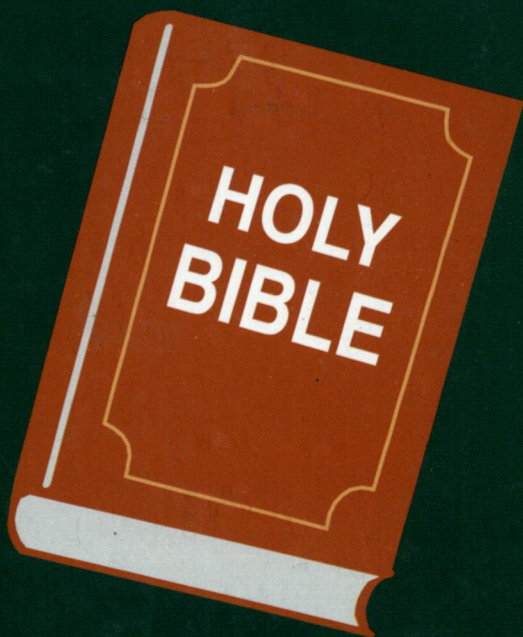


# IN SEARCH OF PRAXIS THEOLOGY FOR THE NAGAS

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Edited By: V.K. NUH

Throughout the ages theological formulation arose in the context of cultural and historical realities. We have come across in the history of the Church that theologians of different periods have interpreted the revelation of God in the context of their historical realities. Living theology is always contextual and it must address the various issues of human society of the given context in the right perspective and relevantly. There are times when the message of the Church becomes ineffective and non-prophetic as a result of theological distortions. Nevertheless, the sharp cutting edge or corrective theology is always present at the frontiers. Theology in the real sense must liberate people from all kinds of sin, social evils, exploitation, oppression, corruptions and other dehumanising forces or structure.

The Western or the European theology cannot be considered as the theology of the 'universal church'. The Liberation Theology of Latin America is a great challenge to the conscience of all Christians. The Latin American theologians have articulated their theology from the perspective of the suffering and oppressed people. It is one of the best weapons to address the contemporary oppressive society. Today, the great challenge before the Naga churches is to develop a praxis theology to actively participate in the suffering struggle of the people. Politically, the Naga people have been undergoing through untold sufferings and human right violation due to their struggle for political independence for the last more than fifty years. Economically, the Naga society has been plagued with all kinds of corruptions and injustices, and exploitation, leading to class conflict between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

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However, Naga churches have not been able to formulate its theological stance to address this complex situation. The Church cannot be neutral. It must clearly demarcate between what is true and what is false. This book is a call to the Naga churches, particularly the Naga theologians to formulate a theology, which can save and liberate the people from political oppression, economic exploitation, and religious apostasy.

This volume has been compiled after consulting various Naga church leaders and theological people to streamline some of the Naga theological outlook. It is in no way a systematic theological book, but a collection of theological articles presented in different theological seminars/conferences by Naga theologians/scholars. Naga theology is still in cradle and still long way to go to find its rightful place.

**Rs. 300/-**

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*Compiled By*

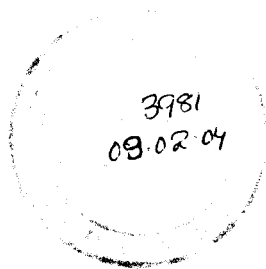
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# The Thrust of Theology to Naga Society

*DR. WATI AIER*

More than two decades ago, Harvey Cox announced, “we are trying to live in an of accelerating change with a static theology”. If we are true to our discipline and rational enough to comprehend sociological mutations, an effort is necessary to provide a sound perspective and an understanding for a theology applicable to our changing times.

The thrust of theology to Naga society, as it is to other societies, is basically a reflection on, and seeks to offer an articulation of faith. Such a thrust is neither dogmatic nor traditional. The reality of faith be it historical, existential or kerygmatic calls for theological reflection. Because we are people of faith, we engage in theology.

Historically during the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries, “theology” underwent a change in meaning. It was no longer simply the discourse about God, it became the rational explanation of divine revelation. And with the rise of universities, the enterprise was destined to become an academic, as well as, an ecclesiastical discipline. Hence, the theological thrust encompasses the intellectual reflection of faith. But it also includes reflection on the nature of believing, and declarations concerning the integration of

commitment with personal and community life. In other words, this means, that theology is also a contextual discipline, namely, the critical reflection on the historical praxis of faith. Theological people do not merely defend and justify, rather by reflecting upon the praxis of faith speaks to a specific historical and cultural context.

In juxtaposition, I would speak of a *kairos* for theology among the Nagas, for there are ages in theology and we are in a favorable position to begin. However, the thrust of theology to the Naga society should not remain a beautiful utopia which obscures the modest accomplishments of today.

It may not be inefficacious, therefore, to mention certain, more or less patent considerations which, if kept in mind by Naga theological people, would greatly insure a better understanding, a higher courage to be, and a greater progress.

### **I. The Thrust of Theology to Naga Society: From Apologetic to Hermeneutics**

This is not an attempt to trace Rahner's "Fundamental Theology" which strongly embarrassed the apologetic approach to theology for lack of wholeness and appreciation of "other theological orientation", because of their "obsession" with an a priori mind-set "magisterium". In our theological outlook the hermeneutical orientation of theology is essential. This is not giving in to a fashion, but in taking note of a new understanding of Scripture, and a new situation in theology among the Nagas which must seek to bring out the permanent significance of the Word of God in scriptural and theological forms, in terms of the historical understanding a person has of himself or herself and of the society. Our theological understanding cannot be confined to the serene presentation of a given guaranteed by rigid dogmatism nor an a priory school of thought, which assume its own to be the ultimate apart from empirical method. We must aim at an interpretation of faith in such a way that they become something more than a mere orthodoxy, a faith that will understand and penetrate contemporary Naga

society, not with rigid traditionalism nor neo-colonial mentality. However, when speaking of being rational and open, every attempt should be made to guard against “irrational-rationality” and “open-closed”, which are symptoms and signal of traditionalism and dogmatism.

This thrust in theology unquestionably calls for reflection on the praxis of faith with renewed energy and an unbiased perspective on the nature of “theological reason”.

I personally think that we are at the *Kairos* moment, when theological people are gathered hopefully to create something “new” instead of destroying one another. The later, is already evident in the politico-cultural and religious arenas of our society.

Taking the favourable moment of our history, we should aim to devote ourselves to re-reading our theological tradition by “suspecting” (Segundo) overly narcissistic approach to theology. From an apologetic orientation to hermeneutical understanding entails aspiration for a partnership between the theological people and the world. Theology is not only understanding of the faith but questioning the heart of the faith. At the same time theological people should seek understanding of the word of God for today and address to the difficult confused and misunderstood issues of modern Nagas. The effectiveness of Christianity and creation of the “new” should be at the root of our theological undertakings.

## **II. The Thrust of Theology to Naga Society: The Need of Knowledge**

Theological people among the Nagas must make real to their own age the abiding truth of Jesus Christ. This means, having the needed tools for the work-knowledge of the age. It is not enough that we should be programmed to utter robotic language such as, “theology is difficult”, “we are academic and they are not academic, etc....” Each must know and rise beyond mere robotic-computerised programmed lines and jargons!

In the middle ages, theology was known as the “queen of sciences” for the very fact that theology was not simply

a discourse about God but theology was rightfully seen in relation to politics, philosophy, science, sociology, etc. For this reason, the discipline of theology was given to the fittest person. It is time that, theological institutions realise this important factor while considering prospective candidates. Mere testimonial stories and singing Christian songs should not override intellectual aptitude of each prospective candidate. “The left-overs” from failing to make it in other disciplines such as science and arts should be curtailed immediately. Theological institutional admission office should not be confused between the “priesthood of all believers” and the vocation to theological discipline. The goal of theological institution should be candidly and realistically weigh between “quantity” and “quality”.

If the pedagogical task of theology is to be reconstructed, teachers must be well-informed with knowledge through readings as opposed to the “banking-method” of education giving in (depositing) the so called “knowledge” which are mostly notes passed on year after year for taking the route of “narration” in the form of story-telling which is redundant and sometime obsolete.

While these are in focus, the knowledge of the ages—namely Christ—should not be pushed to the periphery.

### **III. The Thrust of Theology to Naga Society: A Prophetic Theology**

At this critical juncture of the Naga history our praxiological dimension of theology must announce the coming Kingdom. For the sake of God and Christ can Naga theological people, without hang-ups and fear of each other, testify to the Nagas the coming kingdom? Can we articulate a critical vision of the social and political realities of the present world?

Our critical function, in both negative judgment and in building alternatives, is prophetic as a demonstration in history of God’s love and purpose for the Nagas. To surrender and withdraw the critical thrust of theology to Naga society is to capitulate to the worlds and its false and

destructive illusions about its ability to save itself apart from God's action in our history.

Jesus rejected the major options of his day: identification with the religious and political establishment [the sadducees], the route of dogmatic religious observance (the pharisees), the quietistic stance of withdrawing from conflict and tension to a place of noninvolvement and gossip (the Essenes), and the option toward violent revolution (the Zealots). Instead, Christ chose another option. He preached the judgment of God upon the present order and heralded the coming of a new order, then called into being a community of faith that would witness to the hope and power of the new order. This was continuous with the purposes of God throughout history: to call out a faithful people, "set apart" from the world but radically involved in it as witnesses to and agents of God's salvation in history. This is what Yoder calls "the original revolution; ...and its coherent way of incarnating them".

I take the stand that if the Naga theological people would give God the chance, He would remake our land. We would be "salt" and "light" in a world bound to sin and death.

If we remain faithful to our calling, our every existence would be a profound threat to the establishment and an ever-present catalyst for fundamental socio-political change. Taking this theological position may mean being "classified as cop-outs by the Zealots and as Zealots by the establishment" (taken from lecture on "Naga Theology" to students).

If we are to proclaim and to live in the light of the future that has proleptically come in Christ undermines the present structure of a world system that cannot tolerate nonconformity. The presence of Naga theological people who are not playing by the accepted rules of the game creates serious disruption and calls the whole meaning of the game into question. We must also understand that as theological people, we are a group within society constantly confronting all other groups with models of life and hope while demonstrating the ethical principles of the kingdom of God.

#### **IV. The Thrust of Theology to Naga Society: Mutual Understanding**

Aristotelian *Nicomachean Ethics* alludes to “Birds of the same feather.” However, from the perspective of “community” of Naga theological people, we must realise that within the community there are differences, which is quite natural. For this reason we cannot be traditionalists nor dogmatists. This understanding may be more difficult in theology than in natural science. Nonetheless, for Nagas to be fruitful and more particularly as theological people, cooperation is required and that all avoidable sources of falling-out be overcome and eliminated.

Second, Naga theological people should have an appreciation for one another, having theological differences should not lead one to lack of appreciation for the other. Though Barth and Tillich did not agree theologically, they had profound appreciation for each other works and accomplishments. The same thing goes for Pannenberg and Moltmann, though they greatly diverged from Barth, nonetheless, both the young theologians admired and appreciated for what Barth had accomplished.

Third, Naga theological people should recognise how truth comes to being. One of the greatest dangers of the “educated in theology” is to be found in his or her ability to defend more or less successfully any position. The person may find it easy, therefore, as Fichte put it, to “go on subtilising until he or she loses all power of recognising truth.” Yet indifferentism is neither breadth nor true tolerance, but the end of all advance in the truth. We must realise that our view(s) must be partial. We must expect our partialness to be corrected by positive-conflict with thought of other equally earnest and honest thinkers. Truth is nothing to fear and everything to hope from such a struggle. With this consciousness, it ought not be difficult to keep an open mind toward all fellow-workers.