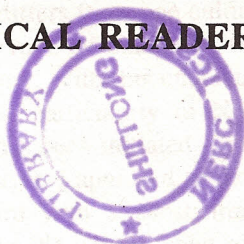


**GOOD NEWS
FOR NORTH EAST INDIA
A THEOLOGICAL READER**

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RENTHY KEITZAR

**GOOD NEWS
FOR NORTH EAST INDIA**
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Edited by
Renthy Keitzar



**THE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CENTRE
PANBAZAR, GUWAHATI
ASSAM, INDIA
1 9 9 5**

Good News for North East India : A Theological Reader published by
Christian Literature Centre, Panbazar, Guwahati - 781001, Assam, INDIA.

FOR NORTH EAST INDIA

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© C. L. C. 1995
ISBN-81-85784-13-2

261.1095416

KEI



Printed at :
SARAIGHAT OFFSET PRESS
Industrial Area, Bamunimaidam
Guwahati - 781 021

THE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CENTRE
PANBAZAR, GUWAHATI
ASSAM, INDIA
1995

THE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CENTRE CHURCH EDUCATION SERIES (C.L.C.C. E.)

The Church and its lifestyle differs from one culture to another. If one has to be a true Christian, the roots of one's christianness needs to be deeply rooted in one's own culture. With this understanding and with an aim to educating the churches, particularly of North East Indian Christians, this C.L.C.C.E. Series has been initiated. But the question of funding came and, with fervent prayer, I appealed to the TEAR Fund in U.K., which readily came forward with a substantial grant for the project. I am extremely grateful to the TEAR Fund and am specially indebted to Joyce Nockholds, Administrative Officer for Asia, to get this project started.

The fifth volume in this series, *Good News for North East India : A Theological Reader*, edited by Renty Keitzar, is a book of varied interest in the form of a theological reader from North East India. It covers a span of about twenty-five years of Christian writing in North East India. The need of regional writers has greatly been felt and its pursuit is fulfilled in this publication. The task of a systematic edition, with the right kind of articles, is not an easy task, but someone who has the experience could do it just the kind of work I wanted in this form. Professor Renty Keitzar, Ph. D., a teacher of long experience, has done this, with the right selection of articles of Christian leaders from different parts of North East India. This book is something like 'a rod' to lead in contextual attempt and the mission of the Church in North East India.

I record my gratitude and appreciation to Professor Renty Keitzar for this work which he carefully selected and edited for wider readership. He has been in this mission of educating the people and, more importantly, the ministers of the Church in this region to make Christian theology more "relevant and meaningful so much so that the gospel, rather good news, may be real to our people". I trust that the readers of this book may derive new insights to be better Christians.

October 21, 1995

Mar Atsongchanger
Director
C.L.C., Guwahati
Assam, India

INTRODUCTION

The Reverend Gordon Jones, a missionary friend working in North East India, spoke at the inaugural service of the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat for the session 1971-72, on 18th July 1971, on the theme, "Good News for North East India." It was a challenge, or may I say an inspiration, to me as a young lecturer at that time. I still remember what he said, specially this : " ... your tasks is to understand the Gospel in its essentials and to interpret it, to translate it, into terms that meet the need of the people of north-east India." This he said, realizing the fact that the great majority of our people, the background is one of animism, of a belief in spirits and demons. These spirits, especially those of the malevolent ones, were to be appeased by offering sacrifices, if not they would harm the people. Liberation from evil forces was needed. This was the belief of our forefathers until the missionaries came among them with the good news of Jesus Christ. He came as "Christus Victor"— the Victor over sin, the Conqueror of all evils. Thus, the title of this book is derived from this significant message.

Now our people are predominatly Christian, specially in the hills areas, but the evil forces are still active in a new form of social evils, all corruptions and injustices. And Jesus must come as Victor and Liberator over all these forces. This is the task that has been entrusted to us to proclaim and publish good news to all. And, now, with the emergence of a literate society, we must make every effort to explore the possibility of using print media like printing and publishing Christian literature in addition to traditional form of oral communication.

Before the advent of Christianity the different peoples of north east India were not united, and were rather estranged from one another as enemies, but Christianity brought them together in Christ as one people. A new consciousness of identity was born in the minds of the people. That reality is expounded by F. S. Downs as tribal ecumenism. But this can be fully realized only when we come together in a united Church, as J. Fortis Jyrwa attempted to show, where all Christians feel the sense of belongingness in the household of God. However, we are yet to achieve that goal. Hence, we need to search for a relevant message of the Good News in Jesus Christ, because there is only One Christ and One Gospel. We may have different traditional or denominational heritages but we have certain things in common as people of north-east India and as believers in One Christ. A new understanding of Christian theology must emerge from this commonality which can bring us closer

as one people of God, accepting one another as fellow tribals and affirming one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and one spirit, and as joint heirs with Christ (cf. Ephesians 4 : 4ff. ; and Romans 8 : 17). That speaks itself the need of a contextual Christian theology for north-east India that is relevant and meaningful so much so that the gospel, rather good news, may be real to our people. The Good news can be really good news only when it is realistic and worth believing : so the "Good News" that we proclaim and publish must be real and realistic.

Much has been written about this region in recent years, both from within and without, may be because of the political movements and phenomenal growth of Christian population. But there is not much of theological writing in the academic sense of the term; it does not mean there are no theologians. We have some creative thinkers who write in the regional languages, which are as many as the plurality of languages and dialects of the region, and these are the theological reflections of the people and may be worth translating them into English one day. Casual observations have been remarked by various authors on religion and theology but no one has so far attempted any major work as such. We may find only a fair amount of articles of theological nature mainly written by church leaders and theological teachers. Many of them are theologically significant, but sad to say, these are not widely known because of a lack of publishing facility in the region. I would say that theologization has begun and we must nurture it into a growing tree that may "bear fruit, thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold" (Mark 4 : 20). The seed of the gospel is already sown, sprouted and is sure to grow in our soil. The good news which we have heard from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, and we have experienced its liberating word of life, this we write and publish "that our joy may be complete" (1 Johh 1 : 1-2).

My involvement in Christian journalism over the years as an editor and amateur journalist has given me an opportunity to collect a variety of articles on many subjects, both general and theological, including many of my own, for publishing or simply for filing. I have compiled here some articles for wider reading with a view to promoting theological literature and the theological students may find them useful as reading materials for tribal Christian theology.

In this book, under six captions, selected readings are given to show an idea towards developing a contextual Christian theology for North East India. I have tried to select representative articles from different areas as far as practicable and the writers are also mostly nationals with the exception of Gordon Jones and F. S. Downs.

I. Encountering the Good News

1. Gordon Jones, "Good News for North-East India," *ETC Magazine* (1971-72), pp. 4-8.
2. F.S. Downs, "Tribal Ecumenism in North East India : the Christian Role in Solidarity Movements," *ETC Journal* (1989), pp. 48-66.
3. J. Fortis Jyrwa, "Church Union Movement in North East India—A Historical Perspective," *Church, Ministry and Mission*, ed. Renthly Keitzar (Guwahati : CBCNEI, 1988), pp. 58-71.
4. Renthly Keitzar, "A Study of the North-East India Tribal Christian Theology," a paper presented at CISRS Consultation in Shillong, February 1992.

II. Bible Translation

5. Zairema, "Bible Translation in North East India," *ETC Journal* (1989), pp. 5-22.
6. P. C. Gine, "Bible Translator William Carey : A North East India Perspective," *ETC Journal* (June 1989- May 1990), pp. 11-21.
7. John Philipose, "The Bible Society and North East India," *ETC Journal* (June 1989- May 1990), pp. 4-10.

III. Religion and Theology

8. Zairema, "The Mizos and Their Religion," *Towards a Tribal Theology : The Mizo Perspective*, ed. K. Thanzauva (1989), pp. 31-44.
9. C. L. Hminga, "The Traditional Mizo Concept of God," *Towards a Tribal Theology*, etc., pp. 45-53.
10. G. K. Nang, "The Meaning of Worship from Animistic Perspective," *Baptist News* (vol. 43 Jan.- Feb. 1994), pp. 2-5.
11. Wati Longchar, "Inter-faith Dialogue : A Question from a Tribal Perspective."
12. K. Thanzauva, "Tribal Theological Trends in North East India," *Asian Theology at the Frontiers*, ed. Renthly Keitzar (Jorhat : ETC, 1993), pp. 82-95.
13. T. Lalsawma, "Christian in Socio-cultural Life," *The Role of Christian in Secular Society* (NEICC, 1976), p. 17-23.
14. P. L. Lianzuala, "Towards a Theology of Mizo Tlawmngaihna," *Towards a Tribal Theology*, etc., pp. 54-62.
15. Wati Longchar, "Sobaliba," Nagaland Students' Union, Bangalore, Souvenir, Silver Jubilee (1969-1994), pp. 25-26.
16. K. Thanzauva, "Theology by the People : Its Implications in

Theological Education in North East India," *ETC Journal* (Jan-May 1988), pp. 38-45.

IV. Contextual Proposals

17. O. M. Rao, "Assamese Bihus and Vegetation Symbolism for the Church in Assam," *ETC Journal* (Jan. May 1988), pp. 14-27.
18. A Behera, "Hermeneutical Methods of Srimanta Sankardeva of Assam as Guide for Communication of the Gospel in North East India," *ETC Journal* (Jan.- May 1988) pp. 28-37.
19. Renthly Keitzar, "Lakhiram Baruah : A Christian Bhakta," *The Baptist Leader* (Vol. XXI Sept.- Oct. 1973, No. 5), pp. 1-5.
20. "Gospel and Tribal Culture : Naga Perspective," a paper presented by ETC Team at the NITS Conference, JRTS, Shillong (1994) as prepared by Miss Asenla, R. Simon, Elungkiebe and Shimreingam Shimray.
21. J. L. Roy, "Primal Vision and Hermeneutics in North East India: Protestant View," a paper presented at the Consultation on Primal Vision and Hermeneutics, Shillong, November 5-8, 1981.
22. Findings on Primal Vision and Hermeneutics in North East India, a Theological Consultation organized by the BTESSC at Shillong on November 5-8, 1981.

V. Women Issues

23. J.H. Thumra, "Biblical Basis of Women Ministry in the Context of Traditional and Cultural Heritage," *Church, Ministry and Mission*, ed. Renthly Keitzar, pp. 119-125.
24. R.L. Hnuni, "Issues of Women Ministry," *North East India Religious Review* (September 1990), pp. 1-11.
25. Wati Longchar, "Headhunting: A Socio-religious Factor for Oppression of Women in North East India," *NEIR Review*, pp. 36-43.

VI. Bible Studies

26. Renthly Keitzar, "Mission and Dialogue in the Local Congregation," *ETC Journal* (Jan.-May 1988), pp. 1-11.
27. Edwin Kharkongor, "Creation in the Old Testament."
28. J.H. Thumra, "The Triumph of the Gospel" (Romans 1:16), *The Baptist Leader* (XXIX Jan.-Feb., 1980), pp. 7-9.

Last but not least, I would express my sincere appreciation to various authors whose articles are included here for wider circulation in the interest of theological education. I am also thankful to the publishers of the articles reprinted here for their kind permission. And, finally, I am

extremely grateful to I. Mar Atsongchanger, Director, the Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, Assam for publishing this book as a companion to my earlier book, also, published by him under the title, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*.

Jorhat, Assam

28 August, 1995

Renthy Keitzar

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Professor Renthly Keitzar is Principal of the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam. At present he is also President of the Senate of Serampore College. He also serves as President of the Board for Theological Text Book Programmes of South Asia.

He has contributed much to the Ao Naga literary work, to both general and Christian literature. He has written and edited or co-authored several books in English including *Triumph of Faith in Nagaland; Church, Ministry and Mission*, (1987), *Asian Theology at the Frontiers* (1993); *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message* (1995), etc. For many years he has been editing the official publication of the CBCNEI, the *Baptist News*.

He is an Ao Naga and belongs to the Baptist Church. He did his theological studies at the United Theological College and later at the University of Chicago. He received his doctoral degree from the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1979. He is married and has two sons.

ISBN : 81-85784-13-2