aroma and a stench; who calls light out of darkness – is indeed the God of the Age.³⁴

Thrall is probably accurate when she offers the following explanation as the greater consideration that steers the favoured interpretation:

'The modern attribution of the term to Satan may be due to what is felt to be the difficulty of supposing that a loving God would deliberately blind people's minds'³⁵.

We hope that our study of 2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6 has sufficiently dealt with such a reservation to show that the supposed 'difficulty' regarding a loving God is in fact a pervasive biblical theme.

³⁴ Whose glory is 'to the ages of the ages' ({}), Galatians 1:5

³⁵ Thrall, *Corinthians*, p.307

'Oh God, You Have Deceived Me'

THE SUPERFICIAL SUCCESS OF THE REFORMATION AND THE TRIALS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (1658-1796) IN SRI LANKA

G.P.V.Somararatna

A new period in the history of Christianity began with the arrival of the Dutch colonial power in Sri Lanka. The Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indischè Compagnie* (VOC) which was founded in 1602 was a joint stock company established in order to engage in profitable commerce in the East.¹ When the Dutch began their expeditions to the east the Portuguese colonial establishments became a hindrance to their ambitions. Sri Lanka, which was controlled by the Portuguese, became a place of special interest to them since the island was strategically located in the Indian Ocean. Another attraction was the island, produce of cinnamon which was commercially profitable during this period. The arrival of van Spilbergen with some Hollanders in 1602 in the kingdom of Kandy was the beginning of Dutch contacts with Sri Lanka.

Dutch Conquest of Maritime Provinces

The Dutch came to Sri Lanka at a time when the Dutch nation was engaged in a war which lasted from 1568 to 1648 with Spain for political independence. The political disaffection between the Low Countries and Spain coincided with the Protestant revolt against the Roman Catholic church, which was the state church of Spain. Calvinism which was a branch of the Protestant movement, rapidly gained ground during this period. Its adherents established in the Low Countries a well-organized church that was prepared to challenge the Roman Catholic church, particularly the oppressive Inquisition, that sought to control 'heresy'. In 1566 riots in which mobs destroyed images in Catholic churches spread across the country. The seven provinces in the Union of Utrecht were cleared of Spanish troops only in 1600.²

Dutch East India Company (VOC):-

The Dutch East India Company was incorporated from a number of smaller companies by the States General of the Netherlands in 1602, its monopoly extended from the Cape of Good Hope eastward to the Strait of Magellan, with sovereign rights in whatever territory it might acquire. In 1619 Jan Pieterszoon Coen, regarded as the founder of the Dutch colonial empire in the East Indies, established the city of Batavia in Java as the headquarters of the company. From Batavia, Dutch influence and activity spread throughout the Malay Archipelago and to China, Japan, India, Iran, and the Cape of Good Hope. During the course of the 60-year war between Spain and the Netherlands (1605-1665), the Dutch company despoiled Portugal, which united with Spain from 1580 to 1640, of most of its East Indian possessions. It supplanted the Portuguese in most of the east Indies, the Malay peninsula, Sri Lanka, the Malabar Coast of India, and Japan.

¹ For an interview of Dutch colonial activities: C.R.Boxer, (1965) *The Dutch Seabourne Empire 1600-1800*, chapter 7.

² K.W. Goonewardane, *The Foundation of Dutch Power in Ceylon 1638-1688*, Amsterdam, 1958; S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658-1687*, Djambatan, 1958; S. Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600-1800: External Influences and Internal Change in Early Modern Sri Lanka*, Collected Series, 525, London 1996; Jurrien van Goor, "Protestantism and Other Religions under the Dutch in Ceylon", E.C.T Candappa and M.S.S. Fernandopulle (eds) *Don Peter Felicitation Volume*, Colombo, 1982, pp.105-119.

The expulsion of the Portuguese from Sri Lanka was a joint venture. The agents of VOC conducted negotiations with the king of Kandy, Rajasinha II (1629-1687) to drive out of the Portuguese from the island.³ After a long period of bargaining a treaty was signed in 1638, with each party hoping to benefit from the eviction of the Portuguese from the island. In 1639 Trincomalee and Batticaloa were captured from the Portuguese and handed over to the king of Kandy. In 1640 the Dutch took the forts of Galle Negombo. While the officers of the VOC and the king of Kandy were disputing the ownership of the fortress captured from the Portuguese there were developments in Europe, which interfered with the war in Sri Lanka. The resuscitation of the native Portuguese dynasty in 1640, after a period of Spanish domination, temporarily put an end to the war between the Dutch and the Portuguese. The ceasefire came to effect in Sri Lanka in 1645. The hostilities between the Dutch and the Portuguese resumed in 1652 after seven years of peace. With the support of the king of Kandy, the Dutch captured Colombo in 1656 and two years later, with the fall of the fort of Jaffna, Portuguese rule in Sri Lanka came to an end.

When the war was over the misunderstanding between the king of Kandy and the Dutch increased. The VOC too Colombo, Matara and Jaffna Diavanis⁴ under their control. The Sabargamuva province was given over to the king of Kandy along with the port of Puttalam and the adjoining districts. This is important for our study since a large Roman Catholic population lived in the area surrounding the port of Puttalam. Later the Dutch territory was expanded as a result of the treaty between the king of Kandy and the VOC in the aftermath of the war of 1764-66.⁵ The entire littoral and the adjacent land now came under the Dutch administration making the kingdom of Kandy landlocked.⁶ VOC'S rule came to an end in 1795/6 when the British East India Company captured the Dutch territory in the course of the Napoleonic wars.

Calvinism

The brand of Christianity, which was introduced by the VOC to Sri Lanka, is known as the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). The DRC belonged to the Protestant churches, which accepted the principles of the Calvinist school of the Reformation. Calvinism owes its origin to the theological system formulated by J. Calvin (1509-1564) which accepted by non-Lutheran Reformed Churches. His followers became the distinguishing force of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. In 1622 Calvinism became the state religion of the Netherlands. The adopted the Presbyterian form of church government, and the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1562) were accepted as the Prebyterian form of Church government, and the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1562) were accepted as the doctrinal standards. During 1618 and 1619 the Dutch Reformed Church's Synod of Dort clarified its Calvinist position in its fight against Arminianism.

³ Philipus Baldaeus (1672), *Description of the Great and most Famous Isle of Ceylon*, Translated from the High Dutch Printed in Amsterdam, 1672, New Delhi, 1996, pp.194-195.

⁴ *Disava* was the Sinhalese word for governor of a district. The title during the Dutch period was high European official who administered one of the three districts, which were called *disavani*, in Dutch Sri Lanka. There were three such *disavani*: Matara, Colombo and Jaffna.

⁵ R. Raven-Hart, *The Dutch Wars with Kandy*, Historical Manuscript Commission, no.6, 1964, L.S. Devaraja, *Kandyan of Ceylon 1707-1760*, Colombo, 1970, p.8; S. Asaratnam, 'The Kingdom of Kandy: Aspects of its external Relations and Commerce – 1658-1710', *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol.III, No.2, 1960, pp.110-127.

⁶ S. Arasatnam, 'Dutch Sovereignty in Ceylon: A Historical Analysis of its Problems', *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol.1, part 1, 1958, pp.105-121; K.M.De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, Delhi, 1981, p.159.

Dutch Reformed Christianity

The conquest of the Portuguese territory in Sri Lanka made some section of the Reformed Church in Holland believe that “God may make instrumental the conquests of Netherlands’ arms to the expansion of His name and kingdom among benighted nations.”⁷ The VOC officially sanctioned only the Dutch Reformed Church in their overseas possessions. This was the Calvinist school of Christianity that the government of the Dutch Republic authorized during the period. Therefore the Reformed Church was offered an unrivalled opportunity to spread its faith in Sri Lanka for nearly one hundred and fifty years.

The Dutch Reformed Church was at an advantage because they had foundation laid by the Roman Catholic priests for over a century in Sri Lanka. Philippus Baldaeus, who served in the first decade of Dutch rule in Jaffna stated, “I must confess that I approved of all their maxims and followed their footsteps in my reorganization of all the schools and churches of Mannar and Jafanapatam, so far as it was consistent with the doctrines and tenets of our own worship and religion, and as far too, as it was calculated to suit the nature and capabilities of the nation...”⁸ the Dutch clergy found not only the infrastructure but also a group of Roman Catholic Christians who had already been instructed in the basic beliefs of the Christian faith. These indigenous Roman Catholics had already made the initial change of allegiance from the native religions to Roman Catholicism. The vocabulary of the Sinhalese and Tamil Languages were already enriched with words and concepts of the Christian religion.

Christianity at the time of Dutch Conquest

The Dutch inherited from the Roman Catholics an impressive Christian establishment, which was properly structured and organized.⁹ There were large well-built permanent church buildings scattered throughout the territory controlled by the Portuguese. Connected to each church was a school building where regular catechism classes were held.¹⁰ These churches had an attached house, which was usually the residence of the priest in charge of the parish.¹¹ The surrounding area of the residence contained well-planned orchards.¹² These gardens were filled with fruit trees most of it which were introduced by the priests from other parts of the Portuguese empire. There were also less impressive houses in the compound, which were used by the schoolmaster, sextons (*merinho*), and other functionaries. These impressive structures were found amidst houses built of mud and thatch in which the majority of people in the villages lived. The Dutch were able to move into these churches when the Roman Catholic priests were expelled from the country. However, the Reformed Church was not in a position to make full use of these buildings due to the paucity of clergymen available to serve in Sri Lanka. The DRC never had one tenth of the priests that ministered to the people in Portuguese period.

⁷ J.D.Palm, “An account of the Dutch reform Church in Ceylon”, *JRAS* (CB) vol.3, 1847-1848, p.5

⁸ Baldaeus op. cit., p.290.

⁹ Robrecht Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under the Dutch Rule, Rome 1957*, pp.73-90; R. Schwickerath, (1904) *Jesuit Education*; W.L.A. Don Peter 1978) *Education in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese*, Colombo, 1978, pp.120-149.

¹⁰ .Don Peter, *Education in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese*, p.38.

¹¹ V.Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: British Period*, Vol.V, Dehiwala, 2001, p.249. Each parish church had *tombos* (registers) giving baptisms, funerals and marriages which occurred in the parish.

¹² A large number of fruit plants were introduced to Sri Lanka during this period. The Portuguese names used to refer to those fruits in the Sinhalese and Tamil languages are indicative of its origin during this period.

There was a large community of Roman Catholics living in this territory. Many people bore biblical and Portuguese names. According to the information supplied by Baldaeus every one of the 26 Roman Catholic churches in the Jaffna peninsula had a school attached to it. There were children enrolled in these schools and schoolmasters were available from the previous regime. The evidence available in the writing of Trinsdade and Queryros corroborates that a similar situation prevailed in the rest of the Portuguese territory in Sri Lanka

The VOC and Religion

The founders of Reformation in Europe virtually ignored the question of missions abroad even though the Roman Catholic had overseas missions before the on-set of the Reformation. Similarly the original charter of the VOC made no provision for the maintenance of Calvinist clergy in the lands under their authority. In the list of priorities of the Company religion held a very low position.

But they soon realized the necessity to attend to the religious needs of the people to combat 'the benighted papist and blind heather.'¹³ In the absence of an official policy in respect of evangelism it was political expediency rather than concern for the spread of the gospel that determined tactions. Therefore it is clear that their evangelism in this period was imposed on the people of the country from above without consideration for the needs at the grass-root levels.

The Statues of Batavia laid down that the Reformed faith was to be the only religion allowed in the territories under the jurisdiction of the Company. The Batavian Code of 1642 provided that the "Reformed Christian Religion" be taught and propagated in the colonies. The Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka, as in the case of other colonies, was completely subordinate to the Company.¹⁴ During the governorship of Riklof van Goens (1664-1675) the priority of the Company over the matters of the church was more explicitly re-emphasized. A commissioner of the Company had to be present at all the meetings of the church councils. In some years the representative to the church Council could not be selected from the members of the Governor's Council. The government always tried to maintain the priority of the company's interests over the church.

In the list of priorities of the company religion held a very low position. Under the Dutch administration the church was a department of the government. Its operation were subject to the scrutiny of the governor and his council. The clergymen were the paid employees of the government. Therefore their loyalties were with the government. They were shifted from place to place on the orders of the authorities of the VOC. The church played a subordinate role in its relationship with the VOC. This position of subordination involved a system of paternalism of the worst kind and crippled the growth of an indigenous expression of the Reformed faith.

Christian and the natives

Governor Jan Schreuder (1757-1762) even went to the extent of declaring that, inview, missionary work was the best way of civilizing the indigenous population and inducing it to become more accustomed to

¹³ C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.133.

¹⁴ This fact was reemphasized during the rime of Rijklof van Goens.

receiving orders from the company.¹⁵ Therefor the purpose of the Dutch government in seeking converts to the DRC was similar in many ways to that of the Portuguese with regard to the spread of Roman Catholicism in the pervious period. They both desired to see a group of natives loyal to their government in Sri Lanka. There was also the fear that many of these people who had made the initial decision to accept Christianity would revert to their former religions and fall back, as the Dutch believed, to the superstitious heathenish ways. This is reflected in the statement of Van der Meyden who wrote to the Directors of the Company on October 1658 “Some of the Roman Catholics asked the Dutch for permission to go back to their former ways.”¹⁶ Those who wished to harness the loyalty of the Roman Catholic community wished to convert them to the Reformed faith. Nevertheless the critics have observed that ‘The role of Calvinism as the helpmate of a great trading company in the East was hardly an inspiring one’ compared to the colossal success of the Roman Catholics.¹⁷

The VOC with its prevailing commercial and political interests, despite its assistance to the church, often became a hindrance rather than an asset to the Christian mission in Sri Lanka. This was compounded further as the local inhabitants could not make any distinction between the Church and the VOC.¹⁸ The fights between various brands of Christianity did in fact bewilder the natives who could not understand such a differences.

Roman Catholics

It appears that from the beginning the Dutch proselyting activity was directed against the Roman Catholic community. The VOC gave its support to the predikants¹⁹ to secure conversion of Roman Catholics, “who were regarded as potential fifth columnists.”²⁰ In this connection it is important to note that “the Dutch were not replacing a decadent and inactive church, as they had replaced a declining political power. On the contrary, they saw that the Catholic Church was a living entity and had penetrated the life of the community with great intensity in certain parts of the country.”²¹ The Dutch wanted to carry through the ‘reformation’ in the island. They began enthusiastically to plant their own brand of Christianity in the island. They began enthusiastically to plant their own brand of Christianity in the island. Nevertheless, the predikants were not knowledgeable enough to work effectively among the Hindus and Buddhists. There were no predikants in Sri Lanka who made a study of Buddhism or Hinduism. Therefore they devoted their attention to the Roman Catholics, which was the area familiar to them. There were officers of the VOC who were genuinely interested in the spread of Christianity in the island. The Dutch governor Van Goens noted that there was hardly any difference between the

¹⁵ Jurrien Van Goor, *Jan Kompenie as Schoolmaster: Dutch Education in Ceylon 1690-1795*, Groningen, 1978, (Hereafter referred to as Van Goor, 1978) p.90, E. Reimers tr. (1946) *Memoir of Jan Screuder, Governor of Ceylon delivered to his successor Lubbert Jan Baron van Eck*.

¹⁶ Asaratnam, *Dutch power in Ceylon 1658-1687*, p.217

¹⁷ C.R.Boxer, *Dutch SEabourne Empire*, p.149; S. Arasatnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658-1687*, pp. 215-236; R. Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, Rome, 1957;

¹⁸ Van Goor, 1978, p.134.

¹⁹ Predikants is the Dutch term for preacher. A minister of the Dutch Reformed Church.

²⁰ C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.147; S.Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon*, p.217.

²¹ S.Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon*, p.217

native Catholics and the 'heathen' in their religious beliefs and practices.²² They felt that those who had taken the first step towards salvation should not be allowed to slip back into their customary darkness.

The vigorous missionary activity in the Portuguese period had left robust Catholic community in the island. Historians have suggested varying numbers for the Catholic population in the island in this period. C.R. de Silva has estimated that about 60 percent of the population in the Maritime Provinces were Roman Catholics at the time of the departure of the Portuguese in 1658. C.R.Boxer has stated that "When the Dutch Finally Drove the Portuguese from Ceylon in 1658, they found about a quarter of a million indigenous Roman Catholics in the island"²³. The majority of the Roman Catholics were among the Sinhalese, mostly Karawa caste. There is no doubt that the Roman Catholics were the majority of the population in the territory, which was under the Portuguese, even though the quality of the faith of these Catholics may be questioned. It is hard to give an accurate figure due to the absence of reliable statistics.

Why did the Dutch persecute Roman Catholics?

During the war of independence in Holland, the latent antagonism developed around its religious aspects. The amazing success of Holland's independence movement was closely connected with the fact that, all the provinces remaining with the union came to the reconciliation with the Catholic ruler, Philip II of Spain. The rulers of Holland believed that the nation had rebelled against the centralizing and tyrannical tendencies of Catholic overlords for the sake of freedom. The rejection of the Roman or Spanish brand of Christianity expedited secession of those who had accepted the Calvinist brand of Christianity. These prejudices were to a great extent relevant to Sri Lanka, which had just been taken over by the Dutch from the Portuguese. The battle for commercial supremacy in the east between the Portuguese and the Dutch added fuel to this Protestant zeal. The Portuguese power in Sri Lanka was based on the commercial aspects as well as the Roman Catholic religion. The Dutch therefore decided to attack both these elements for supremacy in the island. After the truce in 1644 the Church Council in Batavia observed that the Roman Catholic Church would now be able to "fashion their monstrous half hatched abortive foetus right under the walls of the strongholds held by the Dutch."²⁴ While the political leaders had their own reasons for combating Catholicism in Sri Lanka the religious leaders had their own reasons for the war against the Catholics. As evidenced by the answer of the Dutch Predikant to the question of Jesuit father, Antonio Cardim, in 1652 in Malacca, the Dutch position was "if the Roman Catholic Church was allowed, then his flock would frequent it."²⁵ One fact, that was clear throughout this period, was that Calvinist preachers did not wish to contend on equal terms with the other Christian groups. They were aware that the open competition would jeopardize their ambitions.

DRC and Muslims

²² Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658-1687*, p.217. Baldaeus, *A Description of Ceylon*, p.151

²³ C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.147. Boxer has probably taken this estimate from S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon*, p.217.

²⁴ C.R. Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.141

²⁵ C.R. Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.140; Fernao de Qeyroz, *Conquista Temporal e Espiritual de Ceilao*, Colombo: Government Press, 1916, p.971.

The population in Sri Lanka was a multiracial and multi-religious one in this period. While the Sinhalese speaking community was in the majority there were pockets of Tamil, Moor, Mestizo and African communities in various parts of the island. In addition to the Roman Catholics, there were followers of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. In respect of religious affiliations the Muslims claimed the smallest number of adherents in the island. At the same time they lost the smallest number to the DRC. The strongly monotheistic Muslims were not affected by the Dutch proselytizing work. The attitude of the Dutch is indicated in the statement of Ryckloff Van Goens "Our experience shows in how great a degree the Moors in the island are in every respect a source of daily hindrance to us, being verily no other than canker in the Company's profits and the chief perverters of the morals both of our own people and the natives."²⁶ The Muslims occupied the lowest position in the religious hierarchy set up by the Dutch.²⁷

There was no special program in the DRC church to undertake missionary work among the Muslims. Their close social and religious community discouraged any one in their community from embracing Christianity.²⁸ On that account their cultural contribution to the rest of the community was marginal.²⁹

Buddhist

Unlike the Portuguese the Dutch did not practice the systematic destruction of the temples and kovils. However, the agitation of the predikants and proponents sometimes forced the government to take action against the setting up of religious edifices of other faiths. In 1719 the governors council gave permission to demolish two mosks in Jaffna.³⁰

The Dutch were concerned about the possibility of retaliation from Kandy in the event of disruption of religious activities in the Dutch territory. The king of Kandy was always ready to make use of any unpopular anti-Buddhist activity on the part of the Dutch for his benefit. Rajasinha II however was not a devout Buddhist therefore he did not, as a rule interfere with the affairs in the Maritime Provinces. Wimaladharmasuriya II (1687-1707) on the other hand was deeply attached to Buddhism.³¹ Therefore, he often demanded freedom for the Buddhist subjects in the VOC territory. The Dutch policy was to maintain peace and order rather than risk war. Therefore they saw to it that the Buddhists were not provoked to rebellion.

The position of the Buddhists was better in the Dutch period than in the Portuguese period. The presence of the Sinhalese Buddhist kingdom in Kandy was a psychological boost. The revival of Buddhism under the leadership of Velivita Saranankara in fact raised the morale of the Buddhists in the Maritime Provinces.³² The Dutch were reluctant to offend the king of Kandy by complying with the

²⁶ Governor of Dutch provinces of Sri Lanka from 1663 to 1675. *Memoirs of Ryckloff van Goens, 1663-1675*, tr. by E.Reimers, Colombo, 1932, p.35.

²⁷ K.W. Goonewardene, "Muslims under Dutch Rule up to the Mid Eighteenth Century". M.A.M. Shukri (ed) *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, Beruwela, 1986, p.203. (Hereafter referred to as *Muslims in Sri Lanka*) At the top were Protestants, next came Roman Catholics, the Buddhists, Hindus, and last of all the Muslims.

²⁸ D.A. Kotalawela, "Muslims Under the Dutch Rule in Sri Lanka: 1648-1796", *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, pp.167-188.

²⁹ M.A.M. Shukri, "Muslims of Sri Lanka – A Cultural Perspective", *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, pp. 337-361.

³⁰ *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, p.202

³¹ P..E. Pieris, *Ceylon and Hollanders*, Telliappalai, 1924, pp25, 26.

³² John Clifford Hold, John Clifford Bolt (1996) *The Religious Wolrd of Kirti Sri: Buddhism, Art and Politics of Late Medieval Sri Lanka*.

demands of the predikants to suppress Buddhism in the Maritime Provinces. It is clear that the number of Christians in the Galle Disavani declined as a result of the reinvigoration of Buddhist religious life there. The people in several villages often disrupted the visits of predikants. Even the *Tombo*³³ in the Galle disavani were kept very poorly. Directions from the authorities with respect to attendance at church services were generally disregarded. It is observed that the wives of the Sinhalese chiefs did not attend church services at all. A mudaliyar who reported an exorcist was himself molested by the Buddhist residents in his neighbourhood.³⁴ As we noticed earlier even the governors vacillated between extreme opposition and patronizing co-operation of Buddhism, depending on which benefited the VOC most. The Gangarama Vihara, which the Dutch Governor Van Eck had once destroyed, was restored with great splendor within a short period without the opposition of the Dutch authorities. The governor Iman Willem Falk (1765-1785) showed an interest in Buddhism and made several visits to Buddhist places of worship such as Mulkirigala to have discussions with monks.³⁵ Karatota Dhammarama Thera (1735-1827) even went to the extent of helping the government with the studies of the Sinhala language.

In the second half of the seventeenth century the Dutch tried to counter the more forceful expressions for the indigenous religions.³⁶ The Buddhist priests were banned from the Dutch areas by decree in 1682. Despite the relaxation of the religious laws in the last quarter of the Dutch rule in the island they did not favour the incorporation into a possible peace treaty with the king of Kandy the free exercise of Buddhism or Hinduism. The temple at Kelaniya began to increase in influence but the government did not try to restrict it despite the demand of some predikants. The Buddhist monks from Kandy could come to the low country to set up temples.³⁷ The Dutch government did not try to compel the Buddhists to be converted to Christianity. The Reverend Fabricus was punished for destroying some Buddhist temples in Matara in 1741. Some scholars³⁸ have expressed the predestination of the true believers did not try to prevent the practices of Buddhists and Hindus believing that it is an interference with the Will of God. This view however was applicable only when it became convenient to the Company.

Hinduism

In 1704 Predikant De Vriest complained that there were large numbers of *yogis* who crossed over from India and trekked round the country. The village headmen often offered them protection. One of the best known patrons were Timmersa Naik who was an elephant merchant. The Hindu villagers received these itinerant *yogis* with festivities and decorations. The predikants on their school visitations noticed a large number of sacred trees in the Peninsula. Jansz who visited villages in 1757 found many places dedicated to the goddess Amman. At times of pestilence the people carried an image of Amman in their villages. The veneration of sacred trees and places were a widespread phenomenon in Jaffna. Jansz stated that many persons 'danced past his rest house as though they were possessed.'

³³ It was a register of landed property introduced to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. The practice was continued by the Dutch. *The Sri Lanka Archives*, vol.3, (1985-6), p.198.

³⁴ In Galle District in 1775, Van Goor, 1978, p.134.

³⁵ Pieris, *Ceylon and Hollanders*, pp.135-136.

³⁶ Goonewardene, *The Foundation of Dutch Power in Ceylon*, 146, Asaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon*, p.122.

³⁷ Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indien*, Vols 5, Amsterdam 1726, vol.5, P.443.

³⁸ Van Goor, 1978, p.34.

At the beginning of their rule the VOC did not take drastic counter measures due to the lack of man power and as a result in the eighteenth century indigenous religions had gathered momentum. Therefore they were forced to show some tolerance of these activities in order to avoid chaos and rebellion.³⁹ New temples began to appear in the second half of the eighteenth century.

The Dutch policy towards Hinduism did not differ from that of Buddhism. During a good part of the Dutch Period the Hindu Yogis were able to wander through the entire island without any hindrance. These Hindu yogis and Brahmins were able frequently to commute from India to Jaffna and thereafter to move about in other parts of the Island. In the eighteenth century Brahmins were able to further Hinduism without any disturbance even in the town of Jaffna.⁴⁰ Many Yogis came to Jaffna from South India. When they held their religious ceremonies they made much noise with loud drumming and pealing of bells throughout the town. This shows that the Dutch practiced a tolerant attitude to Buddhism and Hinduism, although they were vehemently against the Catholics in the first century of their rule in the island. Church Councils often recommended that only Christians be appointed as headmen. But the Government did not always completely adhere to that request.⁴¹ The Dutch authorities took up a moderate attitude towards religions other than Roman Catholicism. This attitude became even more tolerant towards the end of their rule in the island. Their religious policy was determined by the political and commercial rather than religious reasons. The personal views of the Governors also affected these policies. There were many governors who were interested in promoting Christianity while other governors like Van Imhoff and Willem Falck were tolerant and at times sympathetic to other religions. However, the DRC clergymen were unable to comply with the between the church and the company was bound to occur in the second part of the eighteenth century.

Administration of the Church

Following the traditional practice of the church in the Netherlands, the church in the island was divided into three ecclesiastical districts, which were known as consistories. They were namely Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna. They corresponded with the civil administrative districts known as *disavanis*.⁴² Each consistory⁴³ had a Church Council (*kerkraad*) consisting of predikants, the minor church officials from among the important members of the laity and political commissary or representative of the government in the Council of the governor. The church councils dealt with purely doctrinal matters and the political commissary had enormous power in it. The members of the Church council were selected by ballot. The natives were considered as nominees for election. The democratic ideals in the mother country, however, were not taken into consideration as the dominance of the trading company had to be maintained. They were subject to confirmation by the government. The Consistory in Colombo was regarded as the pre-eminent one. It handled the correspondence between Holland and Sri Lanka. The church was not expected to have communication with outside bodies without the approval of the government. Therefore the letters had to pass through the government censor. Theoretically the council

³⁹ Van Goor, 1987, p. 137. It is also costly to intervene in these matters. Therefore the company turned a blind eye.

⁴⁰ Van Goor, 1978, p.35.

⁴¹ Van Goor, 1978, p.36

⁴² C.W. Codrington, *A Short History of Ceylon*, London, 1947, p.152.

⁴³ The consistory was a board of clerical officers, either national or provincial, charged with various matters of ecclesiastical administration. These Bodies supervise and exercise discipline over the religion and education of the congregation, the clergy, and the schoolmasters, and examine candidates for the ministry.

was expected to assemble eight times a year to discuss the matters relating to the church. Special meetings were held to meet extraordinary situations.

Another institution known as board of scholarchs (*Scholarchale Vergadering*) supervised the educational establishment of the Church. Its jurisdiction corresponded with the Colombo, Galle and Jaffna consistories. The meetings of this board were usually presided over by the *Disave* of the area.⁴⁴ All the clergy of the consistory, and three or four citizens, appointed by the governor, were members of this board. Their duty was to supervise the work of the schools and schoolmasters serving in that particular consistory. The schoolmasters were catechists as well as registrars of births, deaths and marriages. The school board did not have any authority over the matters of doctrine.⁴⁵

The board of deacons, 'diaconie',⁴⁶ was in charge of charitable work and relief to the poor. It was first head of in 1676.⁴⁷ Their function was somewhat similar to the *Casa de Misericordia* of the Portuguese period.⁴⁸ Their major task was the maintenance of orphanages.

Ecclesiastical personnel

The ecclesiastical personnel of the DRC comprised predikants, proponents, sick comforters, sextons, and schoolmasters. Later in the eighteenth century indigenous proponents and catechists were added to this category. The ecclesiastical branch of the VOC provided Sri Lanka with two grades of ministers. The fully qualified ones known as predikants were ordained ministers. They usually had a theological education, very often at a university in Europe. The next group was known as proponents, *knrankbezoekers and zienkentroosters*. They were usually younger men. They were expected to visit the sick, conduct instruction classes, and carry out acts of benevolence.⁴⁹ All the members of the clergy were expected to get certificates of sanction from their Church Councils in Holland and the endorsement of the VOC.

Predikants

The ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church as referred to as predikants. The first predikants to arrive in Sri Lanka were Anthonius Jornjovius (Galle 1642), Anthonius Stamperious (Negombo 1642), Philippus Baldaeus (Jaffna 1658) and Ludovicus Boogaard (Colombo 1660). Among them Baldaeu is well known because of the account of his personal experience printed in Holland.⁵⁰ They had a theological training in a university in Holland. Therefore the position of Predikant was a respectable one in Holland. The predikants for the service in the East were originally trained in the missionary training school (*Seminarium Indicum*) run by the VOC in Leiden. However this seminary had ceased to function at the time of the Dutch occupation of Sri Lanka. The predikants therefore were recruited from the personnel

⁴⁴ S.Arasaratnam, *The Dutch Administrative Structure in Sri Lanka*, C.R. de Silv and Sirima Kiribamune (eds) (1989) *K.W. Goonewardena Felicitation Volume*, pp.121-131

⁴⁵ F.D. Palm, "The Educational Establishment of the Dutch in Ceylon", *JRAS* (cb), ii (1846-47), pp.103-133.

⁴⁶ Diacone was a poor relief board of the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka. Robrecht Boudens, *Catholic Missionaries in a British Colony: Success and Failures in Ceylon 1796-1893*, Immense, 1979, p.27. V. Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*, Dehiwela, 1983, Vol 1, pp, 256, 265.

⁴⁷ Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon under Dutch Rule*, p.208

⁴⁸ Tikiri Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon*, Colombo 1966, p.220.

⁴⁹ R.G. Anthonisz, *The Dutch In Ceylon*, P.186

⁵⁰ Phhilippus Baldaues, *Beschrijvinghe der Oost-Indische de Kerkgeschiedenis*. 2 volumes Amsterdam , reprint 1946.

who passed out of the universities in Europe. The purpose behind it was that the directors of the company believed that the predikants who had been selected by the directors would be more subservient and loyal to the rules of the Company. Most of them came from middle class families. They were married men unlike the Roman Catholic priests who served in the island who were celebrated. Most of the predikants who arrived in the east during this period were men of advanced age⁵¹ as the young predikants were not attracted to the conditions offered by the VOC to the ecclesiastical personnel. The fact that the VOC insisted on the subordination of the ecclesiastical personnel to the authority of the officers of the VOC became a deterrent to attracting young men. All correspondence addressed to the church authorities in Holland by predikants in the East were under the scrutiny of the company. The predikants, schoolmasters and lay leaders were paid by the VOC and not by the church. They were regarded as salaried officials of the company. The order of the hierarchy was clearly defined by the company. The predikants were at the top and the lay leaders and schoolmasters were at the bottom of the organized body of ecclesiastical officials in successive ranks. Therefore they were servants of a business venture despite their clerical trappings.⁵² Under these circumstances the Company found it hard to recruit suitable personnel for service in the east. Similarly the Company found it hard to keep those who came to the East for long, under conditions which were not favourable to a predikant who was dedicated to the gospel. The predikants in the service of the Company received less respect than those who remained in Holland. They were not called to serve parishes but were liable to be transferred from one place to another at the discretion of the directors of the company.

It was stated that in 1651 in Formosa the predikants had to attend to the spiritual needs of the Dutch residents and garrison, and act as interpreters, tax collectors, and licensees for the trade in deerskins.⁵³ The situation did not differ much in Sri Lanka from that of Formosa. It has been stated that their work was a mixture of 'sacred as well as sacrilegious'.⁵⁴

The predikants fared badly in the eyes of the natives who compared them with the Roman Catholic priests who were familiar to them. The sacro magical elements of popular religions gave their believers a feeling of spiritual security, which the Reformed preachers were unable to supply. The external observances of the Roman Catholic Church were in many ways strikingly like some of those in the Hindu and Buddhist beliefs which they sought to replace. The use of images, of rosaries, the cult of the saints and so forth. The veneration accorded to Brahmins by Hindus, and to bhikkus by the Buddhists was paralleled by the respect felt by Roman Catholic for the sacramental and sacerdotal attributes of their own priesthood. This contrasted strongly with the unimpressive status of Calvinist predikants and krank-bezoekers, who lived a life which did not differ from that of the officers of the foreign government.⁵⁵

The predikants tried to insistently cling to the minor issues of prestige and pride. This often became an annoyance to the government officials. There were frequent petty disputes involving prestige between the clergymen and Dutch officials. In 1669 the predikants of Jaffna protested against the precedence

⁵¹ For a description of the ministers of the Dutch period see Roger Greenway, *Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon*, unpublished MA dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, pp.181-215.

⁵² C.R. Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p. 134.

⁵³ C.R. Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.145

⁵⁴ S. Araratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658-1687*, p. 102.

⁵⁵ S. Araratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658-1687*, p. 102.

given to the Disave over them. In an incident it is stated that the Disave, Marten Huysman, had gone ahead of the entourage in which disrespect to his position in the eyes of the people. In 1677 Rev. Maxwell preferred to leave the country due to a dispute with the government. The dispute is not clearly stated in the records.

The paucity of predikants was the frequent complaint of the church during this period. There were only three predikants in the island in 1670. It was very rarely that the number of predikants came to ten during the whole of the Dutch period. The archives of the VOC in Holland contain many letters and reports from Sri Lanka expressing the inadequacy of preachers in such a vast mission field.

Even the few that were there did not live up to the expectation of a minister of a religious establishment. The predikants themselves were the target of criticism of the Company officials. Van Goens stated that they were 'living in grand style, keeping beautiful palanquins and horses and a suite of sixteen or twenty soldiers and who did not hesitate to pose as lords in the villages, and to subject the poor mayorals to a caning if they thought they had not been properly entertained.'⁵⁶ A Sri Lankan young man who went to Holland for studies also expressed his views analyzing the weaknesses of the church in a pamphlet published in 1757. He stated that the missionaries work for personal gain rather than for the love of God.⁵⁷ Out of the seventy-five Predikants who served in Sri Lanka from 1642 to 1725 only eight had sufficient linguistic ability to preach in native tongues. The quality and quantity of predikants were criticized by Governor Van Angelbeeck.⁵⁸ Boudens says, "Predikants failed to take advantage of their privileged situation" to evangelize the people of the country.⁵⁹

There were no attempts at contextualization or 'incarnational mission'⁶⁰ during this period. As they came to Sri Lanka as paid workers of a company they had to live according to the conditions laid down by the VOC. No minister was allowed to associate too closely with the native population. They were serving in Sri Lanka for a short period with a view to returning to their homeland to retire. In the meantime they had to be ready to leave their stations anytime when the company authorities transferred them. The Dutch ministers remained foreign groups of privileged people living in a Dutch colony.

There has never been as many as twenty predikants at any given time in Sri Lanka. It is only a very few who had the ability or inclination to make a study of the indigenous languages. The sporadic efforts made by a few predikants to learn Tamil and Sinhala did not help to any satisfactory extent.

The number of ecclesiastical personnel was restricted to 32 by Governor Schreuder.⁶¹ In 1750 there were in all 43 ecclesiastical personnel serving in Sri Lanka. There were ten predikants, one preceptor, four indigenous proponents, seven schoolmasters, seven *Zieken-troosters* (comforters of the sick), six *Krank-bezoekers* (visitors of the sick), six sextons, and two organists. On an average the salary bill was around 35,000 guilders per year.

⁵⁶ Boudens, *Catholic Church in Ceylon*, p.205.

⁵⁷ P.E. Pieris, *Ceylon and Hollanders*, p.93.

⁵⁸ Boudens, *Catholic Church in Ceylon*, p.216.

⁵⁹ Boudens, p *Catholic Church in Ceylon*, p.216.

⁶⁰ A. Scott Moreau, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Grand Rapids, 2000, p. 474.

⁶¹ Van Goor, 1978, p.142.

In order to remedy the situation governor Van Imhoff, who realized that the effectiveness of the church depended on the ministers, requested the authorities in Holland for more and better reformed clergymen. But this request went unanswered. The majority of the clergymen who came to Sri Lanka remained only for a few years. The VOC transferred them to Batavia, India, Cape of Good Hope and Formosa.

Lay leaders

Krank-bezoekers and *Zienken-troosters* were considered assistants of the Predikants (ministers) of the Dutch Reformed Church. They were also referred to as lay leaders. Actually they were more than that. They served often as substitutes for predikants in places where there were none and where they instructed the people in simple articles of faith and conducted Sunday services. They were “recruited almost entirely from the working class, and included ex-soldiers, sailors, cobblers, weavers, cloth workers and bakers.”⁶² They were a group of subordinate church officials who were sent out from Holland for the work in the territories under the administration of the Dutch East India Company to visit the sick in hospitals, look after orphans and orphanages as well as to hold week day meetings in the churches. *Krank-bezoekers* were young men educated in theology. However, many of them had nothing more than rudimentary theological training. These ‘lay leaders’ were employed ashore as catechists, primary school teachers, and hospital visitors and in similar duties under the supervision of Predikants. Under this system the young men were expected to learn the language of the colony.

In some case the *Krank-bezoekers* and *Zieken-troosters* were promoted to a full ordained ministry as predikants. After a few years of service they were expected to be promoted as Proponents or semi ordained priests and finally as predikants. Such promotions were rare. Predikants, who were their superiors jealously guarded their own superior positions in the hierarchy of the Company, often suppressed *Krank-bezoekers*, even when they were capable men. In 1666 a person called Thaly who came to Sri Lanka served in this capacity. When the time came to make him a predikant the predikants who were in Sri Lanka refused to accept him at the time as a full-fledged predikant, in spite of the consent given by the Batavian church, stating that his education was insufficient and his work unsatisfactory.

Quite often the *Krank-bezoekers* proved to be trouble-makers in the eyes of the VOOC. They wished to be looked upon as ministers, and they yielded to ecclesiastical authority with great reluctance.⁶³ There were occasions when they were dismissed and sent back to Holland.

Clergy in the service of the Company

The clergymen who came from Holland were nominated by the Church Council in Holland and appointed by the VOC for service in the east. Upon their arrival the ministers were expected to present their credentials to the governor who appointed them to their stations.

The Dutch attitude to religion differed from that of the Portuguese. The position of the clergymen in the official hierarchy of the VOC was clearly defined. In fact all initiatives in the field of missionary activities

⁶² C.R. Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.152.

⁶³ C.A.L. Can Troostenberg de Bruyn, DRC, chap. vi.

in Sri Lanka emanated from the secular authorities of the company. With the formation of the Heeren XVII society the VOC firmly resolved to subordinate the overseas churches to their own authority. They insisted that their governors should decide the activities of the predikants and lay leaders. Nevertheless the church councils in the area, which in turn had an officer of the government whose presence was vital, undertook the postings and transfers. The VOC insisted that lay officials should sit on all the church councils. The decisions of these bodies could be carried out only with the approval of the officials of the government. The eminent predikants, Baldaeus, was asked to leave the country on account of disobedience. Rev. Arnoldus Whihelmus Fabricius was sentenced in 1745 to pay a fine of fifty rix dollars for having secretly forwarded his report on the schools directly to the Classis of Amsterdam.⁶⁴

The subordination of the church to the commercial interests of the company was a stumbling block to the genuine growth of the church. The government had the final word on the appointment of schoolmasters, catechists, proponents and predikants. All official correspondence to and from the Church in Holland had to pass through the hands of the governor. With regard to the election of elders and deacons, the practice was for the Church councils to choose double the number of elders and deacons required, and then submit the list to the government for approval. It was after the approval that the election took place. In 1736 the government changed the procedure by asking the church to make the selection and submit the names for approval. The objection raised by the Church Council in Colombo in this regard was rejected by the government. The authorities of the government declared that since the majority of the leaders of the Church were servants of the VOC, the government had the power to decide whether such persons could be spared to serve in the church.⁶⁵

Since the clergy were employed by the VOC, the political authorities made every effort to keep the clergymen under their control. The personal character of the officials of the VOC also added some unpleasant factors. In addition to the Governor the commanders in Galle and Jaffna also exercised considerable authority over the church. The governor even sent the text of biblical passage, which should be preached each Sunday in the church in Colombo.⁶⁶ The Governor's interference in this manner was a hindrance to the freedom of the clergymen. The Governor's interference was very prominent at the church in Colombo. In 1688 the Governor dismissed Jacobos Mawell, a predikants, and Anthony Sheer, a proponent, for objecting to the intriguing activities of the political commissioner who sat at the Church council.⁶⁷

On one occasion Rev. Antonius Hilarius was accused of being too personal in the pulpit when, on May 15, 1645, he delivered a sermon on Daniel 6:4-5, and remarked on the jealousy of princes, when the Governor and his wife happened to be in the congregation. It was suspected that the sermon had been levelled at the Governor. The investigation that followed showed that the charges against the preacher were unfounded, and the consistory declared that everything that the predikant said was in conformity with the scriptures.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Roger Greenway, op. cit. p.190.

⁶⁵ J.D.Palm, *JRAS (CB)* 1946, p.56

⁶⁶ Antonisz, *The Dutch In Ceylon*, Colombo, 1905.

⁶⁷ Greenway, op.cit. p.78.

⁶⁸ Greenway. op. cit. p. 195

The predominantly commercial character of the government and its impingement on effective religious work among the indigenous population discouraged and frustrated many serious ministers.

While the prospect for converting the non-Christian was low in the company's agenda, a number of other reasons have been advanced for the arrival of the Dutch ministers to the East. Some came to gain experience and esteem, some to get away from the difficulties in the home country, some for exciting activity and others for economic return. It is reported that the predikant, who conducted the first service in Galle on October 16, 1642, was a person who was reprimanded at home for his theological views.⁶⁹ However, one cannot disregard the few distinct personalities among the ecclesiastics who made a lasting contribution.⁷⁰

The journey to the east was a difficult one during this period when the ships sailed around the cape for nearly six months to reach Sri Lanka from Holland. Not every clergyman who sailed from Holland was able to reach his destination in the east. There were many shipwrecks, and others died at sea from sickness. A good percentage of Dutch Ministers died young in the East.

Most clergymen who came to the island were married men. The Company paid the clergymen a substantial salary and allocated provisions and food from the Company stores.⁷¹ The fact that the company, not the Church, paid their salary was one reason why there were so few predikants serving in the island.

Occasionally, grievance with the company caused some ministers to return to their homeland in disgust. The grim reports of sickness and death also discouraged the men who would have liked to be in Sri Lanka. As a result of the interference of the government ministers were not free to develop and govern the affairs of the church by themselves according to their religious convictions. This hindered the inventiveness and the imagination of the enthusiastic ministers.⁷² The men of zeal like, Philippus Baldaeus, demanded freedom in church affairs. This freedom could not be obtained. These hardships could be taken as the cause for the sluggishness and reluctance on the part of the ministers to study the native languages and settle down to work among the native. This explains the meagre results of the DRC in the Dutch period of Sri Lanka.

In the north only a few ministers of the church engaged in evangelism outside Jaffna fort. It was not necessary to do so. A systematic scheme of inducements and coercion resulted in a wave a Hindu and Catholic Tamils of Jaffna into the Church.⁷³ The situation was not different among the Sinhalese in the south.

The predikants lived in major towns and separate houses, which were islands of western culture. Their houses were built in the Dutch architectural form thereby separating them from the housing of the rest

⁶⁹ Albert Hyma, (1942) *The Dutch in the Far East: A History of the Dutch Commercial and Colonial Empire*, Ann Arbor: G. Wahr Publishers, 1942, p.10

⁷⁰ A list predikants who served in Sri Lanka during the Dutch period is included Greenways' *Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon*, pp. 181-215.

⁷¹ R.G.Anthonis, *Dutch in Ceylon*, p.186, C.R.Boxer, *The Dutch Seabourne Empire*, pp.139-152.

⁷² The situation was worse in Holland where the matter so fthe Church was under strict supervision of the state in the seventeenth century.

⁷³ Van Goor, 1978, 122.

of the population. They maintained servants and guards similar to the Dutch officials of the period. The ordinary man was not allowed to their houses. Their servants and dogs prevented any person approaching the predikants in their houses.

There was a great gap between the predikants and the ordinary Christians in the countryside. They could hardly communicate with the ordinary people whom they wished to evangelize. They never adopted the life style of the people. They did not consider it necessary to identify with the people. As apparent from their vernacular publications those who learnt the local languages also showed their foreignness in speech and language and broken sentences. If they spoke in the vernacular their sermons were not clear to the people. Often the western style of preaching and logical arguments were unintelligible to the ordinary Sri Lankans. Therefore the religious services of the Dutch Reformed Church were uninteresting to the ordinary man.

The cultural arrogant predikants showed a condescending attitude towards the ordinary people. Their life style showed examples of western ethnocentrism. Even the Sinhalese and Tamil who could achieve the positions of predikant copied these attitudes. When Governor Van Eck requested Predikant Ondaatje who was a Colombo Cetty⁷⁴ and Predikant Philpz who was Sinhalese, to act as itinerant missionaries in 1764, they rejected the offer as not becoming their rank.⁷⁵ Although these two ministers were natives of the country they followed the elite life style of the Dutch Predikants.

Duties

The Dutch clergymen were called upon to work among the local inhabitants as well as the European population. They had the dual task of serving as pastors and missionaries. Therefore the attitude of the DRC was that there should be one church for natives as well as for Europeans. After the completion of the conquest of the Maritime Provinces of Sri Lanka in 1658 the VOC set up three Church Councils which were in Galle, Colombo and Jaffna keeping the pastoral care in these areas under the ministers and these Church Councils. The duties of the clergymen included everyday pastoral care and tours of the villages to supervise the work of schoolmasters and catechists. The congregations of the important towns such as Matara, Galle, Colombo and Jaffna were larger than other twons. These cities usually received one or more predikants. When there were additional predikants available the other predominantly Christian towns like Negombo, and Manna also received predikants.

The Dutch ministers usually conducted two worship services on Sundays in the Dutch language, and where necessary the sermons were translated to a native language by an interpreter. They taught catechism on Thursday. The minister in Colombo led prayer every evening at the Governor's residence and twice a day at the hospital in Colombo. He was also expected to make visitations to the homes of the members of the congregation. The Lord's Supper was celebrated once in three months. The services were also held in the local languages including Portuguese. Those services were usually held on Sunday evenings. The church of the DRC were usually located in towns.

Among the pastoral duties assigned to the predikants in Sri Lanka the most important work was the annual visits to parish schools scattered in the towns and villages of the Dutch territory. The tours as

⁷⁴ Reggie Candappa (ed) *History of Colombo Chetties*, Colombo, 2000, p. 37

⁷⁵ Van Goor, 1978, p.31

members of the scholarchate consumed a great deal of time of the predikants. A decision was taken in 1658 to make every predikant take part in them. However, the ministers, for their convenience, used to take turns in making these tours. Travelling was done on horseback or in palanquins. The journeys were not safe, as they had to travel through jungle and marshy lands. It is reported that Jan Fereira D'Almyda and his wife suddenly faced elephants on their way from Galle to Colombo. Many members of the scholarchal entourage were killed by elephants on these tours.

Therefore the Dutch predikants' visits to countryside were not regular. Although an entourage of servants and headmen always accompanied them. They had to fulfil official administrative tasks. At times the people took the chance of their visit to show their opposition to the Dutch rule as a Civil officer of the Company was also included in this entourage.⁷⁶ Therefore one or two Dutch soldiers also accompanied the entourage.

The poor ratio of predikants to the number of Christians resulted in the Christians getting very little pastoral care. The only exposure that the Christians in a village had to clergymen of the Dutch Reformed Church was the periodic visits he made as a member of the scholarchate. Although these tours were expected to take place every year the state of affairs did not allow such regularity.

The numbers given in the official statistics of the church regarding the baptized Christians gave an illusory picture of the strength of Christianity in Sri Lanka. In fact the number of Christians in the official records kept on increasing during the Dutch period. For example there were only 26 churches when the Dutch took over the Jaffna peninsula in 1658. This number was increased to 36 in 1700 and in 1760 there were 69 churches in the peninsula. On the average there were two ministers to oversee the Christians of all these churches in Jaffna. This number increased to three and occasionally to four fully ordained ministers. Much of the Christian ministry was left in the hands of the indigenous schoolmasters. The ceremony of baptism was followed by the registration of the name of the person baptized in the tombo. The registration was essential in all civil and judicial matters relating to legitimacy and inheritance.⁷⁷

However, it is important to note that the predikant made an impact on society during these tours. They exercised influence through solemnization of marriages and by preaching the value of monogamous marriage. The incidence of polyandry and polygamy therefore was lessened even among the non-Christians in the low country.

Indigenous clergy

In the second half of the eighteenth century there were areas where the Christian mission saw some kind of growth. In the disavani of Colombo there was a considerable growth in the size of the indigenous church membership during this period. This success was due to the activities of the Sinhalese proponents. From 1725 onwards one of them served constantly at Kalutara and another at Wonvendaal.

⁷⁶ Van Goor, 1978, p.131

⁷⁷ Sir James Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*, London, 1850, p.242;

A Tamil proponent worked in Negombo.⁷⁸ There were always one or more Sinhalese proponents in Colombo.⁷⁹ There were also a few Sri Lankan predikants in the second half of the nineteenth century who received training in Holland.

The Sinhalese and Tamil predikants were more enthusiastic about the ministry. The Sinhala predikants like J.J. Fijibrands (1754-1801) and Hendrik Philpz (1758-1790) encouraged the people in every possible way to take part in Christian life. They offered incentives to good schoolmasters and clever pupils in order to inspire them. Philpz constantly emphasized the value of tours of inspection. He also wanted to see that the Protestants enjoyed precedence with regard to government appointments. The Tamil predikant, Philippus de Melho, assisted with the press, did translations, and served as an indigenous proponent. It was the indigenous proponent who mixed with the local people. They visited schools regularly in order to have contact freely with the local people. In this connection the value of the Colombo Seminary is very significant as most of the proponents were trained here.⁸⁰

In 1709 the first three Tamil-speaking proponents were appointed. Two of them assumed duties in Jaffna, their homeland, while the third was stationed in Negombo where there was a large Tamil speaking community. The number of Sinhalese and Tamil catechists also increased during this period. They were instrumental in improving the quality of the knowledge of Christianity among the Christians.

In 1737 the Governor's Council suggested to the authorities in Holland that the best students of the Seminary should annually be sent to Holland to follow a theological training in Leiden at the Company's expense. This was done in order to fill the posts of predikants, which were falling vacant in the island in an alarm in manner. After completion of their studies they were to return as European trained predikants to assume duties. But these predikants were to be paid a lower salary than their European counterparts. Since these ministers did not have any chance of leaving the country in times of dispute with the government, as in the case of Dutchmen, the Company could count on their continued service. They had to be admitted to school at an age between four and six so that after spending eight years in the seminary they would still be young enough to pursue studies in Holland.

Of the number of students who were sent to Holland seven were Tamils. Five of them qualified as ministers. Philippus de Melho, ordained as a predikant was outstanding among them for the contribution he made to prepare the scriptures in Tamil. Of these Sinhalese, two students continued their studies in Europe. Hendrick Philpz who was ordained as predikant prepared the Sinhala scripture for printing. Of the Europeans who studied at the seminary five became predikants. Of them Bronsveld, Meijer and Fijbrands became ministers in Colombo. The candidates were sent to Europe keeping mind the needs of the wider church in the Dutch empire, not merely Sri Lanka.⁸¹ Therefore more Tamils were sent for training in Europe in order to get some of them to work in South India as well. All these candidates were educated to be ministers of the Church. But they did not receive a training for missionary service.

⁷⁸ There was a large Tamil speaking community in Negombo from the time of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. M. Cyril Leslie Fernando, *Impcat of Catholicism in the Coastal town of Negombo in Sri Lanka*, Rome, 1978, p.3; C. Rasanayagam (1999) *Yalppanac carittiram (History of Jaffna)*

⁷⁹ Van Goor. p. 140

⁸⁰ Van Goor, 1987, pp. 151-162

⁸¹ Van Goor, 1978, pp. 82

It was the hope of the government and the Church that the graduates of the local Seminaries would become missionaries to the people of the country.⁸² The seminary graduates did not fulfil those expectations. The graduates contended themselves with following the example of the Dutch predikants, with annual visits to the outlying schools and churches. Therefore missionary work among the rural people was neglected. They also distanced themselves from the people in order to maintain their status in the service of the VOC. The overwhelming majority of pupils of the Seminary was drawn from areas where Dutch influence had been marked. Therefore most of the indigenous clergy belonged to the Westernized indigenous gentry. They lived like the Europeans and used the Dutch language for daily activities. At times the indigenous clergy were more Dutch than the Dutch predikants themselves in upholding the traditions of the DRC. The best example of this group is Hendrik Philipsz. He was the son of Lienege Philip Philipsz Wijekoon Panditaratna Maha Mudalyiar, grandsom of Don Philippe, schoolmaster of Kotte.⁸³ The indigenous clergy had no opportunity for creative activity. Therefore they could not experiment with new ideas which would make the church applicable to the environment of the Sri Lankan society.

Predikants and indigenous languages

One of the most essential requirements of effective mission work anywhere in the world, is knowledge of the language spoken by the people to whom one hopes to bring the gospel. The government encouraged those ministers who showed an interest in the study of indigenous languages. Wilhelmus Konijn⁸⁴ and Johannes Van Leesten⁸⁵ were stationed at Matara in 1705 in order to learn Sinhalese while Adolf Kramer⁸⁶ was provided with a house near the seminary at Nallur to learn Tamil.⁸⁷ The company assigned them with the specific task of studying local languages. They were granted exemption from some of their duties for this purpose. These ministers each received sixty guilders per month as well as the *koopmanskostgeld* (merchant's allowance). Each was allowed to make use of the service of an interpreter, while the available grammar and other material for study were put at their disposal. After 1722 there were always two ministers present in Colombo who were allowed to build up their knowledge of Sinhalese. The VOC tried to maintain the religious services in local languages by providing these predikants when available.

The duration of residence in the country affected the predikants' competency in indigenous languages. In the period from 1704 to 1737 only seven of the fifteen clergymen had served in the island between one and five years. The rest were stationed at one post for periods ranging from two to thirty years. For example D'Oude served fourteen years, Sinjeu twenty-two, de Vriest twelve, Konijn twenty, Gereardus Potken twenty six, Wetzelius thirty, Kanden ten, and Saakenz twenty three at one place in the island. Their average length of service turned out to be about twenty years.

⁸² Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.19

⁸³ Van Goor, 1978, op cit p.80

⁸⁴ Arrived in Sri Lanka in 1706. He translated the four gospels and the Heidelberg catechism into Sinhala.

⁸⁵ He came to Sri Lanka in 1706 as a proponent. He served at Matara in 1711, at Jaffna 1713 and died in Colombo in 1715.

⁸⁶ He arrived in Sri Lanka as a proponent in 1706, studied Tamil and served for several years. He remained in active service until ripe old age/

⁸⁷ Van Goor, 1978, p.72

Language study was hard. There were no lexicons, or grammar books suitable for foreigners to learn the native languages. It was difficult for the ministers to find suitable language scholars who could offer them tuition. Since the local people did not know the Dutch language it was hard to find someone who could converse with the ministers who knew only Dutch. There were few ministers who had necessary skills to teach in the Portuguese language.⁸⁸ Even in that case it was difficult to find teachers who knew adequate Portuguese and Sinhala or Tamil. For Example Kramer's Tamil teacher knew neither Dutch nor Portuguese and at first he was made to learn some texts by heart. Even after learning the language the pronunciation of the language by the Dutch pastors was not intelligible to the native speaker.⁸⁹ As the ministers disapproved of using 'heathen' writings, the classical Sinhalese and Tamil works could not be studied.

Language learning is an area where most of the Dutch missionaries failed. The limited success of their mission in the country may be attributed to this factor too. They did not learn the local languages because many of them did not believe that evangelism was a necessity. This was determined by the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and therefore they believed that evangelism interfered with the sovereign will of God.

In 1682 and in 1693 the Church council in Colombo made a request to Batavia for Bibles in Portuguese. De Meij who was proficient in Portuguese conducted the missionary work in the countryside of Jaffna. After his departure there was no one proficient in Portuguese and none of the interpreters knew Dutch. Therefore, the work came to a halt. When Philip de Vries⁹⁰ settled at Chavakachcheri to learn Tamil, he had to first study Portuguese since his instructors who were proficient in Portuguese did not know Dutch. In addition many of the Christian words in the Sinhalese and Tamil languages were taken from Portuguese. Therefore Governor Simons in 1704 stated that if a person spoke Portuguese he could be understood everywhere in Sri Lanka.⁹¹

Van Imhoff officially acknowledged the importance of the Portuguese language in the church and the school. This cleared the way to appoint clergymen to serve the Portuguese-speaking congregations. He realized that the Portuguese language was so widely accepted in Sri Lanka that any attempt at eradicating it would be futile. Van Imhoff instructed the Portuguese predikants in Batavia to prepare a new edition of the Portuguese Bible for the benefit of Portuguese speakers in Sri Lanka.

There were few Dutchmen who could aspire to be Sinhala and Tamil scholars in the eighteenth century. Konijn remained the authority on Sinhalese to the end of his days. On his death the government recognized Wetzelius⁹² as the new Sinhala scholar. Matthias Wermeliskircher was able to preach in Sinhala in 1750. In 1755 he published a Sinhala hymnal. However, it was the Sinhalese themselves who really did the work in the Sinhala language in the second half of the eighteenth century. Luis de Saram Mahamudaliyar assisted the translation work of the government as well as religious writings. In the last stages of Dutch rule Hendrik Philipsz excelled as a Sinhala scholar.

⁸⁸ One such person was Joan Ferriera (1628-1681)

⁸⁹ Van Goor, 1978, p.73

⁹⁰ He served in Jaffna in 1692 and from 1699 to 1712. He died in Colombo in 1715.

⁹¹ Van Goor. p.40

⁹² Johannes Philippus Wetzelius served in Galle from 1718 to 1722. He succeeded Petrus Kalden as Rector of the seminary in Colombo. He died in Colombo in 1751.

Tamil studies were undertaken by predikants in the very early stages of Dutch rule. Philippus Baldaeus made a good start in preparing Christian documents in Tamil.⁹³ In the eighteenth century Rev. Kraemer who served as a predikant in Jaffna made a study of published material in Tamil. Predikant Potken⁹⁴ and Bronsveld⁹⁵ and Proponent Jan Anthonisz also had a good knowledge of Tamil. However, the Tamils carried out outstanding work themselves. Among them Philippus de Melho is one of the best. Names such as Bastian Jansz and Petrus de Silva are also mentioned as translators into Tamil in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Priests salary:

The personnel in the DRC establishment in Sri Lanka were salaried officers of the government. The proponents received 30 guilders per month in addition to the board wages of an assistant.⁹⁶ This income and other factors created a wide gulf between the clergymen and the people of other factors created a wide gulf between the clergymen and the people of the country whom they wished to evangelize. According to instructions given to Anthony Paviljoen by the Governor General of Batavia in 1665, Reformed ministers are mentioned as those who “live in great style keeping beautiful palanquins and horses and a suite of sixteen to twenty soldiers and who did not hesitate to pose as lords in villages.” The ministers were often accused of doing business on the side to earn money. However, these accusations are exaggerations since the ministers who engaged in such activities were few. Nevertheless, the ecclesiastical personnel held an influential position in Dutch Sri Lanka. There are instances where clergymen were removed from office for drunkenness and engaging in private trading.⁹⁷ Some predikants even owned slaves. It is reported that the ill treatment of a slave by Jacobus van Buren, predikant of Jaffna in 1675, caused the slave’s death.⁹⁸ According to the report of Sybert Araham there were many ministers in Sri Lanka who had come seeking financial gain.

Disadvantages

Protestant ministers were married men. As noticed earlier many of them lacked the single-minded aspiration of propagating the Gospel, which was the hallmark of the Roman Catholic priests of the bygone era. For some of them, at least it is true to say that they held divided interests – personal economic advancement, and the propagation of the Dutch Reformed faith. The fact that they were firmly under the civil administration, and could only act as an appendage to it, frustrated the more able and sincere clerics. But even the very best of the DRC clerics did not share the life of the people they wished to convert in the manner that the Roman Catholic priests had done. This was the main key to success of the Catholic priests and the lack of it the greatest shortcoming of the DRC predikants. They were also frequently transferred from one place to another. The Roman Catholic priests, on the other hand were celibates and remained in one place for a long time, even for life. The status of the

⁹³ Philippus Baldaeus, *A Description of the Great and Most Famous Isle of Ceylon*, p.811

⁹⁴ Gerardus Potken arrived in Sri Lanka in 1718. He served Jaffna, Mannar, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. He died in Colombo in 1752.

⁹⁵ Sigisbert Abrahams van Bronsweld was born in Colombo in 1723. He was educated in the Colombo seminary and continued his studies in Leyden. He was able to preach in Dutch, Sinhala and Tamil. He died in Colombo in 1769.

⁹⁶ Van Goor, 1978, p.143

⁹⁷ Sapramadu, op. cit. p. xxxiv

⁹⁸ Greenway, op.cit.p.187; De Bryuyn,op. cit. chap. XIII

predikants and *Krank-bezoekers* was unimpressive compared to the status of the Roman Catholic priests. They lacked the sacro-magical elements, which gave the believers a feeling of spiritual security. In addition the Dutch were not knowledgeable enough about Buddhism and Hinduism to work effectively among the followers of those religions.⁹⁹

Although many Governors and other civil officers were zealous in evangelizing the country, the lack of ministers hindered their task. There was a great shortage of predikants and other ministries. From 1658 to 1661 Baldaeus was the only predikant in Jaffna, an area which was previously supervised by forty-two Roman Catholic priests.¹⁰⁰ Since 1724 the replacements from Netherlands were few and far between. Most ministers living in the island were of advanced in years.¹⁰¹ Kramer and Scaevola who were stationed in Jaffna died before 1740. Often the eintre Galle disavani had only one predikant when in fact it needed three. After the death of Konijn there were four ministers serving in Colombo, of whom two had applied for repatriation, while Kalden retired in 1737. Therefore the few ministers who were there had carry a heavy burden of duties. After 1737 the greater part of work in Colombo fell on the shoulders of Wetzelius. He had to take over the duties of Konijn, which included the inspection and pastoral responsibility of indigenous congregations of Kotte, Kalutara and Negombo. He also had to shoulder the responsibilities of being the director of the printing works as well as being the recorder of the seminary.¹⁰²

According to a report published in 1747 in Holland by Sybert Abraham, a theological student at Leiden from Colombo Seminary, the negligence of the clergy, and their ignorance of the native languages resulted in the poor performance of the DRC in Sri Lanka.¹⁰³ However, when this was reported to the ministers in Sri Lanka at a meeting held in Colombo the five ministers who gathered stated that the charges were false. Therefore the government set aside the charges as unfounded and unprovable. The government and the church authorities thereby defended their position. The blame for poor results in the religious enterprise was placed somewhere by the ministers as well as the government. However, the publication of Sybert Abraham raised questions in Holland with regard to the quality of the work of the ministers in Sri Lanka.

The predikants remained gentlemen throughout period. They travelled round the countryside in palanquins or on horseback, surveyed situations, admonished persons, awarded prizes and dealt with complaints, but had very little time for contact with people.

Disputes between Church and State

The story of Philippus Baldaeus is a good example of an early victim of governmental interference. He came to Sri Lanka in 1656 when he was thirty years old, full of enthusiasm to tale the Gospel to the native people. He accompanied the Dutch forces as army chaplain to Jaffna, and also to the South Indian ports of Tuticorin, and Nagapatnam. When these towns fell into Dutch hands, Baldaeus was entrusted

⁹⁹ C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, pp.140-144

¹⁰⁰ Francis O. Thambimuttu, *A Profile of Ceylon's Catholic Heritage*, New York, 1961, p.32;

¹⁰¹ For a discussion on the age of the predikants see: Katharine Smith Diehl, "Simon Kat, translator 1624-1704, *Ceylon Historical Journal*, 25 (1-4) Oct. 1978, pp.193-203.

¹⁰² Van Goor, 1978, p.76

¹⁰³ Palm, "An account of the Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon," *JRAS(CB)*, 1847, pp.63-64.

with the task of 'converting' Roman Catholicism and converting the people to the Reformed Religion. He used the discretion to decide what had to be discarded and what could be retained of the Roman Catholic heritage¹⁰⁴

He made a study of the Hindu religion and tried earnestly to learn the Tamil language.¹⁰⁵ He also acquired the ability to read and speak Portuguese for there were so many who spoke that language in Jaffna at that time. He toiled with unrelenting effort to produce Christian literature in Tamil and Portuguese with the help of an interpreter named Francois. He prepared translations of the catechism and prayers in these languages in order to reach a larger number of people in Jaffna.

Since he was a missionary at heart, he submitted plans for evangelization of the island at a meeting of the Reformed ministers in Colombo in 1659. The duties of the clergy were defined at this meeting. The ministers accepted the plan put forward by Baldaeus for systematic evangelization of the island. Even coercive measures such as fines and punishments for non-attendance at church services were also included in this proposal. However, the trouble began when he suggested measures to determine the relationship between the church and state. The ministers who assembled decided to establish a central ecclesiastical body in Sri Lanka to coordinate and supervise the work. According to this plan one minister would be in charge in rotation to handle all correspondence to and from abroad relating to the matters of the church. It was also decided to allow one minister in rotation to undertake the annual tours of inspection of schools. They also decided to meet at least once in three years to discuss common problems and activities. When these proposals were sent for approval to Batavia they were totally rejected. The VOC had no intention of allowing the church the freedom that Baldaeus proposed. Therefore, in 1659 the VOC clearly spelled out the authority of the Company over the matters of the church.

When Van Goens became governor in 1664, he was given instruction by the VOC to tighten control over religious activities and not allow the clergymen to exercise any administrative control.¹⁰⁶ According to the new order, the ministers were not allowed to travel freely within the country without permission from the officials of the government. Baldaeus rejected these restrictions and finally decided to give up his duties in June 1666. When Baldaeus was not willing to reconsider his decision, the Governor Van Goens was angry and dismissed him from his post in the island and sent him back to Holland. The Governor was not willing to consider the request of Baldaeus to remain in service till his successor arrived. He was blamed for being a *huyrlinge* (hireling) instead of being a *herder* (shepherd).¹⁰⁷

In 1670 the predikants planned to send an annual letter to the church council in Amsterdam informing of the situation of the church in that particular year. Although the predikants insisted in their right to communicate directly with the mother church in Amsterdam, the government objected to it. The government also prohibited the correspondence between two churches in the island without channeling

¹⁰⁴ Baldaeus, op. cit. p.290

¹⁰⁵ Araratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon*, pp.215-236; Baldaeus, p.30

¹⁰⁶ Arasaratnam Baldaeus, p.34.

Baldaeus wrote a book about Sri Lanka in Holland and published in 1672 at Amsterdam. The book is a valuable contribution to the study of the history of Christianity in Sri Lanka. Throughout the book the author regrets that he could have done more for the spread of the gospel.

¹⁰⁷ Arasaratnam, *The Dutch Power in Ceylon*, p228; Baldaeus, *Description of Ceylon*, pp.815ff

such a communication through the government. This kind of restriction was placed in order to prevent predikants writing reports, which were critical of the activities of the VOC to the Church in Holland.

Reformation in action

With the expulsion of the Portuguese from the island, an opportunity was available to the Dutch to carry out a religious reformation in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese had left a robust and powerful Roman Catholic community in the island. The opinion of the Dutch authorities was that these Roman Catholics continued the legacy of the Portuguese power in the island. They showed extreme loyalty to the Portuguese rulers. The fact that Portuguese power was still strong in the neighbouring Malabar Coast added to further fears of the Dutch of a possibility of an attempt by the Portuguese to re-conquer the island. The Dutch were aware that the loyalties of the Roman Catholics in the island were undoubtedly with the Portuguese in such a contingency. Therefore, the Dutch religious propagation was motivated by factors both political and religious. Even in the case of the non-Roman Catholics one could observe the political motives behind the Dutch attempts to convert them to the Reformed Faith. The Dutch East India Company very soon recognized this religious force. Therefore, religion came to play a part in the Company's activities in Sri Lanka.

The Dutch government, within a short period after the conquest of the Maritime Provinces directed their attention to the Roman Catholics in order to convert them to the Reformed faith. In this connection they introduced rigorous repressive measures. They took over the flourishing Roman Catholic religious establishments and handed them over to the predikants of the Reformed Church. Roman Catholicism was made a proscribed religion in the country.

Penal Laws

The Dutch used their penal laws to combat Roman Catholicism in Sri Lanka. The first edict issued by the Dutch on September 19, 1658 stated "Anyone who harboured a Roman Catholic priest or who even failed to denounce one whose whereabouts he happened to know would be liable to the death penalty."¹⁰⁸ It further stated: "All subjects and inhabitants belonging to this commandment are strictly forbidden to practice any Roman Catholic rites or ceremonies in public or to attend the same on the penalty that the holder of such gathering shall pay 12 rix dollars and those who are caught attending the same 3 rix dollars each which money shall be distributed in three portions, namely—to the apprehender, to the officer be it Dissave or Fiscal in whose Jurisdiction the same takes place, and the deaconate and if it can be discovered by whom such meeting was summoned and the ceremonies performed, they shall be put into chains for 3 years without mercy and sent to Colombo".¹⁰⁹

It is not certain whether any person was put to death on account of harbouring a priest, as the Dutch records available to us today do not contain any such information.¹¹⁰ According to Valentijn a proclamation issued by the Dutch on August 12, 1682, forbade all forms of dissemination of the Catholic Faith.

¹⁰⁸ Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under the Dutch Rule*, p.74

¹⁰⁹ Codex 2393 of the Sri Lanka National Archives, translated by Roger Greenway, op cit. p.33

¹¹⁰ Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, p.75

The plakkaart issued by Governor Simonsz in 1704 in Jaffna reemphasized much of the previous edicts. In it was stated "All subjects and inhabitants under this commandments are strictly forbidden to exercise the Roman Catholic Religion; the penalty shall be that the author of such an assembly shall pay a fine of 12 Rix Dollars and each of the persons discovered therein 3 Rix Dollars which fine shall be divided into three parts, one for the informant, another for the officer, either Dissave or fiscal, in whose jurisdiction such happens, and the third for the *disaconie* (diaconate); and on the grounds of having been discovered and produced, he who had called together the conventicle and performed this religion service shall without mercy be put in chains for three years and sent up to Colombo."¹¹¹ This was a less severe penalty than those declared in the plakkaart of 1658 where corporal punishment was to be meted out to anyone who harboured a Roman Catholic priest. The repressive attitude continued in the first century of Dutch rule in the island.

'The proclamation issued in 1706, required fishermen, chetties, paravars, and other castes under pain of fines and chastisement to send their children to a newly established Dutch Reformed school. By another plakkaart reading all persons were ordered to come to service on Sundays."¹¹²

In 1715, a proclamation was issued, which forbade not only all public assemblies on the part of the Roman Catholics, but also the administration of baptism by any Catholic priest. In 1733, and again in 1745, the plakkaart of 1658 was republished. In 1748 and 1751 a law forbidding the education of a Roman Catholic for religious service was issued. In 1751 another law emphasized the condemnation of any celebration of Roman Catholic mass in the Dutch territory. The new and more sever edicts indicated that they were unable to eradicate Roman Catholicism from the island.

Difficulty to enforce Laws

The VOC issued plakkarts "against devil worship and heathenish superstitions."¹¹³ The plakkaart issued in 1732 condemned severely "all idolatry" under pain of whipping, fines, and in the case of repeated offences, twenty-five years of forced labour in the public works of the Company.¹¹⁴

The VOC authorities observed in Holland in 1641 that it was impossible to prevent Roman Catholic priests from out going into the east in disguise although they accepted in principle that anti-Roman Catholic regulations ought to be enforced. By the end of the eighteenth century, anti-Roman Catholic regulations were virtually a dead letter. By that time the Dutch authorities were willing to allow a disguised Roman Catholic Bishop to remain in Holland. In 1745 they even allowed the Catholic fathers to baptize and celebrate mass un pretentiously in Batavia.¹¹⁵

The Dutch were prepared to force the people who were Christians in name to attend to the obligations of their faith, but they were not prepared to go further. The directors seldom insisted on the full rigour of the official policy. The penal laws could openly be enforced within the areas where Dutch authority was strong. Therefore in the cities of Colombo, Jaffna and Galle, the Company could afford to emphasize

¹¹¹ Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, p.101

¹¹² Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, p.104

¹¹³ J.D.Palm, *JRAS(CB)*, 1847, p.27

¹¹⁴ Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rue*, p.220

¹¹⁵ C.R. Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.142.

the letter of the law. Most of the time the clamour for the observance of the laws came from the predikants. The predikants often protested to the civil authorities about the Roman Catholic religion. When Calvinist ministers tried to get the anti-Buddhist rules enforced, they met less and less co-operation from the government.¹¹⁶

Iconoclasm :

In addition to the penal laws, the Dutch authorities undertook a program of destruction of Roman Catholic images in all parts of the island, which came under their rule. When the Dutch were bombarding the city of Colombo, they took a statue of the Apostle Thomas, cut off its nose, knocked it full of nails, and shot it out of the mortar into a bunker ditch occupied by the Portuguese.¹¹⁷ Therefore when the Portuguese surrendered the fortress to the Dutch in 1656 the treaty included a clause stating: "In the event of the surrender of the fort our churches and images shall be regarded with all reverence. The clergy and ecclesiastical functionaries shall be permitted to take with them all the images the might wish to remove, as well as relics, holy vessels, silver lamps, and all other ornaments whatsoever appertaining to sacred services and churches including all moveable property which might belong to them."¹¹⁸ In the process of conversion of Roman Catholic establishments to Dutch Reformed institutions, there was a systematic attempt to destroy the remaining Roman Catholic symbols in the country. Therefore the statues, crosses and other symbols placed in public places were destroyed during the first few years of Dutch rule. The churches that were taken over by the Dutch were stripped of icons.

Interactive between European and Locals

The converts provided a reliable supply of clients to the colonial regimes. A number of Dutch governors attempted to initiate a European colonization in Sri Lanka in order to form an inexpensive and yet important reserve of personnel as a source of man power loyal to the Dutch in the country.¹¹⁹ Evangelization was also another attempt to make a population loyal to them. Protestantism would be a means whereby the subjects could become deeply committed to the Company so that it would thus be able to rule the island in peace and quiet.¹²⁰ The statistics that the predikants provided show a steady increase of the number of people professing to be Christians during the course of the Dutch period. However, these were people who called themselves Christians for reasons other than religious. The Sri Lankans did not feel comfortable to shift allegiance to a religion that looked unfamiliar and secular.

Coercive practices

The use of coercive measures on the part of the Dutch, and the enthusiastic support of the predikants in the enforcement of these regulations, which suppressed other religions, is very similar to the measures taken by the Portuguese. They learnt from and followed the Portuguese in their attempt to suppress

¹¹⁶ C.R. Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.143; Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under the Dutch Rule*, pp. 74-77.

¹¹⁷ Tennenet, *Christianity in Ceylon*, p.40

¹¹⁸ S.D. Sparamadu, Bladaeus, op. cit.p.196; V. Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Portuguese Period*, Vol. III, Colombo 1991, p.395

¹¹⁹ Van Goor, 1978, p.16.

¹²⁰ Van Goor, 1978, 41.

other religions. In 1688, the predikants made a specific reference to the practices of the Portuguese as regards the suppression of non-Christian religions. A petition made by them asked the government to stop Buddhist worship at Kelaniya, which was the centre of Buddhism in the Dutch territory in this period. They also asked the government to convert the Buddhist preaching hall at Kelaniya into a Christian school.¹²¹ In their petition the ministers also indicated that in a similar manner, a Christian school had been erected near Negombo on the ruins of a Roman Catholic Church, with a result that the Catholics no longer came to that place to worship.¹²² The Dutch authorities did not attempt to tamper with the Buddhist worship at Kelaniya, as such an action would rekindle the wrath of the King of Kandy. The ministers on the other hand presented a number of arguments in favour of complete suppression of all other religions except Reformed Christianity. They asserted that if the Buddhist worship at Kelaniya was to be permitted to continue “under the immediate eye, as it were, of the government,” the VOC would be acting against the tradition established by the Dutch Governors.¹²³ They also quoted the example of “the first Christian emperor, who converted the temples of idols into temples of their God,”¹²⁴ the Dutch ministers who were familiar with the teachings of Gesbertus Voetius, who taught that coercive measures were sometimes useful and justifiable, defended their proposal for the use of coercion.¹²⁵

In 1682, Governor Lourenz Van Pyl (1680-1692) issued restrictions against Buddhists, in which devil dances and other ceremonies were forbidden.¹²⁶ In 1692, the ceremonies at the Buddhist temple at Kelaniya were prohibited, and the Buddhist priests were ordered to withdraw from the temple.¹²⁷ These measures, however, were difficult for them to enforce due to various pressures which were beyond their control.

The Dutch levied heavy fines on baptized Christians who attended non DRC ceremonies, and on those who failed to attend Sunday services or send their children to schools run by the Dutch.¹²⁸ Before a person could be employed in government service, he was supposed to become a baptized member of the Reformed church.

The Church authorities in Holland did not approve of the coercive methods used in Sri Lanka by the VOC, and voiced its condemnation of the practice which prevailed in Sri Lanka from the very beginning.¹²⁹ Not only did they express their disapproval of their coercive practices being followed in Sri Lanka, they also disassociated themselves from both the responsibility for the methods followed in Sri Lanka and the nominal Christianity prevalent in the island. In 1681 the consistory in Amsterdam warned about the indiscriminate baptisms, saying that these persons were not true Christians but rather “baptized heathen.”¹³⁰ Yet the practice continued till the end of Dutch rule. However, in the latter part of the

¹²¹ J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.30, *Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon*, op.cit. p.54.

¹²² J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.30

¹²³ J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.30, De Bruyn, Chap.IX

¹²⁴ J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.30

¹²⁵ H.A. Van Andel, *De Zendingsleer van Gisbertus Voetius*, Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1912, pp.164 ff.

¹²⁶ *Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon*, p.54-55

¹²⁷ *Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon*, p.55

¹²⁸ *Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon*, p.55

¹²⁹ J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, pp.42-43

¹³⁰ J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.20

eighteenth century the predikants made a difference between the thousands who were baptized and the few who attended communion services.¹³¹ The Dutch ministers in 1734 tried to justify their position by informing the authorities in Batavia that the baptized claimed that “they and their forefathers were Christian from Portuguese times.”¹³² The local people on the other hand regarded baptism as a ‘harmless rite’ which gave them several economic advantages.

In 1721 when J.W Marinus, a predikant, conducted an investigation in the villages he discovered that schoolmasters made many false entries in the baptismal registers. In some cases false witnesses came forward to attest to the baptism of certain people in order that they might be registered as Christians. There were also cases where nominal Christians left some of their children unbaptized so that they could be given in marriage to non-Christians without interference of the Church.¹³³

The coercive methods used by the Dutch made the local people suspicious of the Christian missionary enterprise. As Tennent rightly puts it, the people “could not fail to conclude that there must be something defective or unreal in a religion which required coercion and persecution to enforce its adoption.”¹³⁴ The DRC ministers became frustrated and disheartened when they began to realize the instability of their endeavor.

Nominal Conversion:

The hostile attitude of the Dutch to the other religions and the favours they showed towards those who professed the Reformed faith led to fraud and superficiality as regards religious affiliations of the people. The civil rights of those who were not baptized were not recognized in courts of law in the Dutch territory. Therefore in order to protect themselves and their families in the vent of legal suit and their land when the ownership or inheritance was contested, Hindus and Buddhists saw no alternative to nominal conversion. Non-Christians could not secure employment in positions over the Company except by the profession of the Reformed faith. There was a plakaat which stated “that not native could be raised to the rank of modeliar or admitted to any employment under the state, without subscribing to the Helvetic Confession and also professing to be a member of the Reformed Church”.¹³⁵ Even in the case of private business, the Christians were favoured by the Dutch therefore the large-scale businesses were in the hands of those who claimed to be Reformed Christians. This was true until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

This means that the people had to declare that they were Christians by accepting baptism and registering of the government. With the passage of time the numbers of the DRC swelled to immense proportions. Large numbers continued to seek baptism. In some areas the entire population was baptized. A report of 1750 claimed that Jaffna had a Christian population of 94, 477.¹³⁶ A decade later in 1760 the reports claimed the number of Christians in Jaffna was 193,148,¹³⁷ out of which only thirty

¹³¹ J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.55

¹³² J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.50-52

¹³³ J.D.Palm. JRAS(CB). XXIX, 1846, p.51

¹³⁴ Tennentm *Christianity in Ceylon*, p.70

¹³⁵ S.D.Franciscus, *Faith of Our Fathers*, Colombo, 1983, p.7

¹³⁶ V.Perniola, *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, Dutch Period*, Vol. 2, Dehiwala, 1985, p.2.

¹³⁷ (Arasaratnam 1985:147

attended church regularly.¹³⁸ These were most likely Burghers, Mestizos and *mudaliyars*. The unreliability of these statistics is seen in the fact that various records quote different figures.¹³⁹ Even among the Sinhalese the nominal conversion to Reformed Christianity became a norm.

Quality of the Faith:

The majority of so called Christian were un-churched, except when the predikant visited the village once a year. The methods followed by the DRC show that the predikants were more eager to convert than convince, because they had more regard for the number than the genuineness of the faith of the converts. Therefore it seems clear that under the Dutch religious policy the people were forced to live a life of duplicity. They pretended to profess the Christian religion. As brilliantly explained by Sivathamby the result was that "The pretended profession of a religion cuts both ways: it makes false Christians and equally false Hindus." It is also interesting to note that while, in most cases, Hindus and Buddhists reverted to nominal Christianity, the majority of Catholics and Muslims did not bow down to the Dutch policies.¹⁴⁰

The predikants who noticed the superficiality of Christianity among the people in Sri Lanka were helpless to bring about a solution. In their desperation they could only demand that the government observes the penal laws. J.D.Palm who made a study of the Dutch Reformed Church in this period concluded "From their birth to their death the Sinhalese are said to be Buddhists in heart. When a child is born they consult astrologers. It is sick; they tie charms to its neck, hands, and feet. Does it eat rice for the first time; a heathen name is given it, letting go the name given at baptism would they undertake any work, they must needs first ascertain the lucky day, the propitious hour. Are they sick, or in adversity, devil ceremonies are performed; do they marry, it must be in a good hour, accompanied with all manner of superstitions; do they die, their graves are ornamented with white leaves, and coconuts as food for the deceased, for which purpose also they bring a few days after burial, rice and other victuals to the grave."¹⁴¹ It seems clear from this statement that going to church became a social gathering rather than a spiritual and meaningful worship of the Lord.

Neither the Buddhist nor the Hindu considered receiving baptism and calling themselves Christian as an abandonment of their own faith.¹⁴² Attendance at religious ceremonies of any religion was regarded as a meritorious act therefore they did not find it contrary to their own religious beliefs. Even today a Buddhist would not hesitate to drop an offering at a wayside shrine of a Hindu deity, a mosque or a Roman Catholic sanctuary as according to their understanding all these would enable them to gain merit.

This was equally true in respect of the Tamils who were influenced by the Hindu religion in Jaffna. The Dutch records contain many incidents of duplicity as regards the profession of religion in Jaffna. Out of many incidents recorded we cite one example. The Vanniyar named Dom Philip Nallamaparan Panakamam requested Van Reede to admit his son to the Seminary in Jaffna when it was first

¹³⁸ V.Perniola, *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, Dutch Period*, Vol. 2, p.2

¹³⁹ Van Goor, 1978:112

¹⁴⁰ Lorna Dewaraja, *The Muslims of Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1994, pp.55-82.

¹⁴¹ J.D.Palm *JRAS(CB)*, 1847, p.52

¹⁴² Valentijn, *Ceylon*, Chapter, vi

established. This boy, after admission to the seminary by accepting baptism, rebelled against the rules of the seminary regarding the practice of taking meals at a common table because he did not wish to be 'polluted' by the presence of low castes at the table. On one of his visits to the South Indian town of Nagapatnam with a Dutch officer he secretly visited a Hindu temple for worship. This act was discovered by the Dutch officer who went with him.¹⁴³ This is a case of a Hindu retaining his caste, religion and privileges and yet professing to be a Christian.

In their haste to add more names to the lists of converts, the predikants encourages superficial profession of Christianity. The statistics they provided were exaggerations. Therefore they were large numbers recorded in their statistics, but the church remained weak and Christians ignorant of Christian doctrine. The Dutch churches found in all parts of the island had empty pews on Sundays. In this connection it is pertinent to quote the warning given by Governor Van Imhoff in this regard stating that they should "abstain from sending in lists of the converts they had made to Christianity, when they only cause that religion to be ill understood and ridiculously observed."¹⁴⁴ The Christian leaders in Holland were lulled into a false sense of complacency because of the glowing reports of great numbers of converts they received from Sri Lanka. This created a situation where the real purpose of missions were overshadowed by other motives. The bloated numbers prevented those who were interested in the real growth of the church from considering suitable action to propagate the gospel.

A converted person was generally obliged to leave his caste and family. Christians were not allowed to inherit heathen practices from Hindus and vice versa. When the entire village was declared to be Christian there was no need for any such dislocation from society. In the light all this it is understandable that examples of individual conversions to Protestantism were rare.

The Dutch government decreed that attending 'heathen' feasts would be punishable by a fine for the first offence. If the offence were repeated, by whipping with a cane.¹⁴⁵ The VOC management in Batavia and the Church council in Sri Lanka were against the exercise of punishment but on the other hand they did not want the baptized Christians to go astray. Fines were imposed on Christian adults and children for attending church and school. This was relaxed for a short period but again re-imposed in Gollensse's time.¹⁴⁶ The Dutch took strong action against the baptized Christians. They could not understand that a Buddhist or a Hindu, without any uneasiness, could not understand that a Buddhist or a Hindu, without any uneasiness, could be a devotee of two religions at the same time.¹⁴⁷ The Church Council in Colombo insisted that Christians should be loyal to their faith. Therefore attempts were made in the first half of the eighteenth century through imposition of fines to induce the Christians to attend church services and the schools regularly. During the second half of the eighteenth century the policy of the Church Council was to encourage the ministers to become more active and pay regular visits to the countryside in order to supervise the baptized Christians.

Those who professed to be Calvinist Christians among the Sinhalese and Tamils during this period publicly declared their allegiance to Christianity because of their desire to find posts in the government,

¹⁴³ Arasaratnam, "The vanniya of North Ceylon," *CJHS*, 9,2 1966, p.109

¹⁴⁴ Tennent, op.cit. p.58

¹⁴⁵ Van Goor, 1978, p.33

¹⁴⁶ *Memoir of Van Gollensse*, p.39, and 83

¹⁴⁷ Van Goor, 1978, p.35

and to maintain their rights of inheritance. The hundreds of thousands of believers that the DRC records claimed dropped a few hundred with the demise of the VOC in Sri Lanka showing that Calvinism had made no lasting impression on the people of the island.

Buddhism and Hinduism tolerated other religions as long as they did not interfere with the practices of their religion. The inclusivist nature of the popular practices of these religions allowed them to tolerate other religions. Buddhists listened to the sermons of the predikants in order to acquire merit and not because they understood the Christian doctrines. They did not find anything incongruous in accepting baptism to comply with the rules of the government and holding on to the traditional religious practices at home. On the other hand, the predikants were not able to come to a dialogue with the Buddhists or Hindus, as they did not have any knowledge of the opposing religions. Therefore, they failed to understand the attitude of the Buddhists and Hindus to Christianity.

The acceptance of the Christian sacrament of baptism symbolized the willingness of Sinhalese and Tamils to enter into the realm of public life which dominated by European rulers. The Sinhalese did not regard baptism as a sacrament in Christian terms, but as a civil rite. The same can be said regarding Christian rites associated with marriages and funerals. The registrations of these events were legal only when recognized ecclesiastical authorities performed them. It was only the baptized who had the civic rights established and recognized by the government. The parents took baptism in the interest of their children's welfare. In their minds baptisms was not a declaration of their allegiance to Christianity. It was the Dutch minister who made the mistake of enumerating these people as Christian.

The system of inducement was put into effect that favoured baptism and the acculturation of the colonial mentality. Those who had been baptized were expected to behave in a certain fashion, at least in public. Periodical attendance at church was mandatory. Since education was highly weighted towards catechesis, indoctrination took place.

There was no systematic or sustained reaction to Christianity during this period, except in the case of the Roman Catholics. During the Dutch period the Buddhists who belonged to non-Goyigama castes did not have their own *sangha* structure. Therefore there was a natural tendency for non-Goyigama castes to be attracted towards the church ritual without opposing it. However, the disapproval of the Dutch religion by the people is indicated by the loss of numbers in the church registers in times of political unrest.

The nominal Christians were known as 'Dutch Christians' in the early years of British rule.¹⁴⁸ The people in the Maritime Provinces had comfortably settled down into a dualism in religious practice and profession.¹⁴⁹ The majority of baptized Christians continued in their traditional religious practices while taking part in Christian religious ceremonies. They were baptized as children. They attended church schools for civic purposes. However, they attended church services only when the ministers were present in the villages. At the same time they continued their traditional rituals at home. In the case of Hindus they attended temple ceremonies in their villages, kept the feasts of the Hindu calendar. The Buddhists attended their temples on *poya* days and observed *sil* on special full moon days. In this manner the people settled down to a dualism in religious practice and profession. The Sinhalese

¹⁴⁸ Kulandran, *The Word, Men and Matters*, Vol.2, Jaffna: Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1985, 112.

¹⁴⁹ Charles Hoole, *Modern Sanyasin*, p.186.

Buddhists and Tamil Hindus found a common ground, though independently, to counter the inroads of the Dutch Reformed Church. William Harvard reporting on the Christian states “They have no objection to the Christian religions; but for their amusement are apt to attend Buddhist festivals. Numbers of them make no difficulty in asserting that they are both Buddhists and Christians; and are willing to be sworn either way, or both ways in a court of justice!”¹⁵⁰

The enthusiasm of the predikants in the first few years to convert the people to the Reformed faith did not last long. The activities of the predikants became restricted to the towns where there was a small Dutch congregation and a few native Christians. The decline of DRC activities was visible from the third quarter of the seventeenth century. The attempt to convert the Roman Catholics to the Reformed faith had become a superficial success. At the grassroots level one could find Catholicism firmly established. The Roman Catholic to the Reformed faith had become a superficial success. At the grassroots level one could find Catholicism firmly established. The Roman Catholic rituals gave the ordinary man a certain feeling of spiritual security in an environment where life was rough and difficult. The Catholics could offer this as a bridge for the conversion of the ordinary Hindus and Buddhists. Dutch Religion lacked symbols of religious worship. Its insistence on the Bible as the sole guide in religion offered no attraction to the natives, whether they were Catholics, Hindus or Buddhists.

The Dutch authorities showed their disapproval of other religions through their plakaarts.¹⁵¹ Towards the end of Dutch rule no temples were demolished while increasing construction of new ones are recorded.

Political Bribery

Van Goor, who made a study of education during the Dutch period is of the opinion that the “Dutch never resorted to coercion.”¹⁵² On the other hand there is adequate evidence to show that the Dutch compelled the people to accept the Reformed faith. The British historian Tennent shows that “The political bribery adopted by the Dutch to encourage conversion amongst the Sinhalese (sic) was eminently calculated to create doubt and contempt in the naturally suspicious minds of the natives.”¹⁵³

Similarly the Tamils in Jaffna, especially those of the Vellala caste, found attractions offered by the Dutch to throw in their lot with the Reformed Church on order to avail themselves of the opportunities available under the VOC rule. It is clear that the people did not make any distinction between the Church and the Company. It was not the religion that played a part in it. It was the connection between baptism and tax and land policy of the Dutch government, which acted as a method of coercion.¹⁵⁴ Historians have observed the decline in the number of pupils in 1751 when the system of school fines was abolished.¹⁵⁵ These fines were re-imposed again by Governor Van Gollensse in order to attract

¹⁵⁰ W.M.Harvard, *A Narrative of the Establishment and Progress of the Mission to Ceylon and India*, London, 1823, p. LXII.

¹⁵¹ Plakaart was the Dutch word for edict, legislative enactment or an official announcement.

¹⁵² Van Goor, 1978, p.37

¹⁵³ *Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon*, p.69

¹⁵⁴ Kotalawala, *Agrarian Policies*.

¹⁵⁵ Van Goor, 1978, p.133

children to these schools.¹⁵⁶ The church and state went hand in hand in the attempt to get converts through various methods of 'bribery'. Cordiner states: "At Columbo the highest of which ranks of natives profess Christianity; and such of them have received the benefit of good education are more conscientious and respectable than their heathen neighbours."¹⁵⁷

Number of Christians

As we indicated before, the Dutch inherited from the Portuguese a large number of churches scattered in all parts of the Maritime Provinces. Of this number the churches in the Sabaragamuwa province were lost as that part of the country was annexed to the Kandyan territory after 1638. Even in the case of the Dutch territories there were some churches which were neglected and fell into disrepair. The number of Protestant churches in the Dutch territory of Galle Disavani was sixteen in 1650. In 1660 the number increased to a twenty-three. In 1693 the Galle Disavani had only twenty-one churches as a result of political unrest. The Dutch *Tombos* provide us with statistics regarding the number of churches, Christians and school children. Although these statistics may be regarded as correct in regard to Christians is doubtful. The number of Christians in the Galle *Disavani* in 1693 was 25, 827. The Colombo *Disavani* had 17,000 school children distributed among 23 churches. The numbers for Colombo, however, are difficult to assess in the seventeenth century due to contradictory figures given in various accounts. In 1671 the number for Galle and Jaffna was 20,000 adults and 14,000 children of school going age. In 1681 there were 3,870 school children in the *Disavani* of Colombo and 2,557 in Matara in 1687.¹⁵⁸ This decrease was again due to the political unrest in the Dutch territory during this period. By 1704 the number of churches and schools was increased to twenty-one, and there were about 22,000 Christians. The total school going population in that year in the Colombo *Disavani* was 20,467. There is adequate information about the church in the Dutch records from the year 1704.

If one looks at the reports about the success of the Reformed Church in the Dutch reports one would get the impression that the numerical strength of the Reformed Church was continuing to grow in the eighteenth century. In 1722, Valentijn reported that there were 190,000 Tamil Christians, 230,000 Sinhalese Christians total approximating to about 420,000 baptized Christians in the island. In 1760 there were 182,226 baptized Christians in Jaffna. But there were only 64 communicant members of the Church. Out of 9820 baptized persons in Mannar only five were communicants. In the Galle *Disavani* there were 89,077 Christians but only 36 were communicant members. This shows the sad predicament of the church when we consider that many of these communicant members were Dutch people or native officers of the VOC. Very often the predikants had to preach to empty pews while the statistics in their *Tombos* were bloated with nominal Christians.

It did not take time for the authorities in Holland to realize that these were '*Christiani sine Christo*'. As early as 1700 the Classis in Amsterdam addressed this matter to the Consistory in Colombo. Nearly half a century later a similar appeal was made.¹⁵⁹ The authorities realized the futility of their attempts to convert the natives to the Reformed Faith. Therefore since the 1750s there was a relaxation of their religious policy which hitherto allowed only the Dutch Reformed Christianity in their territories. The

¹⁵⁶ Memoir of Van Gollensse, p.39, and 83

¹⁵⁷ Cordiner, p.96

¹⁵⁸ Van Goor, 1978, p.134

¹⁵⁹ Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*, p.64

Dutch clergymen lamented “the relapses of their converts, first to the errors of popery, and finally into the darkness of heathenism.”¹⁶⁰

Lack of growth

The attendance at church services were very poor during this period. The perennial complaint of the ministers was that the Europeans made disappointing parishioners.¹⁶¹ The large church buildings, which the Dutch took over from the Portuguese, were often less than a third full.

The church in Colombo was significant because it was where the Governor attended services. When he entered the church, everyone was expected to rise and remain standing until he was seated, even if it occurred in the middle of prayers or when the Holy Communion was being celebrated. Severe punishment was meted out to those who failed to rise when the governor arrived.¹⁶²

The DRC clergy, who adhered to the doctrine of predestination, were often half-hearted in their evangelism. At that stage in the development of Calvinism, stagnant growth in the Church was not regarded as a problem. H.Zwaardedecroon, ‘commandeur’ of Jaffna in 1697 stated: ‘It is known only to God what the reason is that our religion is not more readily accepted by this nation: whether it is because the time for their conversion has not yet arrived, or for any other reason, I will leave to the omniscient Lord.’¹⁶³ As we pointed out earlier “Dutch Christianity was first of all “a mere appendage of the Company.”¹⁶⁴ Religion was never allowed to have a vitality of its own. Serious missionaries found this connection between the church and state a stumbling block. Baldaeus found the restrictions imposed on his missionary activities by the VOC extremely humiliating and as a result in July 1665 he terminated his work in Sri Lanka

Very often the conversions were effective and long lasting when whole groups of persons embraced Christianity. Individual conversions had very little effect and seem often to have been motivated by personal gain. Van Goor has indicated that since Calvinist Protestantism strongly emphasized the individual embracing a new faith, it became a serious handicap for the spread of Protestantism in the country during this period.¹⁶⁵ Calvinist faith had to be taught by word. But it could not accurately be conveyed because of linguistic differences between the natives and the predikants. When the sermons were translated they often did not have the intended meaning. The schoolmasters who were entrusted with the teaching of religion were often people who did not believe in the Reformed faith.

The clergymen were painfully aware of the superficiality of the baptisms that were taking place in this period. But they were helpless for several reasons. In 1730 the church council in Galle pointed out a number of reasons for the slow growth of the Reformed faith and the nominal nature of those who professed Christianity in the Disavani of Galle. The council lamented the fact that they were *sub regimene mundano*, which placed the church under the jurisdiction of the VOC. They also blamed the

¹⁶⁰ Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*, p.67

¹⁶¹ C.A.L. Van Trrostenberg de Bryn, DRC, Chap. II

¹⁶² C.A.L. Van Trrostenberg de Bryn, DRC, Chap. II

¹⁶³ Van Goor, 1978, p.34

¹⁶⁴ Charles Hoole, p.186, Sapramadu, xiv

¹⁶⁵ Van Goor, 1978, 128

native chiefs for outward profession of Christianity in order to hold offices of the Dutch Government. These native Christians were condemned as “incorrigible Buddhists.”¹⁶⁶ The consistory censured the government for its reluctance to suppress ‘pagan’ worship. However, the company was not willing to take such drastic action, even though the Portuguese did so in the previous centuries, because of the belief that it would have a negative impact on its commercial interests. The clergy believed that the ‘hypocrisy’ among the native ‘Christians’ could be wiped out if all the ‘pagan’ worship centres were destroyed. The consistory also blamed the proponents for indolence and schoolmasters for inefficiency and unfaithfulness. They also found that the plakaarts issued by the government were ignored and disregarded. The council also blamed the Europeans who were living in Sri Lanka for their licentious and offensive life style.¹⁶⁷ However, the predikants failed to see their own contribution to these failures.

The Dutch Reformed Christianity could not take firm root in Sri Lanka during this period. It had the stigma of a foreign religion. Therefore, when the foreigners were out of the country the religion also went into oblivion. The Christian mission during this period had only a limited attraction to a small percentage of the population in the country.

Some scholars have indicated that Calvinism was not a proselytizing religion¹⁶⁸ and therefore the Dutch missionaries failed in their attempts to spread the faith in Sri Lanka. The statement that Reformed faith was not a missionar one is debatable. The missionaries of the reformed church went to many European countries and even across the seas during this period. In addition the fact that the VOC reached Asia meant that their ministers were the first Protestant Christian missionaries to Asia. In any case they believed in the Bible which laid emphasis on ‘the great commission.’ The contemporary records show that the lower ranks of the clergy in the DRC were ruthless in their persecution of other religions. The Roman Catholic Fr. Joseph de Jesu Maria wrote in 1711 “The proponents are more ruthless in persecuting us than even the predikants either because they are natives and know the language and all the ways and byways of the country, or because they are the first of this nation to occupy such posts in this new institution of the devil, or because by showing their zeal for the increase of their Calvinistic sect their importance increases in externals, for their hearts they are said to be still pagans.”¹⁶⁹

The VOC provided a certain number of Calvinist predikants and several hundred lay leaders and schoolmasters to undertake affairs relating to the DRC. The company provided funds for the building and upkeep of churches and schools and founded three seminaries for training candidates for ordination. The company also paid for the printing and distribution of Bibles and devotional literature on quite a considerable scale.¹⁷⁰ Roger Greenway states that “The Dutch were children of their times, and they cannot be condemned on the basis of the higher missionary standard of later generation.”¹⁷¹ The same Dutch on the other hand prevented the mission minded Moravians from working in Sri Lanka while sanctioning the presence of inert predikants. However, it is true that the Dutch came to Sri Lanka

¹⁶⁶ Greenway, p.13

¹⁶⁷ J.D.Palm, op cit.pp.52-53

¹⁶⁸ S.D.Saparamadu, (ed) *An Historical Relation of Ceylon by Robert Knox, introduction*, Dehiwela, 1981, p.xxxi

¹⁶⁹ V.Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: Dutch Period*, Vol. I, p.456

¹⁷⁰ For a list of Sinhala and tamil publications see: C.A.L. Van Troostenburg de Bruyn, *De Hervomde Kerk in Nederlandsch Oost Indie onder de O.I. Compagnie, 1602-1795*, Arnhem, 188, pp. 398-503.

¹⁷¹ Greenway, op.cit. p.12

at a time when the Protestant movement was in its infancy, and certainly before the Protestant missionary movement began.

The Protestant clerical presence of the island was very slender and was subject to the scrutiny of the political authority of the VOC. It was a religion, which was brought to the country by the government without much support at grass-roots level. As we noticed earlier the Dutch Reformed Church inherited an extensive array of institutions from the Portuguese. In the course of time the Dutch also added new buildings and institutions. But they were not able to utilize them to the full capacity. They lacked personnel devoted to the task of evangelizing Sri Lanka who could man these institutions. While there was a serious inadequacy of European ministers attached to the Dutch Reformed Church, the Church as well as the state refused to accept the offer of independent European missionaries for evangelism in the country. They also failed to allow the free development of an indigenous class of predikants who could teach the religion in their own languages.

C.R.Boxer's statement is that "Only in three places did the Calvinist missions, supported by the Dutch East India Company, attain a modest degree of success – Formosa, Amboina, and Ceylon – and only in Amboina did the success last longer than the Company."¹⁷² The Early English reporters found the Christians of Dutch Reformed church ill instructed.¹⁷³

In respect of the activities of the DRC during the Dutch period it may be relevant to quote Mahatma Gandhi's address to the Madras Missionary conference in 1916 where he stated: "It will not be denied that many of the conversions are only so-called. In some cases the appeal had gone not to the heart but to the stomach"¹⁷⁴ People were encouraged to become Christian for material advantages. Therefore very little chance was there for genuine conversions.

Contradiction between teaching and doing

The Sri Lankans did not understand the difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The history of antagonism between the Catholics and Protestants in Europe was not relevant to them. They saw once group of Europeans trying to destroy another, yet they called themselves Christian. It was noticed at the siege of Colombo that idea of good news of divine forgiveness and love sounded strange from a group of people whose priests had close association with the armies who had very little concern for human suffering. They held services of thanks giving to God for special blessings to them.¹⁷⁵ Under such circumstances it is no wonder that the predikants had to preach to empty pews while the disguised Roman Catholic priests went about celebrating mass, baptizing people and hearing confession.

Sinhalese opposition

The Buddhism the Dutch predikants had to reckon with was different from that which was encountered by the Portuguese. The Portuguese period may be regarded as the first time that the Buddhist had to deal with Christianity in such a competitive way. Therefore they had not developed a defence against

¹⁷² C.R.Boxe, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.144.

¹⁷³ James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon*, London, 1807, p.91

¹⁷⁴ MK Gandhi, "Swadeshi," *Harvet Field*, 36, April 19116, p.127.

¹⁷⁵ Baldaeus, *op. cit.* p.246, 266

such an onslaught on their religion. The experience with Roman Catholic and Reformed missionaries gave them an opportunity to develop some form of defense against Christian evangelism. Therefore resistance of Buddhism to Christianity was clearly visible since the seventeenth century in the southern part of Sri Lanka.¹⁷⁶

The revival of Buddhism under the leadership of Velivita Saranankara (1698-1778) in Kandy had its overflow into the southern provinces of Sri Lanka. The Buddhist monks from Kandy frequented this area to visit the temples. The Mulkirigala temple was in a flourishing state even during the time of governor Shreuder. In various conversation with Bhikkus, Wermelskircher revealed himself as someone interested in Buddhism.¹⁷⁷ The revival of Buddhism during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha also may be also attributed to the impact of the rise of educational attainment of the people in the Maritime Provinces. In the second half of the eighteenth century the Southern province received a religious and literary 'revival' as a result of the rise of literacy among the people. The wall paintings at the Buddhist temples at Mulkirigala, and Sitalpavva also show the influence of European art. The fact that most Buddhist monks of this period were baptized in their childhood and had their basic education in the DRC schools is contributory to the revival of Buddhism in this period.

The existence of the kingdom of Kandy which supported the Buddhist cause, was a deterrent to the Christian leaders. It gave a certain dignity to their religion. The Dutch had to reckon with a strong, antagonistic Buddhist priesthood, which sought to hinder the spread of Christianity in every way. In Galle and Matara districts, the Christian schools were severely hampered in their efforts to Christianize the children, because of the private instructions given by Buddhist monks to children in homes and temples.¹⁷⁸ The predikants expressed their frustration on a number of occasions over their efforts to convert the Buddhists in this area. The Church Council in Galle complained in 1730 about the baptized Christians stating that "the highest benediction they can pronounce is, May you become a Buddha."¹⁷⁹ Therefore the opposition to the DRC activities in the Galle Disavani came from the Buddhists who were baptized as Christians.

It is interesting to note that there were polemical writings in the form of *ola* documents in circulation among the Buddhist monks during this period in the southern part of Sri Lanka. The otherness of Jesus that is evident in these adversarial myths and folktales of resistance to Christianity is "symptomatically demonic, dangerous and disordering."¹⁸⁰ A book now available in *ola* dated 1762 gives a collection of tales concerning three unholy spirits, who are called the Father, Son and Spirit. Richard Young believes that the story originated in an earlier time although the *ola* is dated 1762. The images used in these folk tales are notable because they enable us to visualize the way Jesus Christ figured in the Buddhist imaginations. We come across several prominent Buddhist scholar monks during the latter part of the Dutch rule making a valiant attempt to revive Buddhism in the territory under Dutch rule. Among them

¹⁷⁶ Richard Young, "An Early Buddhist Tract Against the Christian Doctrine of Creation", *ZMR*, 69, 1984, PP. 44-53.

¹⁷⁷ Van Goor, 1978, p.78

¹⁷⁸ J.D.Palm, "Educational establishment of the Dutch in Ceylon, *JRAS(CB)2*, 1847.

¹⁷⁹ Greenway, op. cit.p.45

¹⁸⁰ Richard Fox Young, "Adversarial Images of Jesus Christ in 18th and 19th Century Buddhist Hindu Folklore," *Dharma Deepika*, Vol.2, No.3, pp.67-74

Karatota Dhammarama and Bovala Dhammakanda had close connections with the Dutch administration.¹⁸¹

Tamil Opposition

The opposition of the Tamils to the DRC mission was not visible like that of the Sinhalese. The position in Jaffna differed from the Sinhalese region. The king of Kandy did not exert influence on that part of the country. The control of the kings of South India in the affairs of Jaffna was also negligible. The political power of the company on the other hand was strong in Jaffna. Therefore there was very little decline of the number of people who professed to be Christians in Jaffna from the Portuguese period. It appeared as if all the population now embraced the Reformed faith like they did in the case of Roman Catholicism previously. In 1663 the number of Christians in Jaffna was estimated as 62, 558. There were 9,582 in the areas of Vavuniya and Mannar.¹⁸² Eight years later, in 1671, the number in this total area was 150,000. It was estimated at the turn of the century that the whole population of the peninsula was 'Christian.' The tendency of the people to maintain a dual allegiance in religious matters did in fact allow the swelling of numbers of so called Christians.

Moravian Experience

Moravian Brethren was essentially a missionary movement begun sometimes after 1732 out of the Church of United Brethren in some German states in central Europe. They chose to go to the most remote, unfavourable, and neglected parts of the world. They had planned to spread the gospel in Sri Lanka along with a number of other countries. According to Georg Schmidt, who served as a missionary to South Africa, Zinzendorf's plan was to use of Cape as a link with Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka in turn was to become the door to the East Indies, with a chain of missions stretching to Mongolia and Persia. As a part of this vigorous Moravian missionary movement in Europe two of their ministers, David Nitschmann III¹⁸³ (d.1772) and Dr. August Christian Friedrich Eller¹⁸⁴ arrived in Sri Lanka in 1738.¹⁸⁵ The Dutch Reformed Church was the only Christian church, which was sanctioned by the government during this period. The Dutch administrators were very strict with regard to expressions of Christianity other than the Reformed faith.¹⁸⁶

Moravian evangelists, who were aware of this tendency, did not reveal their proper identity to the Dutch authorities on their arrival in the island. They arrived in the island as colonists since the Dutch

¹⁸¹ Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900*, Berkeley, 1976, p.84

¹⁸² Baldaeus, op. cit. p.173

¹⁸³ Nitschmann was a member of the first directory of the Moravian Brethren formed in 1762.

¹⁸⁴ J.E.Hutton, *A History of the Moravian Church*, London: Moravian Publication Office, 1909, p.245.

¹⁸⁵ Georg Schmidt, in June 1738, while on a visit to Cape Town, had the joy of meeting the two of them, who were on their way as missionaries to Sri Lanka.

1. Taylor and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church, Bethlehem, PA* : Inter provincial Board of Christian Education of the Moravian Church of America, 1967, p.56: Jurrien Van Goor, *Jan Compenie as Schoolmaster: Dutch Education in Ceylon 1690-1795*, Groningen, 1978, pp.87-88.

¹⁸⁶ Letter dated January 13, 1738, Document KA 2294, fol. 2104-2107 of the East India Company Archives, Amsterdam.

government encouraged the settlement of Europeans in their colonies in order to create a secure political atmosphere for them in Sri Lanka.¹⁸⁷

At the outset Governor Gustaaf Willem Baron Van Imhoff (1736-39) and Rev. Johannes Philippus Wetzelius,¹⁸⁸ the senior clergyman of the island, encouraged them in their effort to preach the gospel since the Moravian Brethren did not always encourage the establishment of local churches, preferring to remain as a 'Church within a Church.' Therefore the Moravians were able to gather friends. They started a ministry at 'Mogurugampelle' (Mugurugampola)¹⁸⁹ where they were able to gain some converts.¹⁹⁰

At first the religious enthusiasm of the two Moravians did not attract much notice. They began to hold prayer meetings in private dwellings without creating a threat to the existing ecclesiastical structure. Within about two months the Moravians were able to attract about fifty followers to one of their assemblies. This was about the number that attended the Dutch Reformed Church in Colombo on a normal Sunday. Some of them were converts from the Dutch Reformed Church. There were some from outside the church as well. Even when criticism of their work began to appear Wetzelius, the chief predikant in the country stood by the Brethren to the end. But he was helpless in view of the severity of the rules of the Dutch East India Company. When the Consistory of Colombo began to notice these activities they referred to them as conventicles or secret unauthorized assemblies in private dwellings. The Company officials and the majority of Calvinist clergy referred to the Moravian as 'Protestant dissenters' and treated them with the same suspicion as the Roman Catholics.¹⁹¹

As soon as their true identity was revealed the Moravians were asked to leave the country as they encountered severe opposition from the established church. The orthodox DRC attitude to Protestant dissenters, like the Moravians, was very hostile in the colonies. Instead of looking into the areas, which needed to be corrected in their won church, the Dutch Reformed Church viewed the Moravians as an attack on their establishment. "The orthodox Calvinist attitude to Protestant dissenters overseas was even more illiberal than it was in Europe." Even in the case of Lutherans their first church in Batavia was built in 1743-49, almost a century after they were allowed these privileges in Amsterdam.¹⁹²

Two *Krank-bezoekers* of the Dutch Reformed Church, Portous and Eferson also joined the Moravians. The new teachings of the Moravians therefore began to pose a threat to the Reformed church. The participation of these two *kranck-bezoekers* was interpreted by the Reformed Church as a threat to its own existence. The association of *kranck-bezoekers* with the Moravians is interesting. *Kranck-bezoekers*

¹⁸⁷ K.W.Goonawardene, "A New Netherlands in Ceylon: Dutch Attempts to Found a Colony During the First Quarter Century of their Period in Ceylon," *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol.II, July 1959, p.208.

¹⁸⁸ Wetzelius was the Rector of the Seminary in Colombo during this period. He possessed an extraordinary knowledge of the Sinhalese language. He preached in Sinhala with ease. He died in Sri Lanka on the 19th December 1751 at an advanced age.

¹⁸⁹ There was a school run by the Dutch Reformed Church at Mulgamapola from the very beginning of Dutch rule in Sri Lanka. This village is located about thirty miles from Colombo
Jurrien Van Goor, 1978, *Jan Kompenie as Schoolmaster*, op. cit. p.124. This village is located about thirty miles from Colombo.

¹⁹⁰ *Memoir left by Baron van Imhoff to his successor Bruynink*, 1740, translated by Sophia Anthonisz, Colombo, 1911, p.62.

¹⁹¹ C.R.Boxer, *The Dutch Seabourne Empire*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965, p.135.

¹⁹² C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.139.

and *zien-troosters* were considered assistants of the predikants, therefore part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Dutch Reformed Church.¹⁹³

Some prominent members of the Reformed Church demanded the *krank-bezoekers* to renounce their affiliations with the Brethren. At the disciplinary hearing one of the *krank-bezoekers* refused to recant. Therefore he was dismissed from office and sent to Batavia for further examination. The other confessed his indiscretion, and was therefore retained. This incident which required disciplinary action against some ministers of the ecclesiastical establishment, was a rare occurrence in Sri Lanka.

Danish Missionaries:

The treatment received by Danish missionaries was different to that received by the Moravians. Although they were Lutherans, the Danish missionaries were able to co-operate with the DRC in Sri Lanka. From the very beginning Ziegenbalg, the founder of the Danish mission in Tranquebar, sought contact with Dutch ministers in Sri Lanka. In 1737 a technician from Tranquebar assisted with the manufacture of types for the printing press in Colombo for Tamil Printing.¹⁹⁴ The Portuguese and Tamil Bibles prepared by the Tranquebar mission were also made available to the Dutch predikants in Sri Lanka. However, it is important to note that the Lutheran did not plan to operate clandestinely in Sri Lanka as the Moravians did.

Education

According to Calvinism, on which the DRC based its doctrines, the Bible contains all that is necessary to know God and our duties to Him and our neighbor. The authority of scripture is assured by the '*testimonium Spiritus Sancti*', an interior persuasion whereby distinction is made between the canonical and other writings. The Dutch being Calvinists were heirs to the reformed scholarship and literary tradition. Therefore they recognized the potential of literature for evangelism. They made a great contribution to Sinhala and Tamil Christian literature, which also had a positive impact on the development of those languages in general.¹⁹⁵

The common method adopted by the DRC to instruct the new Christians was catechism. The first use of catechism in the vernacular languages to Christianity in the Dutch period was introduced by Baldaeus among the Tamils of Jaffna. These catechisms were constructed according to the texts used in Holland. The early translations of catechism were copied on *olas* and paper and distributed among schools. The establishment of the printing press was a major landmark in the development of Christian literature.

. "As the pioneer Portuguese missionaries had discovered, there was a far better chance of converting the children than their parents, and the Calvinist ministers likewise increasingly concentrated their efforts on the rising generation."¹⁹⁶ They treated the older generation as 'too Rome minded' and not

¹⁹³ Quite frequently these men proved to be trouble makers to the authorities. They were unhappy that they were treated below the status of proponents. There were instances when some of them were dismissed and sent back to Holland,

S.D. Franciscu, *Faith of Our Fathers: History of the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1983, p.243

¹⁹⁴ Van Goor, 1978, p.88

¹⁹⁵ Punchibandara Sannasgala, *Sinhala Sahitya Vamsaya*, pp.632-634.

¹⁹⁶ C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.144.; S Arasaratnman, p.217.

ready to give up their previous practices. The DRC ministers also increasingly concentrated their efforts on the younger generation through schools.

School building:-

The Dutch were able to inherit a fairly organized system of education set up by the Roman Catholic missionaries of the previous regime. Every parish had at least one school attached to the church. The buildings were permanent structures like their churches. The catholic fathers had trained a group of local personnel to assist them in educating the believers in the basic tenets of the faith. They were the main avenues for the Catholic fathers to have a communication with the people at least till they became conversant with the local languages.

When the Dutch took over the Portuguese territory, an effective system of education carried out through a network of schools and colleges was found throughout the Maritime Provinces. There was an impressive network of schools in each village in Mannar and Jaffna. In 1658, in the Jaffna Peninsula alone, they found more than twenty schools which had been recently built by the Portuguese. They had well-constructed parsonages alongside the schools.¹⁹⁷ The Dutch found them to be vulnerable agents of evangelism. The Galle district also had several schools. By and large the Dutch took over the educational organisation of the Portuguese. The churches and schools could be taken over by the Dutch at the departure of the Portuguese, as they did not suffer damage during the time of war. Therefore, in one sense, the Dutch churches and schools were continuations of Portuguese institutions.

Elementary education was treated as an essential part of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The medium of instruction was the vernacular. As late as 1780 the Portuguese buildings were in use by the Dutch. In 1780, 26 of 52 schools in the Colombo *Disavani* and 14 of the 51 in Galle were in fact Portuguese buildings.¹⁹⁸ Even the schoolmasters in the first few decades of the Dutch rule were recruited from those who had been trained by the Roman Catholic priests before the defeat of the Portuguese.

“It was on the schools principally, that the Dutch built their hopes for establishing the Reformed Religion in the island.”¹⁹⁹ When the Dutch considered the task of the propagation of their religion, it was obvious to them that the best institution was the system of schools which they inherited from the Roman Catholics. Therefore they made an attempt to maintain and strengthen them. The schools were central to their tasks of propagating the religion since the Reformed Faith was concerned with the knowledge of God, especially as it is revealed in the sacred scriptures. They believed that faith in God grows with the growth of knowledge brought about by education. This is a marked departure from the Roman Catholics who emphasized on the rituals and symbols of religious faith. Therefore schools were considered as the fundamental tool of evangelism. In addition to the schools, Calvinists emphasized the value of preaching as a mode of transmitting the knowledge of God. The vernacular schools provided a very valuable opportunity to achieve these purposes.

¹⁹⁷ Baldaeus, op. cit. pp. 290-292

¹⁹⁸ Boudens, *Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, p.45

¹⁹⁹ R.L.Brohier, “The Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon,” *Journal of Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon*, XXVIII, No.2 October, 1938, p.109.

The Dutch Governor Jan Maaatzuyker (1653-1660) advise his successor to devote particular attention to the schools for their value in spreading Calvinism. Education in the day schools was free, but the parents were responsible for all expenses with regard to their children's accommodation, food and clothing.²⁰⁰

The local residents supplied the labour for the building of schools. Persons in the statutory services provided the largest part of the building material. The salaries of the schoolmasters were for a time paid out of the yields of the school fines. Later in the eighteenth century it was taken over by the Company. In 1720 the costs for the 151 schoolmasters in the whole island amounted to about 3018 rix dollars.²⁰¹

Education in these schools was offered to all children, to boys as well as girls. In some instances even the slave children were admitted to schools. Instruction was given in schools to children aged between six and twelve. They were taught prayers, catechisms, and other Christian doctrines. They were also taught prayers, catechisms, and other Christian doctrines. They were also taught to read and write in their mother tongue. Most of the teaching was done in the afternoons. The schoolmasters also conducted classes for those pupils who failed in the *largatie* text. The Dutch educational system, despite its failures was in advance of their time. They can be considered as the forerunners of the Protestant educational enterprise, which was introduced to the island in the nineteenth century.²⁰²

Teaching material was not available at the beginning of the Dutch Missionary work in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the first predikants had the formidable task of preparing material suitable for teaching Reformed faith to the people. The contribution of Philippus Baldaeus was a great help at the initial stages of Tamil work. Baldaeus is credited to have translated a large number of Christian literary works suitable for teaching the Tamils during his short tenure of work in Jaffna. The Sinhalese work took a longer time to get underway due to the non-availability of Reformed Christian literature. Therefore they had to depend on the work done by the Portuguese.

These translations were copied on *olas* and made available to the schoolmasters and for oral instruction to pupils.²⁰³ The children did not possess books. They practiced their writing on the sand.²⁰⁴ Even the manuscripts that the schoolmasters held were not often complete. The *olas* were damaged by constant use. They also had many copyists' errors, which added to the confusion. Very few copies written on paper were available.²⁰⁵ The establishment of a printing press in 1736 eased the situation. However it took some time for the press to prepare sufficient material for these schools. In this education the memorization of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and various catechisms played an important role. It is, however, accurate to state that the education imparted by these schools was a Christian one.

Number of schools

²⁰⁰ Similar situation prevailed in Formosa where the Dutch had a successful evangelical drive that the Children mealy learnt their catechism and doctrine like parrots, without any real understanding of what they glibly repeated. C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p. 145.

²⁰¹ Van Goor, 1978, p. 142.

²⁰² K.H.M. Sumathipala, *History of Education in Ceylon*, Colombo 1968

²⁰³ J.D.Palm, JRAS(CB), 1946, p.44

²⁰⁴ Baldaeus, op. cit. p.332

²⁰⁵ J.D.Palm, JRAS(CB), 1946, p.44

The Dutch boasted that at the end of their rule in the island they had a complete religious educational system, which provided education from kindergarten to University. The commandaries of Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna were divided into counties, and these into parishes in each of which was established a Protestant school. The schoolhouse also used as parish churches, and a register of marriages and baptisms was kept in each. In 1704 there were forty-eight schoolmasters in the Colombo *Disavani*.²⁰⁶

Each school had three to four teachers, and every ten schools were supervised by catechists who in turn were superintended by Dutch clergymen making annual circuits to examine the children, to baptize, marry and administer communion. The schoolmasters and catechists were trained at the Colombo Seminary, while some were sent to Europe for further education and to enter holy orders.²⁰⁷

The ratio between the number of villages and the number of schools in the *Disavani* of Colombo was about ten to one. In the regions of Galle and Matara it was 48 schools for 564 villages. In Jaffna there were 37 schools for 173 villages where there were 160,000 Christians in 1698. New schools were added during the eighteenth century. For example between 1710 and 1728 eight new schools were built in the Colombo *Disavani*. Another five were established before 1742, another five before 1780 and another one after 1780. The number of new schools built in the Jaffna *Disavani* was two during the eighteenth century while the number for the Galle *Disavani* was four for the same period.²⁰⁸ The number of schools was increased as a result of the belief that the Christian community was growing as indicated in the statistics of the Company.

When the predikant came to the village for inspection he performed the '*largatie*' ceremony and discharged from the schools those pupils who had reached a certain age limit. This age limit was twelve in the case of boys, while it was ten for girls. The boys were expected to render services to the Company according to their castes once they left the schools.

The statistics indicating the number of children in schools did not mean that there was regular attendance. In fact many schoolmasters taught only a few months in a particular year before the arrival of the predikant. The date of the arrival of the predikants was normally announced in advance. Many parents in the Southern *Disavani* were not keen on getting their children a Christian education. They allowed their children to be baptized and registered in the school *Tombos* as Christian in order to safeguard property rights and other privileges. Therefore many children were registered as Christian when in fact they were not.

²⁰⁶ According to Palm the schools were located at Galkisse, Mototto, Pantura, Caleture, Ramoenene, Horrene, Waduwe, Cedewarte, Diagan, Milagre, Nagam, Macoene, Alican, Pentuancare, Wewalee, Inderaewe, Payagalle, Barbaryn, Bentotte, Woldendahl, Mutwal, Colomobo Malabar School, Slva Island School, Paspetal, Cotta, Cotelwalle, Pannebakkerey, Calene, Chunapitty, Tope, Negombo two schools for Sinhalese and Tamil, Weilligampitty, Minuangodde, Mahapittigam, Migame, Corlawattte, Bollewelani, Wellicade and Agelewatte. (Palm, J.D. Palm, JRAS(CB), 1946, p.48-49.

²⁰⁷ The schools of the Galle *Disavani* were located at Hickkedoewe, Kahawe, Madampe, Walotte, Batotte, Indoeroewe, Cosgodde, Wattoegeddere, Rayigam, Talpe, Dadalle, Acmiwenne, Walne, Codagodde, Ahangam, Cogalle, Talpe, Baddegama, Maplegam, Tellicudde, two schools of Galle, Denepitities, Powatte, Mirisse, Dewinoewere, Bamberende, Dikwelle, Polwakdandewe, Gottemana, Kahawatte, Hakmana, Attoerellie, Akkoeresses, two schools of Matara, Walgam and Belligan.

²⁰⁸ Van Goor, 1978, p.125

There were also complaints about children being put to work in the school garden instead of teaching them.²⁰⁹ It is reported that in Jaffna a fine of 1 and ½ *kasu* for non-attendance was levied. The children who attended school were not liable to *ooliam* service in Jaffna till they completed schooling. Similar fines are reported in other parts of the island.

Female Religious Education

The Dutch system of education encouraged girls also to attend schools. The clergymen were anxious to encourage mixed education. Although there was reluctance on the part of the parents, there was a reasonable number of girls who were enrolled in Dutch schools in all three consistories, though for all practical purposes, many of them did not attend the schools. Despite the insistence of the predikants that both boys and girls should attend school, only sons of headmen and schoolmasters attended school. In many towns and villages in the Galle *Disavani*, girls scarcely attended school. The schoolmasters made an attempt to get the girls as well as boys gathered to the schools at the time of the arrival of the predikant in the latter's annual visits to villages. Time and again groups of people of Salagama caste forced their way into the schools in order to compel the predikant to discharge their daughter formally from school even though many of these children did not attend school at all.²¹⁰ In Matara the girls were, for all practical purposes, not attending school. At the inspection of 1755 only one girl turned up.²¹¹ In 1731, in the Galla *Disavani* when the scholar was making his visit, a mob assembled and interrupted the proceedings and even assaulted the scholar with a stick.²¹² The situation in Jaffna was more conservative in respect of female education. The parents did not want their daughters to attend schools, as such a contingency would have prevented them from getting married in the traditional manner. According to Cordiner (1803) "The girls are neither taught to read or write: but they be able to repeat a certain number of prayers, and to express the catechism and creed before they obtain permission to be married."²¹³ The Dutch attempt to educate the girls was a failure from the start.

Schoolmasters:

A variety of religious and governmental activities was centered in the school. The *Tombo*s were the registers kept in the school in order to keep a record of the population. Registration was very important to the people and therefore they allowed themselves to be registered as Christians.²¹⁴ The Divine worship service was conducted in the schoolhouse. Parents brought their children for baptism to schoolhouses. Marriages were solemnized at schoolhouses after the schoolmaster published the announcements. In addition to the regular school the alumni of the school were expected to come to the schoolhouse twice a week for a period of five years after the graduation for further instruction. When the pupils were formerly dismissed from the school, they were called *largeerden* (discharged).

²⁰⁹ The reports come from Colombo, Jaffna and Galle *Disavanis*. Van Goor, 1978, p.118

²¹⁰ Van Goor, 1978, p.132

²¹¹ Van Goor, 1978, p.133

²¹² J.D.Palm, JRAS(CB), 1946, pp.151-152.

²¹³ James Cordiner, *Description of Ceylon*, London, 1807, p.94

²¹⁴ *Tombo* was a record of each individual history in the district. It identified parents, family, place of birth, place and date of baptism, marriage, degree of education, date of death, and relatives still alive. (P.E. Pieris, *Ceylon and the Hollanders*, pp.93-93).

The position of schoolmaster was a respectable one in the village. He was paid a salary of 1 and 4/5 rix dollars a month.²¹⁵ He held an important position in the dissemination of basic Christian knowledge to the people. Therefore, it was expected that he was a person committed to the Reformed Faith and had a sound knowledge of the Christian religion. He was also the most important administrative figure in the village. The majority of schoolmasters were laymen although there were a few schools managed by proponents.

Most of the native schoolmasters in the first two or three decades of Dutch ruler were from a Roman Catholic background. Therefore, many of them who were Roman Catholic at heart gave very little attention to the DRC faith. The quality of their faith in the Reformed religion was appalling throughout the Dutch period. Very often their morals were a disgrace in the public eye. The majority of schoolmasters, according to Arnoldus Japijn, undertook the work more as a livelihood than for the sake of truth or the salvation of souls.²¹⁶

In addition to teaching, the schoolmasters had other responsibilities. On Sundays it was customary for the master to read out a sermon, or part of catechism during the church service. He was also responsible for the Sunday services in case there was no minister to conduct services. A predikant came only once a year to many schools. Therefore at all other times the schoolmaster was responsible for services held in churches which were located far away from the residence of the predikants. Some pupils in the school who would recite certain prayers at the services, assisted him. Most schoolmasters in distant places were not faithful in performing religious duties assigned to them except on occasion when an officer of the Dutch administration or a predikant was present.

Nevertheless, most of the indigenous work of the Dutch Reformed Church was entrusted to the schoolmasters. They were responsible for registration in the school *Tombos* of all births, deaths, and marriages. Cordiner commenting on the practice of registration of marriage states "A register of such marriages, however, continued to be kept in each school, for the prevention of bigamy, and the regular transmission of inheritances."²¹⁷ They had to keep a record of migrations, and of the length of time children attended schools.²¹⁸ They fulfilled duties as village clerks (*dorpschrijvers*). They also fulfilled other notarial duties such as drawing up deeds and contracts. For this service they received a notarial fee from the government. The schoolmasters, therefore, were respectable people in their villages. They usually belonged to higher classes of the rural society. Assistant teachers and *merinos* (sexton) also helped the schoolmaster with the work in the school. The duty of the *merinho* was to see that the children came to school regularly. Very often in the villages of cinnamon peelers, there was parental objection to the attempts of the schoolmasters to persuade the children to attend school. In Jaffna *merinhos* sometimes had to pick up the children from their homes. On many such occasions they were chased away by the parents. Even the assistance of the headmen was of no avail in the face of parental opposition. According to Jansz, only poor children whose parents could not afford to bribe the masters attended the schools in Jaffna in 1757.²¹⁹ The increased attendance in schools at the time of the tour of

²¹⁵ Arasaratnam, *Indian Church History Review*, XIX(1) June 1985, p.44

²¹⁶ H.V.Leembruggen, "The Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon," *Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon*, 32, Colombo, 1942, no.2., pp.57-71

²¹⁷ James Cordiner, *Description of Ceylon, 1807*, p.94

²¹⁸ Valentijn, op. cit p.422

²¹⁹ Van Goor, 1978, p.137

the predikant was to be explained by the fact that the people considered it as an injunction from the Government.

Schoolmasters were assisted by *Merinhos* on Sundays to conduct Sunday services. They were officially under the purview of the *Disave*, a civil officer although they also had to work under the predikants. By their dress and title they were distinguished from the others in the village. It is observed that the schoolmasters were poorly paid, inadequately trained, and very often spiritually unsuitable for the vital role which they were expected to play in the missionary program of the Church.

In 1680 predikant Arnoldus Japijn wrote concerning the people in Matara stating that they refuse to attend religious services or send their children to schools.²²⁰ Governor Simons in his memoirs stated that “the people are rather negligent regarding attendance at the services, so much so that even weekly sermons were discontinued, and the catechism classes have also become out of date.”²²¹ The quality of the converts was a lamentable factor throughout the Dutch rule in the island.

Scholararchale Raad

The school commission known as Scholararchale Raad, which was appointed by the Governor and the Council, attended to the ordinary affairs relating to the management of the schools. The school board consisted of some laymen and the predikants in that *Disavani*. The chairman of the school board was the *Disave* of the particular *Disavani*. One of the clergymen served as the secretary.²²² The *Disave* was expected to visit the schools together with a minister four times a year. In practice, however, this task was assigned to another member of the Scholararchale Raad due to the pressure of work of the *Disave*. The school board was in charge of the churches, schools and leprosy asylums in that area. Therefore the Dutch used church and school not only as religious centres but also as administrative units. The lives of all the natives professing Christianity and living within the precincts of the schools were under the surveillance of this Commission.²²³

Inspection Tours

The supervision of the schools was the responsibility of the Scholararchale Raad at Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna. A predikant and a member of the Scholararchale Raad undertook the rural visitations. They could not visit more than once school on a single day. These annual rounds lasted for months depending on the conditions of the country. The inspection tours could not be conducted during the times of political turmoil and natural disasters, like flood, pestilence, and so on. Predikant Kat complained in 1701 that the inspection tours had been discontinued, as the ministers were busy elsewhere conducting visitations and engaged in the services in the navy.²²⁴ In 1730 Johan Willem Marinus and Godfried John Weijermani

²²⁰ Boudens, *Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, p.206. Arnoldus Japijn, who served from 1680 to 1685 is remembered for his report which he drew up on the native congregations at Matara.

²²¹ Boudens, *Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, p.2016, Simons, *Memoirs*, p.21

²²² Simons. *Memoirs*, p.30

²²³ J.D. Palm, *JRAS(CB)* 1946, P.144.

²²⁴ Van Goor, 1978, p.114

nearly lost their loved on annual scholarchal tour. The predikants travelled in a palanquin²²⁵ and spent the nights in the houses of local residents. Members of certain castes were obliged to provide them with food while they were on these tours. They conducted themselves very much like the officials of the government travelling on circuit. They were as unapproachable as the government officers. According to J.D.Palm there were fifty-three schools in the Colombo *Disavani* in 1784. The scattered habitation of the natives, and bad and dangerous roads, resulted in the desertion of several scholarchs, and made spiritual supervision almost impracticable.

The work of inspection was divided in 1788 among scholarchs into three circuits.²²⁶ The visitation of the minister to schools was announce in advance by the Disave in order to get the people ready for the formalities associated with such a visit. On the day of visitation the schoolmasters summoned all Christians in the village to be present in the church. The vidane, korale and other dignitaries saw to it that the needs of the predikants were looked after well. The predikant and another scholarch arrived in the village with an entourage, which normally was less than sixteen, comprising European soldiers, Lascarins and coolies. There were abuses of these visitations. There are reports of coolies being used for private trading purposes by predikants.

Usually the investigation at each village lasted one full day. It was performed in a fixed order.²²⁷ The school children were examined with regard to their knowledge of catechism, the Ten Commandment, the apostle's creed, the Lord's Prayer and elementary scriptural knowledge, in the morning. The scholarchs also, if they wished to, could try to find whether there was a degree of understanding of the Christian faith. After the examinations, they added some religious instruction and exhortation. If the children had reached a satisfactory level of knowledge they were given permission to leave school. The next stage of the examination was of the older pupils who were not attending school but came to classes twice a week. These pupils who are referred to as largeerden, were examined according to their attendance at Sunday worship and everyday Christian living. On that occasion the attendance at church was mandatory.

The predikant thereafter preached a sermon in the church, performed baptismal ceremonies, and solemnized marriages. The parents who wished to get their children baptized by the predikant were brought to school. The predikant was expected to examine briefly whether the parents understood the nature and obligations of baptism. However, it seems clear that baptism had, as a rule, been administered even if the parents' replies were not satisfactory. Nevertheless, there were exceptions to the rule when some predikants tried to assess the quality of the Christian faith of the parents. In the case of Johan Willem Marinus, the predikant of Galle *Disavani* in 1720-1736, the attempt to assess the faith of the parents caused laughter and jests of on the part of parents.²²⁸ There was also a practice known as confirmation where the DRC Predikants also gave a course of instruction to those who were to be confirmed as Christians.

²²⁵ J.W.Nepolean Pathmanadan, *The Mission and the Ministry of the Church Missionary Society in Ceylon during the British Colonial Period*, Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Glamorgan, 1999, p.14. The palanquin travel was allowed only to the elite in the society.

²²⁶ J.D.Palm, JRAS(CB) 1946, P.145-146

²²⁷ For an account of these visits read: Palm, Ed. Esr., xxviii, pp144-146, Baldaeus, op cit. pp. 342-346, De Bruyn, chap, vi.

²²⁸ J.D.Palm, JRAS(CB) 1946, p.50

The scholars next inspected the school records, *Tombos* and collection of fines. The custom of imposing fines on those who failed to attend school was put into practice from the very early days of Dutch rule. These fines provided sufficient funds to pay the salaries of the schoolmasters. School fines were abolished in 1751 during the administration of Gerard Jan Vreelandt (1751-59) in an effort to eradicate opposition to Christianity in the island. The practice of imposing fines also contributed to dishonesty on the part of schoolmasters who collected them.²²⁹

At the next stage the minister heard the complaints of schoolmasters, pupils, parents and village headmen. If he was dissatisfied about any aspect of schoolwork he could make inquiries and impose disciplinary measures.

The work in the village was concluded with a divine worship service, followed by the administration of baptism in the evening. The Lord's Supper was celebrated on this occasion. Marriages were solemnized of those who had their proclamations (banns) published beforehand.²³⁰ It is reported that in 1751, the visiting predikant in the Colombo Disavani baptized 1,031 children and thirteen adults and married 297 couples. Similarly in Jaffna in one such visit a predikant baptized 4,069 children and married 930 couples.²³¹ The ministers were encouraged to baptize as many as possible. Therefore their baptism was a superficial one and had no religious value attached to it. Since the VOC paid *discipelgeld* (disciple money) for each convert they made there was a temptation to baptize as many as possible irrespective of the quality of conversions.²³² Certain villagers also offered the minister gifts (*dakum*), in keeping with the traditional practices, when they visited the village.

This procedure was repeated from one village to another until each of the schools assigned to their area had been inspected.²³³ After the conclusion of the visits the predikant made a general report which he presented to the school commission. The reports were submitted to the government and not to the church. Arnoldus Wilhelmus Fabricus, the minister of Colombo Consistory who sent a copy of the report to the Church Council in Holland was fined 150 rix dollars in 1745.²³⁴ The VOC strictly adhered to the idea that the church should be subordinate to the state.

The inspection tours achieved very little. The individuals who took part in these tours often had to undergo much hardship. The villagers had also to face hardship because of the presence of a large entourage which had to be fed at the expense of the village. The procedure was repeated year after year. The predikants and other members of the Scholarchale Raad behaved like the government officials who had come to take advantage of the people. James Cordiner (1802) who was critical of these practices stated "The most effectual means of disseminating the blessings of the gospel throughout the east would be for the Christians who go to those parts to live in a manner worthy of their profession."²³⁵

Text Books

²²⁹ J.D.Palm, JRAS(CB) 1946, P.145; Arasaratnam, Baldaeus, p.33.

²³⁰ Pieris, *Ceylon and Hollanders*, p.94

²³¹ De Bruyn, op.cit, Chap II

²³² De Bruyn, op.cit, Chap II

²³³ Palm, Ed. Es. Xxviii, p.150

²³⁴ De Bruyn, op.cit, Chap II

²³⁵ Cordier, *Description of Ceylon*, p.98

The school curriculum required textbooks for the children. There was a significant amount of literature prepared for use in schools even before the setting up of the printing press in 1736. In addition to the hand copied manuscripts there were a number of books printed in Amsterdam for use in the schools in Sri Lanka. In 1710 a series of catechisms, meant for different age levels were used for schools in the Sinhalese and Tamil speaking areas. A collection of prayers, forms of administration of sacraments, and five sermons translated into Sinhalese were distributed among the schoolmasters in Colombo.²³⁶ In the case of Tamil they were able to obtain some printed material from the Danish printing press in Tanquebar. There was also a considerable amount of literature published in the Portuguese language during this period. These were intended for colonists as well as the native people since Portuguese was very commonly used in Sri Lanka during this period. Portuguese was also used by the Dutch as the medium of communication with the local people. At the early stages of the Dutch rule Baldaeus prepared even sermons at Portuguese. This practice was continued by several other predikants.

Evaluation of Parochial the School System

The schools system that the Dutch took over from the Roman Catholics was a large one. The extensiveness of this school system was far beyond the ability of the VOC to maintain. They were never able to supple the personnel that the school system needed. Therefore the schools were assigned to the poorly trained schoolmasters, whose zeal and devotion to the Reformed faith were questionable. In fact when the Dutch took over the schools from the Roman Catholics they also inherited the teachers who were loyal to the Roman Catholic Church.²³⁷ The shallowness of the influence of the DRC is reflected in an episode relating to the visit of a predikant to a village in Jaffna peninsula in 1704. On his arrival a Tamil woman innocently repeated “Ave Maria” for the benefit of the Reformed minister.²³⁸

The statistical records of the Dutch school system are impressive. They give the appearance of an extensive educational establishment in all parts of the Maritime Provinces, which were under the rule of VOC. Nevertheless, the Dutch school system has been regarded as a cultural failure.²³⁹ It revealed tragic weaknesses at every point. The leaders of the VOC expected that large number of conversions would take place as a result of these schools. The superficiality of the thousands who claimed baptism was seen when the whole structure crumbled with the British conquest. The members of the Scolarchale Raad were hoodwinked by the presence of a large concourse of people who gathered at the annual inspections. For the man in the village these inspection tour were civil rather than a religious exercise.

Tennents’ statement that “Under a system so superficial and inefficient, the labour actually bestowed was productive of no permanent fruits; it’s was but seed sown on stony ground, it was scorched by the sun, and because it had not roots it soon withered away”²⁴⁰ iis true not only about the Dutch schools, but also the entire missionary enterprise of the DRC in Sri Lanka.

Through the schools system, which was largely conducted in the vernacular, the Church was able to transmit some Christian cultural values to the people. Many people in the Dutch territory became

²³⁶ Greenways, *Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon*, p.118

²³⁷ Baldaeus, op.cit.p.346

²³⁸ De Bruyn, o. cit. p.57

²³⁹ Greeway, op. cit. p.111

²⁴⁰ *Tennent Christianity in Ceylon*, op.cit.pp69-70

literate as a result. The impact of this education influenced indirectly, the revival of literary activities in Kandy in the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁴¹

Seminaries

The Dutch who wished to convert the native population to the Reformed religion, felt that those who embraced the Protestant faith should not be allowed to abandon it again. They found that the establishment of schools for the native Christians and the affiliated registration of local population was helpful in keeping the reformed Christianity alive in Sri Lanka. But the missionary activities could not be continued with the meagre supply of predikants and a few lay leaders from Holland. Therefore, the creation of a seminary to train indigenous clergymen came to the discussion table of the VOC very early. The overall shallowness of the conversions to Reformed Christianity was revealed to the observers of missionary activities in the very early years of Dutch rule.

Governor Rijkloff van Goens (1659-64 and 1665-1675) first put forward a proposal to set up a training school for schoolmasters because of the shortcomings that the schoolmasters displayed in the first few decades of the Dutch rule. However, the creation of seminaries in Sri Lanka was the work of one personality. He was Henrick Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, the Commissioner General for the Company's overseas possessions. He was present in Sri Lanka during the period 1689-1691. During an inspection made by him in the Christian season in 1689 he found the existence of seven large Roman Catholic Churches in the vicinity of Jaffna town. On the visitation of some of these churches they found several schoolmasters who were on the payroll of the VOC. This discovery made the Dutch authorities look seriously at their work in the island. As many of the ministers who came from Holland were unable to learn the language of the people it was envisaged that the seminaries in the island would be able to train natives for the task of propagating the Reformed faith among the Sinhalese and Tamil speaking people. Van Reede proposed that a schoolmaster should be appointed at an important church in each of the four provinces of Jaffna to take charge of teaching.²⁴² These day schools were found at Nallur, Chavakachchery, Point Pedro and one of the islands off the coast of Jaffna until the nineteenth century.²⁴³

Van Reede's experience of Roman Catholic revival in Jaffna as a result of the presence of Fr. Joseph Vaz in 1689 made it urgent to open a seminary.²⁴⁴ He realized the strong presence of the Roman Catholic faith and the shallowness of the native population who embraced Protestantism. In order to penetrate into the local population he decided to train natives who would in turn be able to train others. Therefore he embarked on a plan of a 'training school' for natives to prepare them for proponents' examinations. The original plan was to have only about twelve students admitted to this school. His intention was to get a few leading students to the ministry as proponents and allow the rest to be schoolmasters. Indigenous people had to be approached in their own languages. Since the Dutchmen had difficulty in learning the Asian languages, the seminary was intended to train indigenous people for mission work. The services of the alumni of this institution would be useful not only in Sri Lanka but also in other Dutch possessions in South Asia.

²⁴¹ G.C.Mendis, *Ceylon Today and Yesterday*, Colombo, 1957, p.63.

²⁴² Van goor, 1978, p.48

²⁴³ H.I.Root, *Cetnury in Ceylon*, New York, 1916, p.6

²⁴⁴ Boudens, *Catholic Church in Ceylon under Dutch Rule*, p.93.

Funds for the Seminary were to come from the coconut and areca palms cultivated at the seminary premises.²⁴⁵ However, when the seminary in Jaffna was set up, all costs involved in its maintenance, including expenditure for clothing and food for the pupils, were borne in full by the Company.

Jaffna Seminary

The first seminary to be established was the Jaffna Seminary, which was opened in 1690. It was built in Nallur, on the property of the former kings of Jaffna. The strategy was to open a seminary each at Jaffna, Colombo and Galle. The Seminary in Jaffna was set aside for studies in the Tamil language. The Council of Jaffna was very enthusiastic about the proposal and therefore the work went ahead. The Council in Colombo was at the beginning skeptical about the proposal, and therefore it took a longer time for a seminary to come up in Colombo. The first rector of the Jaffna Seminary was Adrianus de Maij who was conversant in Tamil and Portuguese.²⁴⁶

The students for these seminaries were to be drawn from the Dutch expatriates and the 'respectable' families in Sri Lanka. At the initial stages of the Jaffna seminary, Van Reede even persuaded headmen of the Vanni to enroll their sons in the new educational institution.²⁴⁷ The training at the seminary had an elitist character. The dress of the students was distinguishable from the rest of the people in Jaffna. However, the seminary was not able to make Dutchmen out of the pupils. They remained entrenched in the traditional society despite the indoctrination they received at the seminary. In the training the emphasis was on the 'Dutchification' of the pupils. Contacts with the parents were restricted to a minimum. Much emphasis was placed on the mastering of the Dutch language.

The religious instruction was in fact the second important aspect of the seminary, the first being the impartation of Dutch culture.²⁴⁸ As a part of their linguistic training the pupils translated a number of biblical books into Tamil from Dutch under the guidance of the rector of the seminary. The knowledge of the Bible took precedence over all other matters in classroom instruction. Adriana de Meij²⁴⁹ translated a number of prayers into Tamil for the use in the seminary. When he died in 1699 Gerardus D'Oude succeeded him. In 1706 Otley became the rector, and in 1716, his son, Abraham Otley succeeded him. The inadequate knowledge of the Tamil language of the rectors after Meij minimized the influence of the seminary on Jaffna society.

The Seminary in Jaffna made good progress during the three decades it lasted. The pupils were provided with good instruction in Tamil and Dutch. They were examined at the end of every year. Those who were promoted to higher classes could receive training in Theology, Church History, and Dutch language. The best students were selected as un-ordained ministers, known as proponents, and sent to local parishes for the ministry.

²⁴⁵ Van Goor, 1978, 41.

²⁴⁶ Adrianus de Meij was born at Pulicut in South India. Before he came to Sri Lanka he had served as predikant in Pulicut and Nagapatnam in South India. Therefore he was well versed in the Tamil Language.

²⁴⁷ S.Arasaratnam, The Vanniyar of North Ceylon, *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, 1966, pp.101-102.

²⁴⁸ Van Goor, 1978, p.48.

²⁴⁹ Died on February 8, 1699

The first batch of twenty-six students who were admitted to the Jaffna Seminary were from well to do families but of different castes. There were two Brahmins, a Chetty, two Vanniyars, and many Vellalas. The Karaiyars were consciously left out because of their Roman Catholic affiliations. These students lived in the boarding house attached to the seminary. Because of caste taboos there were problems at meal times. The two Vanniyar boys, Dom Joan and Diogoe Poeniamoety were expelled from the school after refusing to have their meals together with the other pupils. Their parents were also offended by the practice of joint meals. As a result the parents forbade them to have any contacts with the other seminarians.²⁵⁰ Although the students called themselves Christian many of them practiced Hindu religion secretly. The schoolmaster Otley stated that “Despite their extensive knowledge of the catechism they had remained heathen at heart.”²⁵¹

The seminary in Jaffna was closed in 1722. The better students of the Jaffna seminary were sent to Colombo which begun its activities in 1696.

Colombo Seminary

Colombo Seminary in 1696 after receiving permission for its establishment from the authorities in Batavia. It was set-up through the initiative of Predikant Simon Kat. He urged this project in a memoir presented to the Church Council of Colombo in 1692. Therefore he expected to be the first rector of the Colombo seminary. The Governor Iman Willem Falck (1765-85) proposed that the seminary should be converted to a training school for indigenous proponents drawn from all the territories under the domination of the VOC in the East. This plan, however, did not materialize due to lack of support from Holland.

When the Colombo Seminary commenced Simon Kat suggested that education should be conducted in Sinhalese or in Portuguese.²⁵² He suggested Portuguese because he considered that it was easier for the Sinhalese to learn Portuguese than Dutch. There were only twelve pupils at the inception. The Colombo seminary, which was expected to serve the Sinhalese speaking community, ran into difficulties due to the paucity of teachers who were competent in Sinhalese. The absence of books on grammar hampered the learning of Sinhalese by the Dutch ministers.

Most of the pupils of the seminary were taken from the families of mudaliyars²⁵³ and the Dutch expatriates. 1723 there was a complaint from the heads of the Salagama caste that boys of the Durawa and Karawa castes were admitted to the schools leaving out their children.²⁵⁴ There were some Tamil-speaking students in the Colombo seminary, most of whom came from the Cetti community in the capital. Throughout its existence the seminary was confined to the children of the local elite and the Dutch residents.

²⁵⁰ Valentijn, op. cit. 441

²⁵¹ Valentijn, 443-444

²⁵² Van Goor, 1978, 40

²⁵³ Mudaliyar was a title of honour. Sometimes the mudaliyar commanded some soldiers in times of war during the Dutch period.

²⁵⁴ Van Goor, 1978, p.71

The curriculum of the Colombo seminary was similar to that of Jaffna seminary. The emphasis in both places was on a memorizing process using repetition. The pupils were not encouraged to excel in academic studies but to be useful to the church and state in running routine affairs.

As mentioned earlier, the number of pupils taken into Colombo seminary at the commencement in 1696 was twelve. It was increased to fifteen within a short time. However, the seminary did not progress as expected. It was closed in 1698 on the advice of the authorities in Batavia. It was reopened in 1704 during the governorship of Cornelis Jan Simons (1703-7).

During the period 1704-1737 the character of the seminary resembled that of the now defunct seminary in Jaffna. The aim was to train *landpredikers* (indigenous clergymen), proponents, schoolmasters, and interpreters. With the appointment of Johannes Philippus Wetzelius as rector in 1737, the seminary underwent a fundamental change. With the sanction of Governor Van Imhoff (1736-1739) the standard of the courses taught in the seminary was improved by offering a new curriculum. Now the pupils who completed studies at the seminary were able to pursue theological studies at the universities in the Netherlands.

Again in 1759 Governor Schreuder (1757-1762) lowered the standard of education in the seminary. The seminary was expected to train heads of *Pattus* and *Korales* in addition to proponents and schoolmasters. In 1786 the seminary became the centre for training of indigenous schoolmasters as well. It continued this task until the end of Dutch rule in the island. The rectorate was abolished and, during this period, no children of European or mixed descent were admitted as pupils as was done in the period prior to 1786.

The type of education provided at the seminaries was determined by the provisions of the regulations drawn up by Van Reede in 1690, and the additions to those regulations made in 1709. During the first few years, the emphasis was laid on the mastering of Dutch and the learning of simple catechisms. Van Goor's impression is that 'the Seminaries did not do much to promote Protestantism in the island.'²⁵⁵ It was confined to an education offered by the Dutch for the indigenous elite. Governor Van Imhoff once complained that "the pupils of were unable to distinguish between 'yes' or 'no' in Dutch even though the emphasis of the Seminary was on mastery of the Dutch language."²⁵⁶ The pupils were trained to learn by heart two parallel texts – one in Dutch and the other in the mother tongue – but the meaning of separate words was not explained to them. Therefore they possessed very little insight into what they had learned.

Out of the 72 pupils who passed through the Colombo seminary from 1739 to 1760 there was 29 Mestimoz, 21 Sinhalese, and 18 Tamils.²⁵⁷ It is hard to determine whether this was an outcome of a deliberate policy. The recruitment policy was probably responsible for it. The European children were recruited through schoolmasters while the indigenous pupils came through the Disaves and the Mudaliyars of the VOC administration. For the purpose of management the Mestizos and Castizos were placed among the European children. A large number of these pupils were children of Company servants.

²⁵⁵ Van Goor, 1978, p.60

²⁵⁶ Van Goor, 1978, p.70

²⁵⁷ Van Goor, 1978, p.79

Both Jaffna (1690-1722) and Colombo (1696-1796) seminaries became colonial feeder schools to universities in Leiden and Amsterdam.²⁵⁸ In 1747 a second seminary was established in Colombo. It lasted till 1753. Its rector was Philippus de Melho, a Tamil Proponent, who later became a predikant. He was a brilliant scholar and a Tamil from Jaffna. This seminary was set up mainly for the purpose of training indigenous schoolmasters.

Evaluation of the Seminary

By 1740 the Sinhalese and Tamil schoolmasters were mostly ex-students of the Seminary. After 1740 the seminary served as an institution providing both primary and secondary education. Latin and Greek also became a part of the curriculum. The education system was very much the same as the system followed in Holland. During the administration of Shreuder (1757-62), critics pointed out that all the predikants trained at the seminary, including the Sinhalese and the Tamils who were sent to Europe for further education, were serving within the European community. However, nothing significant was done to remedy the situation.

In spite of the training offered by the Seminaries the standard of schoolmasters did not rise appreciably during this period. Only a few proponents were willing to work among the local people. There was also a shortage of competent interpreters.

During the administration of Shreuder the well-known premise that European ministers who knew a vernacular language would be more successful in the field of mission work than their indigenous counterparts was rejected. Therefore they decided to remove the Mestizo and Castizo pupils who were considered European from the seminary and to stop the teaching of classical languages. The objective now was the training of indigenous pupils to equip them to the proponents and schoolmasters. The possibility of the proponents of European stock to be promoted to the rank of predikant was one alternative to reduce the problems caused by the paucity of predikants. As a rule, however, this chance was not given to the Tamil and Sinhalese proponents, although there were a few exceptions.²⁵⁹ The few proponents that the seminaries succeeded in creating were scarcely adequate for the work even among the Dutch and Mestizo population. There was no supply of men for missionary activities among the Non-Christians. On the whole the work among the Sinhalese and Tamil-speaking people was left in the hand of the incompetent and half-hearted schoolmasters.

Nevertheless, nowhere in the area of operations of the VOC did a comparable educational institution such as the Colombo Seminary exist for a long period of time. The seminary in Colombo provided secondary training to 289 youths, among them 60 were of European origin. The best pupils of the Seminaries in Jaffna and Colombo were qualified as proponents. But not all those who qualified were appointed as proponents. Some of them were appointed as schoolmasters. Eight pupils who studied in this seminary were trained as predikants in Europe; there were others who journeyed to Europe but did not become predikants and one died before he was ordained.²⁶⁰ In addition, fourteen proponents and eight catechists and several schoolmasters, Company servants, and revisers working at the press were products of the seminary.

²⁵⁸ Van Goor, 1978: 42-74

²⁵⁹ Van Goor, 1978, p.89

²⁶⁰ Van Goor, 1978, p.103

Fourteen Dutch predikants also received their early training at the Seminary in Colombo. The seminary supplied all the indigenous ecclesiastical personnel in the eighteenth century. In addition, a number of others who had been educated there, went on to serve in Batavia, Malacca and Cochin. The seminary also contributed to the establishment and development of the work of the printing press in Colombo. The seminary contributed to the translation and publication of texts intended for the vernacular schools. In the latter phase of the seminary, it produced several linguists who made a tremendous contribution to the task of scripture translation.

The seminary was an expensive institution to the government. About 6,000 guilders were spent annually for its maintenance. It was therefore the continual topic of discussion among the government authorities and the clergy. In fact the government even criticized the teaching curriculum of the seminary. Governor Cornelius Jan Simonsz (1703-1707) criticized the emphasis on polemics in the seminary, and advised that the students “should not have their thought engaged on the current theological disputes” but “as much as possible improve their memory,” and “their understanding and judgment.”²⁶¹

The Seminary in Sri Lanka was an experiment for the Dutch authorities. The view current during this period was that native youths were not capable of attaining a sufficient standard of theological knowledge.²⁶² On the other hand Van Imhoff (1736-1740) said that “the seminary established in Colombo is a test of the possibility of such an enterprise.”²⁶³ The education that the seminaries provided was highly European in its orientation. The management of the VOC from the beginning to the end supervised it. It must be noted to its credit that the seminaries in Sri Lanka were more productive than all other such institutions set-up in Dutch Asia during this period. Their contribution to the educational upliftment of the country through the supply of trained schoolmasters and textbooks is commendable. The education in Sinhala and Tamil languages also helped the enrichment and development of those two languages through the provision of means to express concepts and thought of Christianity. They also introduced some European philosophical and religious terms to these languages.

The Colombo seminary made a great contribution to the development of Christian literature in the Sinhalese language. From the beginning the rectors were people who were able to work in the Sinhalese language. The first rector, Simon Kate supervised the translation of scripture, prayers and catechism into Sinhalese and Tamil with help of a team of Sinhala and Tamil assistants.²⁶⁴ Kat also began a compilation of a Sinhalese Dictionary, a Dutch Sinhalese dictionary, and a Sinhala grammar, with the text in Portuguese and Tamil. With the help of Wickremasinghe Mudaliar Dom Anthonio he prepared a Sinhalese version of *Nemesis*, the Gospel of Matthew, two chapters of Luke, seventeen chapters of Acts of the Apostles, the *Kindervraagjes* by Borstius, the Heidelberg Catechism a number of prayers, and the *Vestibulum* by Comenius.

The second rector, Johannes Ruel, continued the work in Sinhalese begun by Kat. He found many of the translations compiled by Kat to be faulty. In fact as a result of Ruel’s criticism of the translations of Kat,

²⁶¹ De Bruyn, op.cit. chap. VII

²⁶² De Bruyn, op.cit. chap. VII

²⁶³ De Bruyn, op.cit. chap. VII

²⁶⁴ Katherine Smith Diehl, ‘Simon Kate, the translator, 1624-1704’, *Ceylon Historical Journal*, 25, (1-40 1978, pp 193-203

the Governor Herit de Heere (1697-1703) appointed a committee to look into the quality of Kat's work and found that Ruel's criticism was correct. However, Kat's work provided the foundation for the others to proceed. Ruel revised the translations done by Kat and circulated them for use in schools.²⁶⁵

Christian Culture in the Dutch Era

The Dutch who were brought up in the Judeo Christian culture brought with them Christian elements of their background to Sri Lanka. Through the Christian educational establishment, a thin layer of Christian influence was felt through the Maritime Provinces. The Dutch judicial system was well organized. There were three major courts of justice – in Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna; the Colombo court heard appeals from these courts. A circuit court, the *Land Raad*, was presided over by the *Disave* and sat in various districts. Native chiefs were invited to sit on cases involving local custom. The customary law of the land was administered in the courts, unless it clashed violently with Dutch jurisprudence. Increasingly in the eighteenth century, Roman-Dutch law was used in the Sinhalese areas of the Southwest and south. This had important social consequences. Private property right in land spread more widely in these areas, and property transfers were subject to Roman-Dutch law. A gradual transformation toward monogamy occurred under the influence of the new legal system. This legal system which embodied elements of Christianity helped Sri Lanka to get rid of some elements of caste based laws of the traditional Sinhalese and Tamil societies.

The Dutch Reformed Church was able to continue some of the cultural elements introduced by the Roman Catholics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Among them the ceremonies associated with baptism, marriage and funerals stand out. Baptism became an expedient civil necessity for the Sinhalese and Tamils of the Dutch territory even though they did not really believe in Christianity. Most of the Christian names assigned to them at the times of baptism were derived from the Dutch usage although Portuguese names also continued to be in usage. Monogamous marriage introduced as a sacrament in the previous centuries by the Roman Catholics priests continued to be reinforced under the Dutch. With the legality of an ecclesiastically performed marriage deemed necessary for purposes of inheritance it was now more widely practiced. However the marriage ceremony itself came to be solemnized amidst the flurry of other duties thrust upon the predikants on their annual visits to the local churches. Regarding funerals the DRC continues the practice of burying the dead in the church graveyard following the order of service designated for a burial service. The commonly used word '*Karakoppuwa*' for the graveyard in Sinhalese is directly derived from the Dutch.

The Dutch maintained the Christian interests in the island despite their failures in many other fronts. The monogamous marriage was emphasized by the Dutch was a continuation of the Roman Catholic values. Even among the Tamils in Jaffna the practice of monogamy became more prevalent. The predikants who went on annual tours were disturbed by the presence of concubinage, adultery and the institution of temple dancing girls (*deva dasi*) in Jaffna. They were able to enlist coercive power of the state to introduce laws against such practices.

The introduction of the systematic registration of population was another contribution. Marriage continued to be determined by traditional concepts. Marriages in Jaffna were arranged by respective

²⁶⁵ Punchibandara Sannaga, *Sinhala Sahitya Vansaya* (Sinhala), Colombo 1967, pp. 630-632.

families even in the case of those students who had an education at the Jaffna Seminary. These arranged marriages followed the caste rules to the extreme. Therefore there was no possibility of creating any change in the caste system. In the Hindu marriage ceremonies the bridegroom tied a chain of gold called *thali* round the bride's neck and this was the symbol of the marital union. According to the testimony of the Baldaeus when the Christian couple were married in the church, there too the *thali* was used.²⁶⁶ This custom continues among the Tamil Christians to the present day.

Education contributed to the introduction of western culture to various parts of the Maritime Provinces. The percentage of literate population in the Maritime Provinces was several times that of the Kandyan kingdom where only the elite had the privilege of receiving temple education. The Christian educational establishment spread throughout the Maritime Provinces enriched the Sinhalese and Tamil languages by the introduction of Christian and European concepts.

Language studies.

The Dutch being Calvinists were heirs to the reformist scholarship and literary tradition. Therefore they recognized the potential of literature for evangelism. They made a great contribution to Sinhala and Tamil Christian literature, which also had a positive impact on the development of the literature of those languages in general.

The language studies in the Dutch period also were a result of their campaign against Roman Catholicism. In order to attack Roman Catholic beliefs the Dutch predikants had to communicate with the local people. Owing to the shortage of linguistically qualified personnel, this work had to be carried out through the help of interpreters. This led to incorrect translation, as many of the interpreters did not know Dutch adequately. The work among the indigenous population was entrusted to the local schoolmasters. All these schoolmasters also needed literature in the vernacular for use in their schools.

Calvinism believed that the Bible contained all that was necessary to know God and one's duties towards God and one's neighbor. Therefore, it was necessary to make the scripture available to the people in their own language. The DRC ministers therefore embarked on a program of translating the Bible into the Sinhala and Tamil languages. It is important to note that their Bible differed from that of the Roman Catholics since the apocryphal books were not included in it.

Communicating the gospel in a new culture is difficult. Not only is the message itself new, but also the cognitive categories of the new culture are inadequate to fully express the Christian concepts. The concepts commonly held by the Sri Lankans about God, devil, sin, salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life bore little resemblance to those in the Bible. These concepts also differed between Sinhalese and Tamil cultures. In this connection the Dutch were at an advantage since the Roman Catholic missionaries had done some ground work in introducing some Christian concepts. But the Protestant traditions of the Dutch differed considerably from those of the Portuguese.

Tamil Literature

²⁶⁶ Baldaeus, op. cit. pp 182-3

The Dutch were more fortunate than the Portuguese in their attempt to study the local languages. They found the work done by the Portuguese writers in the previous era very useful. They were especially fortunate in their study of the Tamil language as there were several Portuguese writings done on the Tamil language. Baldaeus who had laid the foundation of the missionary work in Jaffna, possessed only a very superficial knowledge of the Tamil language. He did his translation work with the help of Portuguese speaking interpreters. Nevertheless, Baldaeus is considered to be one of the pioneers of Tamil studies among the Europeans in Sri Lanka, not because of his own knowledge of Tamil but because of the work he was able to do in Tamil. He was able to get the cooperation of those who were competent in Tamil and Portuguese to translate a selected portion of Dutch writings into the Tamil language.

Adrianus de Maij who had learnt Tamil from his childhood revised the Tamil work done by Baldaeus. The Tamil grammar of Balthazar de Costa was used by Simon Kat in his study of Tamil. They also found *Vocabulario Tamulico Lusitano* written by the Jesuit father, Antao de Proenca (1625-1666) useful. The Tamil Dictionary compiled by Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) and Martinho Martins (1597-1656) was also used.

The Dutch used the Tamil Bible prepared by the Danish missionaries at Tranquebar. However, later the Dutch decided to prepare a Tamil version, which would agree with the Netherlands State Bible, which differed from the Lutheran Bible of the Danish mission.²⁶⁷ The Church council in Colombo appointed a special committee to take up this matter.²⁶⁸

De Voogd who lived in Jaffna from 1667 to 1669 made a study of the Tamil declensions and conjunctions in order to prepare a Dutch Tamil Dictionary. Simon Kat who made a copy of Voogd's list compiled a Tamil – Dutch word list according to the Tamil alphabet. It was Simon Kat who undertook the translation of the Bible into Tamil soon after De Voogd died. He translated the Gospel of Matthew, two chapters of Luke, sixteen chapters of Genesis, and seventeen chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. In addition, the Heidelberg catechism, a Dutch Tamil dictionary, a Tamil Dutch dictionary, and Tamil grammar, the *verstibulum* by Comenius and a number of sermons were also translated into Tamil.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century there were several Tamil scholars from among the native population who were able to undertake the translation of the scriptures into their mother tongue. Most of them were competent in Tamil, Dutch and Portuguese in addition to their theological training. Therefore, they were qualified to undertake the task. Among them Philippus de Melho became a notable Tamil poet during this period.²⁶⁹ He revised the translations of the Gospels available in Tamil and began translating the remaining part of the New Testament. His work entitled 'Triumph of Truth' published in 1753 in Tamil was a denunciation of Roman Catholic beliefs. In 1748 the four gospels and the Book of Acts prepared by Philippus de Melho and Simon de Silva were published. In 1755 the Book of Psalms was printed. Willem Jurien Ondaatje and Sigisbert Abrahamszen Bronsveld also became well known Tamil translators during the last stages of Dutch rule. The complete Tamil Bible was published in

²⁶⁷ The Bible which was had translated by Ziegenbalg into Tamil was available for readers from 1711. The printing press was set up in 1711 at Tranquebar to print these Bibles for distribution among people.

²⁶⁸ J.D.Palm, JRAS(CB), 1846, p.45

²⁶⁹ Simon Cetty, *Tamil Pultach*, pp. 69-72

1758. It was acclaimed as a major achievement and a priceless instrument in spreading Christian knowledge among the Tamil people.

In addition to the translation of the Bible and the publication of religious literature the Dutch also encouraged other kinds of Tamil writings. Among them the work entitled *Tiruccelvar Kavyam of Arulappa Pulogasingham* is the story of Balaam and Jehoshaphat. Arulappa Pulogasingham was the Mudaliar of Telippali at the end of the eighteenth century. This book had 1,946, viruttam divided into 23 santos (*padalam*). The style and diction of this book follow classical Tamil literature.²⁷⁰

Sinhalese Christian Literature

In 1694 Rev. Simon Kat was able to secure a copy of a Portuguese Sinhalese grammar and an incomplete Portuguese Sinhalese word list compiled by Pedro de Borgim. The Sinhalese Buddhist monks on the other hand displayed a reluctance to entrust their writings to European clergymen. Therefore the knowledge of the Dutch clergymen of Buddhist terminology was marginal. A thorough knowledge of Buddhist terminology was essential to present the religious concepts found in the Bible in the Sinhalese language, which was nourished by Buddhism. Kat had to depend on interpreters for his Sinhalese work. For the purpose of translation he used Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and Latin Bibles. He was assisted by Mudaliyar Dom Anthonio Wickremasinghe who knew Portuguese well and had a good knowledge of the Spanish Bible.²⁷¹ In this process Kat also began a compilation of a Sinhalese Dutch dictionary. His Portuguese, Tamil and Sinhalese Dictionary, Dutch Sinhalese dictionary, and the Sinhalese grammar, with the text in Portuguese and Tamil were pioneering studies in the field. With the help of Mudaliyar Wickremasinghe he prepared a Sinhalese version of Genesis, the Gospel of Matthew, two chapters of Luke, seventeen chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, the *Kindervraagjes* by Borstius, the Heidelberg Catechism, a number of prayers, and the *Vestibulum* by Comenius.

In the Sinhalese Bible translations which were undertaken by Simon Kat, the procedure followed was that at the outset Kat would discuss the Portuguese version of the biblical text with his helpers in the committee of translators. The Sinhala and Tamil translators then began to translate that section into their languages. When a chapter was completed, an attempt was made to check whether everything had been correctly translated. This procedure took a long time. While work was proceeding Kat was required to train new assistants since many of his assistants fell ill and were absent from meetings. His assistants were mostly taken from Mestizo and Burgher communities. The latter factor is reflected in his translations of the Sinhala and Tamil Bibles. The language used in these translations is heavily colloquial and grammatically inaccurate because these Mestizos knew only the spoken language and were not familiar with the written grammatical Sinhala and Tamil. By 1696 he was able to complete a few catechisms, prayers, parts of the Bible and a dictionary. However, the quality of the translation work was poor. As we noticed earlier this became the cause for conflict between Kat and Ruel who succeeded him as the rector of the Colombo Seminary. As a result of the criticism of his translations Kat had to write a note containing thirty-six pages defending his translations. Ruel revised some of the translations of Kat and prepared a catechism in Sinhalese.

²⁷⁰ Edumud Peries, 'Sinhalese Christian Literature of the XVIIth and the XVIIIth centuries', JRAS(CB) Vol.35, pp 162-178: p.62

²⁷¹ Van Goor, 1978, p.58

Konijn was another predikant who contributed to Sinhalese Christian literature. He translated the four gospels, the Heidelberg catechism (1724), the Holy Communion formulae, a benediction and a number of sermons and prayers (1725). He also revised and edited Ruel's catechism.²⁷² Konijn encouraged the use of the lyric style of expression familiar to the Sinhalese, and proposed that they should be read aloud by schoolmasters to their congregations.²⁷³ This method was found suitable for the Sinhalese people who were not familiar with the tradition of singing for worship. This kind of chanting on the other hand, was common in the Sinhala devil dancing ceremonies and in temples dedicated to Hindu gods.

After the death of Konijn, Wetzelius, who served as the rector of the Colombo Seminary, was the only remaining authority on Sinhalese among the Dutch predikants. During this period Sinhalese scholars like Louis de Saram, the *maha Mudaliar*, also helped in the work of translations. Wetzelius wrote a simple exposition of Christianity for the Sinhalese (*Korty begrip van de waarheid*). He also prepared a compendium of Christian doctrines in Sinhalese and presented it to the Colombo Church Council for revision and distribution.²⁷⁴

In the second half of the eighteenth century the translation of the scriptures received a boost due to the training of several Sinhalese. The proponent Gerardus Philipsz and the predikant Hendrikus Christoffel Philipsz and Fijbrands were prominent among those who prepared the scriptures in Sinhala for publication. Hendrikus Philipsz translated larger parts of the Old and New Testament into Sinhalese.

Catechism was a question and answer method of explaining Christianity. This was first adopted by Baldaeus in Jaffna. They had to be short questions and clear answers, which could be understood by the ordinary people. A number of them were translated by Baldaeus into Tamil. These texts were written on large boards and hung on the walls of the school. Most of the predikants who subsequently undertook Tamil and Sinhalese writing made it a point to prepare catechisms in the vernacular.

Evaluation

The Dutch contribution to Sinhalese and Tamil languages came from their schools system and literary activities. The Dutch published several catechisms, prayers and scripture portions in keeping with the reformist tradition. These texts were written on large boards and hung on the walls of the school. In this connection it is wrong to assume that the Dutch were merely adapting the Portuguese methods as some scholars have indicated.²⁷⁵ In any case the Portuguese missionaries in Sri Lanka did not contribute to the Christian literary tradition as they did in other parts of South Asia. Nevertheless, it should be stated that all the literature produced in this period were translations of western writings. The translations were literal and therefore lacked clarity. The language of the prose writings was cumbersome and not easily intelligible to the average reader or to the hearers.

The language studies in the Dutch period also were a result of their campaign against Roman Catholicism and their attempt to spread the Reformed Christianity. In order to attack Roman Catholic beliefs, the Dutch predikants had to communicate with the local people. The Dutch being Protestants

²⁷² Van Goor, 1978, 73

²⁷³ J.D.Palm, JRAS(CB) 1846, p.45

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p.45

²⁷⁵ S.Arasaratnam, Baldaeus, pp.30-31.

were zealous about the scriptures and therefore they expected the people to read the scripture in their own language. The shortage of linguistically qualified personnel among the predikants made it necessary for most of this work to be carried out through the help of the interpreters. This led to incorrect translation, as many of the interpreters did not know Dutch or the original languages of the Bible. For the same reason work among the indigenous population was very largely entrusted to the local schoolmasters. However, all these schoolmasters also needed literature in the vernacular to be used in their schools, thereby making language studies an essential area in their religious activities. In the venture of learning indigenous languages the predikants received the full support and encouragement of the government. The government officers who did not have a working knowledge of the local languages preferred to resort to the help of the clergy of their own race to getting help from the interpreter mudaliyars in the government service.

It needs to be recognised that the translating printing and distribution of the scriptures in the vernacular languages were undertaken by the Dutch long before the Bible societies were organized. In the eighteenth century, the Dutch had a plan to prepare an edition of the Bible in three columns in Sinhalese, Tamil and Portuguese.²⁷⁶ Most of the translation of the scripture was from the original languages, Greek and Hebrew, into Sinhalese and Tamil. The publication of Christian literature in Sinhalese and Tamil can be considered the most significant contribution of the Dutch to the cause of Christianity in Sri Lanka. However, the weaknesses of these translations were numerous. The Sinhalese language used by the Dutch was of very poor quality. It was the colloquial languages of the Colombo area with a mixture of some Tamil and Dutch expressions. The religious writings written in this improper language was repulsive to the villagers who were used to the refined language used in their Buddhist temples. Therefore these Bible translations failed to generate religious fervor among the people.

Printing Press

The translated biblical books and other religious material had to be copied by hand in the initial stages of Dutch rule. The accuracy of these copies had to be checked afterwards by predikants, often by the ones who were competent in the local languages. This meant that much time had to be devoted to this task. The few predikants who were competent in local languages were not in a position to spare time for work of this nature.

Therefore, the Dutch administration contemplated setting up a printing press in Colombo mainly to undertake the printing of religious books for use in schools. In 1723 it almost looked for a while as though a printing press was going to be established but, as a result of the death of Governor Isaac Augustin Rumph (1716-23), the whole project fell into oblivion.

The government authorities expressed the need for the printing press, especially with the Sinhala type, again in 1734. Tamil printing was not a problem as there were several printing establishments in South India, which undertook printing in Tamil. Therefore the authorities in Batavia agreed to obtain such a press for Sri Lanka. It was delivered to Sri Lanka in 1736. The printing press was set up in 1737 under the guidance of Governor Van Imhoff (1736-39). The press was owned and maintained by the government.

²⁷⁶ Palm, ed. Es. Xxix, p.46

The government made the appointments for its management. Nevertheless it was devoted to the printing of books in Sinhalese and Tamil languages. A predikant was generally in charge of its work.

The printing press produced a large number of books in Sinhalese, Tamil and Portuguese to be disturbed among the schools and churches. The printing press did not restrict its work to the publication of Christian writings. It also produced schoolbooks for Dutch, Tamil, and Sinhalese schools. The Dutch press in Colombo produced only a limited number of other work, as most of its publications were religious in nature.

The contribution made by the Colombo seminary in the translation and printing of books is very significant. The Heidelberg catechism, confirmation booklet, and Sinhalese schoolbooks were prepared and printed in the first phase of the printing press. A number of sermons by Wetzelius and a small book on psalms were published in the second stage. Of the scriptures the Gospels translated by Konijn were printed in 1739. After a short interval, scriptures in Sinhalese began to be printed as a result of the efforts of Hendrick Philipsz and J.J. Fijands who were Sinhalese predikants. The success of the press is proved by the fact that by 1744, hand-written manuscripts were given up in schools.

There were difficult in the working of the press. In 1743 the press remained idle for almost six months because the silver smiths refused to enter the precincts of the building for casting types owing to an outbreak of smallpox.²⁷⁷

For the predikants and for the VOC, the printing press constituted an important means of communication with the people. Its publications reached the schoolmasters and headmen through whom all those who could read and write could benefit. The system of education with the help of the printing press improved the Sinhalese as well as Tamil writing.

The expenses associated with the printing press, including the upkeep of the buildings, was about 5,000 guilders. The VOC absorbed all these expenses. The Company also spent money for the upkeep of the press. It supplied salaries to the personnel who were working in the press. The materials needed for the press also came from the Company stores.

Caste and Religion

The contribution made by the Dutch Reformed Church towards minimizing the rigidity of the caste system was negligible. The fact that the church and state worked hand-in-hand meant the policies followed as regards to the oppressive caste system were contrary to the basic principles of Christianity. The state policy in fact reinforced the caste system and racial hierarchies. The Government rigidly enforced caste in the society, because it was economically advantageous for the objectives the VOC.²⁷⁸ This is reflected in the matters relating to the church as well. The Jaffna Peninsula became Vellala domain in the Dutch era and the coastal Karaiyar caste, the bulk of which had become Catholic in the sixteenth century, was dispossessed of the privileges that they had enjoyed in the Portuguese era. In their opposition to the Roman Catholics who happened to be Karayyars the Dutch government consciously improved the position of the Vellalas thereby cancelling the gains made by the Portuguese

²⁷⁷ Van Goor, 1978, p.85.

²⁷⁸ (Matthias, '03

in reducing the caste restrictions in Tamil Society. In the south the Salagama caste or cinnamon peelers grew in number and prominence during the Dutch period due to the economic importance of cinnamon produce. Nevertheless this caste did not become Christian en mass like the Karawa had done in regard to Roman Catholicism in the Portuguese times.²⁷⁹

Achievements

The Dutch Calvinist ministers with their Puritanist ideologies made an attempt to reform Sri Lankan society. Dutch clergymen found early marriage of girls, which was prevalent among the Hindus, a repulsive practice. According to Baldaeus the girls as young as 8 years old were brought to Church for marriage. Although child marriage was not as frequent as in India there were frequent occurrences of it among the Hindus in Jaffna. The ministers were also disgusted by the fact that the parents forced these young girls into early marriages.²⁸⁰ In order to combat this practice the ministers suggested that “an earlier proclamation of consent be secured from the parties to a marriage.”²⁸¹ According to the practice prevalent at that time the consent of the children who were marrying were not sought. The child marriage issue was handled by requiring girls to obtain an *ola* signed by the clergymen and scholar. At the time of marriage the parents were expected to show this *ola*. If a girl was found reluctant to consent to a proposed marriage, she was to be given an opportunity to explain her reasons to a civil authority. These rules remained in the law books while the traditional practices continued especially in villages. The young children did not dare to question the desires of the parents. However, registrations of marriage was mandatory to all those who wished to establish their legal rights over property. Therefore, through the Tombo maintained by the schoolmasters the practice of child marriage was curtailed although it did not completely eradicate it.

There were also continual incidents of broken marriages and concubinage. Polyandry and polygamy were also common practices. The clergymen requested the government to proclaim laws against adultery, concubinage and the institution of temple dancing girls among the Tamil Hindus.²⁸² Those who desired polygamous marital unions sought marriage ceremonies outside the church. In such cases the marriages were not registered and the offspring found it difficult to inherit property. Therefore the practice of monogamy receive a boost during this period. Adultery was made a punishable crime. The temple dancing girls were punished. Those dancing girls who were caught were sent to remote villages or placed in reformatories.

Failure of DRC

The DRC had several weak areas compared to the Roman Catholic mission in the previous century. The Roman Catholic Church was firmly established in Sri Lanka at the time the Dutch began their work. The Dutch religion, devoid of external religious symbols, was less attractive to the Sri Lankans. They did not have a sufficient number of missionaries who were dedicated to the mission as the Roman Catholics had.²⁸³ The Roman Catholics had more ministers in Sri Lanka in the eighteenth century even though

²⁷⁹ K.M. de Silva (ed) *University of Ceylon: History of Ceylon*, vol.III, pp.60-61

²⁸⁰ Arasaratnam, ICHR, p.52

²⁸¹ Arasaratnam, ICHR, p.52

²⁸² Arasaratnam, ICHR, p.52

²⁸³ C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.140.V. Perniola, *Dutch Period*, Vol.1, p.415, Vol.III, pp. 50-54, 75-78.

their presence was illegal in the Dutch territory. Roman Catholic priests were celibates who could remain in the island for the rest of their lives. While predikants preached to empty pews the Roman Catholic priests in disguise performed baptisms, and marriages and the mass to large numbers of the faithful in underground churches. "Equally well attested was the general superiority of the Roman Catholic missionary personnel and techniques over those of their opponents."²⁸⁴

Since the Reformation there was the tendency to stress the extreme importance of the Word of God. The Reformed Church has formed a worship style, "the word-centered worship" which considered the preaching of the Word of God by the predikant as a major part in worship service. This tradition and heritage became the basis of forming the minister-dominated worship style. While the place and role of the pastor have been increasingly emphasized, the position and function of the laity have been conversely weakened and neglected in worship activity. This tendency brought about a passive worship, which became the biggest problem of church worship in this period. One of the problems of Reformed worship was "the passive nature of the congregation."²⁸⁵ Worship, however, is never intended to be a passive situation. People had been able to rattle off Dutch catechism, more out of memory skills than conviction.²⁸⁶ State backed schools and churches became institutions of the government supported by its laws and statutes that enforced attendance. In such a situation that people looked upon the Reformed religion with suspicion. Whatever they did in regard to the Dutch religion was out of civil obedience to the government rather than religious faithfulness.

The missionary attitude with which the Dutch came to the island was that of early Protestantism. The Reformers lacked a missionary passion and the understanding of the cultures of the people whom they wished to evangelize. There was very little understanding of the cultures of the eastern people during this period. The close association of the church with the VOC determined the fate of the religion as well. The missionary efforts of the VOC were hardly ever free from the desire to maximize profit, and religious work slackened as it was not materially profitable for the Company. In such circumstances there was very little chance for the Christian religion to be presented in a pleasant manner to the indigenous population. Therefore no form of indigenous expression of Christianity which could be close to the hearts of the people emerged during this period. As a result the Dutch attempts to evangelize the country ended up in a disastrous failure.

Dutch Christianity was a mere appendage of the VOC. The company was not willing to hire enough personnel to staff the religious institutions, which needed to evangelize the country if they seriously desired to replace Roman Catholicism with the Dutch form of Christianity. As we noticed earlier, the VOC considered Christianity as a means of making people more loyal to the Government. The leaders of the VOC in Sri Lanka did not distinguish between secular and spiritual matters and failed to present a form of Christianity that could be considered genuine. In the Portuguese period the Catholic priests often took the side of the believers when the officials were harsh and unreasonable. There were no such mediators in this period. The schoolmasters were the religious dignitaries who were closest to the

²⁸⁴ C.R.Boxer, *Dutch Seabourne Empire*, p.141.

²⁸⁵ Webber, *Worship is a Verb*, 12.

²⁸⁶ Young and Jebanesa, *Bible Tremeled*. Vienn, 1994, p.47

masses. They did not possess the effectiveness that the Roman Catholic fathers had during the Portuguese period.²⁸⁷

In their enthusiasm to eliminate any trace of Portuguese influence and the anti Catholic tendencies of the Reformation the Dutch ruined the successful missionary work of the Roman Catholics for over a century. The Dutch abruptly curtailed the health growth of the Roman Catholic Church. In addition the worldly attitude of the Dutch predikants and the hostility that they showed to the Roman Catholics ultimately resulted in inoculating the future generations of Sri Lankans against any form of Christian propagation. This negative attitude of the Sri Lankan population had a lasting effect as could be seen in the Protestant missionary endeavor in the nineteenth century.

During the Dutch period the worldview of the people of Sri Lanka remained intact. The gospel was presented in a foreign manner, and was not communicated forcefully to the traditional Sinhala and Tamil people.²⁸⁸ Converts were obtained, not by the witness of the native and foreign believers but largely by the power of the government. The coercive attitude of the government caused the ministers of the church to depend on government measures for the growth of the Church. They were not interested in a witness of their own. Therefore the majority of so called Christians never accepted of the Christian religion in their hearts. As soon as the prospects of material advantage were removed, the people reverted to the traditional religions in the first decade after the departure of the Dutch.

²⁸⁷ Sasanka Perera *New Evangelical movements and Conflict in South Asia: Sri Lanka and Nepal in perspective*, S.L. Stirrat *Power and Religiosity in a Post-colonial Setting*.

²⁸⁸ Anne M. Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture (Buddhisms)*

Colombo Theological Seminary was founded in 1994 because of the growth conviction of the need for an inter-denominational and biblical theological centre in Sri Lanka's commercial capital. The acute spiritual and social needs of South Asia presents God's challenge to the Church in the region. Through the prayerful cooperation of leading men and women across the spectrum of the Sri Lankan church CTS was born in order to respond to this challenge. The Seminary, as a centre for Spirituality, Research and Missions serves by: providing Resources for the Church for the Transformations of Nations

In addition to sending out trained men and women- to give solid, evangelical leadership in Ministry, Missions and the Marketplace – CTS is committed to furthering the cause of the Gospel through relevant publications. The object is to make available the finest Christian scholarship in the body of Christ worldwide, to both the seminary student as well as the keen Christian in the local Church.