

SOLIDARITY WITH GRIEVING FARMERS IN INDIA  
An Ethical and Pastoral Approach in the Context of Increasing Suicides Among the Farmers

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the diverse challenges that confront Indian farmers and delves into the biblical and ethical resources at our disposal for recognizing and responding as disciples of Christ. Additionally, it provides recommendations and suggestions based on successful models and best practices from various regions for bringing hope, healing, and transformation to the lives of farmers in India.

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## NOMENCLATURE

SHGs: Self-help Groups

LS: *Laudato Si*

SRI: System of Rice Intensification

UN: United Nations

ISPCK: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

## General Introduction

Farming is the backbone of India's economy, and the majority of people in India depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, farmers in India are facing numerous challenges that affect their ability to sustain themselves and their families. Farming can be a difficult and unpredictable occupation, with factors such as weather, pests, crop failure, and market prices that are often beyond the control of the farmer. When these factors lead to financial or personal hardship, it can be a source of significant stress and grief for the farmers and their families. The struggles of Indian farmers are complex, and their suffering is often ignored or overlooked. The first chapter will delve deeper into these issues, highlighting the various challenges that farmers in India face and aims to bring awareness about the urgent need for people, especially Christians<sup>1</sup> in India to come together in solidarity to support them. It is essential to recognize that these issues are not limited to a particular religion or community but affect the entire nation. The Christians in India have a responsibility to respond to the needs of our fellow citizens and to work towards building a just and equitable society. By understanding the challenges faced by Indian farmers, Christians in India can respond more capably and effectively.

The plight of Indian farmers has been a topic of much concern in recent times. It is every Christian's responsibility to respond with compassion and empathy toward their suffering as disciples. The response of the disciples of Christ should be more than just a superficial display of sympathy. Therefore, the second chapter will explore the resources available to us as we seek to respond like Christ as his disciples to the struggles of the Indian farmers. This chapter will draw our attention to the parable of the Good Samaritan, as well as the Beatitudes, as guiding principles for responding as disciples of Christ. This chapter will

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<sup>1</sup> "Christian" here means both individuals and organizations (not only Catholic).

also examine the virtues of mercy, hope, and justice, and how Christians can cultivate these qualities in their lives as they seek to be faithful disciples of Christ. Through the inspiration of these ethical and biblical resources, I hope that every Christian in India can equip oneself with the tools necessary for responding to the needs of grieving Indian farmers in a manner that is both meaningful and transformative.

In order to bring hope and transformation to the lives of farmers, it is essential to look at successful models and best practices from various regions in India and implement them in other parts of the country. There are several regions in India that have been successful in improving the livelihoods of farmers through various initiatives and supporting systems. The third chapter explores some of these successful models and best practices from some regions, which can be introduced in other regions in India for supporting farmers in their struggles. This chapter aims to provide suggestions and recommendations based on these successful models to help farmers across the country. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to recognize and accompany the grieving farmers in India for bringing hope, healing, and transformation to these farmers and the survivors of their suicide.

## Chapter 1

### Farmer's Grief and Suicides Have Become an Epidemic in India

#### 1.1 Introduction

Farmers feed the world but, unfortunately, farming has become a high-stress and even dangerous occupation. Climate change, changing farming practices, crop failure, difficulty in marketing, capitalistic domination, and over-regulation have led to indebtedness and multiple stress for small-scale farmers. Furthermore, the social and cultural marginalization of farmers and the prevalence of landlessness and sharecropping can further compound these challenges, making it even more difficult for farmers to make a living and maintain their well-being. Studies have found high rates of depression and anxiety among farmers.<sup>2</sup> These risk factors too often culminate in suicide by farmers.

Although there are social and geographic variations, depression and suicide among farmers are global problems that need an urgent response. Though the phenomenon is worldwide, this chapter will focus on issues of Indian farmers as a lens to understand and evaluate Farmers' suffering and grief. In India, records show that about Nearly 4,00,000 farmers committed suicide in India between 1995 and 2018 because of hopelessness and stress. This translates into approximately the farmer's 48 suicides every day.<sup>3</sup> However, it is important to understand that most farmers in India do not want to end their lives, but continue to work hard and bear all the burdens and struggles. They do not want to end their lives because they love their family and continue to support their family even if the situation appears to be hopeless. On the other hand, some of them commit suicide when they can no longer withhold their mental pressure, even when they want to live for the family. The increasing number of

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<sup>2</sup> Magnhild O. Torske et al., "Anxiety and Depression Symptoms Among Farmers: The Hunt Study, Norway," *Journal of Agromedicine* 21, no. 1 (2016): 24-33. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Nanda Kishore Kannuri and Sushrut Jadhav, "Cultivating Distress: Cotton, Caste and Farmer Suicides in India," *Anthropology & Medicine* vol. 28, 4 (2021): 558-575. 558.

challenges that farmers face and the attempts of farmer suicide cases underline the fact that this is a genuine epidemic.

Though vulnerable they still remain capacious. James Keenan SJ in his article entitled, “Vulnerability and the Father of the Prodigal Son” differentiates vulnerability from precariousness. He stresses that the vulnerability is capacious, vigilant, attentive, and responsive like the character of the father of the Prodigal Son. He repeatedly emphasizes, “the centrality of the story is the enduringly vigilant, attentive, and responsive Father who is so because he is vulnerable.”<sup>4</sup> Keenan believes that “our vulnerability derives from the nature of God in whose image we are made; made in the image of the vulnerable God, vulnerability is our nature.”<sup>5</sup> Keenan rightly notes that God suffers because God is vulnerable, and God is vulnerable because God loves, and our dignity is rooted in God’s vulnerability.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is good to look at vulnerable God’s love and mercy to understand our vulnerability.

The reason for considering the vulnerability of farmers in India as capacious is that they continue to cultivate even after facing many crop failures and other challenges. Many of them do not want to end their lives because they do not want to add more burden to their family by committing suicide. The only reason why some of the farmers end their life is that they think their death might bring some compensation to the surviving family. The saddening reality is that many of the survivors of the farmer’s suicide do not receive adequate compensation and other support. In many cases, the death of a farmer adds many additional burdens to the family.

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<sup>4</sup>James F. Keenan, “Vulnerability and the Father of the Prodigal Son,” *Accademia Alfonsiana Blog* (blog), 2019, <https://www.alfonsiana.org/blog/2019/09/27/vulnerability-and-the-father-of-the-prodigal-son/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> James F. Keenan S.J., *Moral wisdom, Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 83.

## **1.2 Unwavering Spirit of Indian Farmers for the Sake of the Well-being of Their Families and Communities**

These days, farming does not offer much profitability or income. It makes most farmers in India financially unstable. The reality of farmers' hardship and struggle in India continues to this day and is confirmed by the increasing number of suicide attempts. However, it is also evident that many farmers in India are not ready to give up. This section aims to emphasize the unwavering spirit of many farmers in India who relentlessly strive to overcome challenges and desire to improve the lives of their families and communities. Thousands of farmers from various regions of India joined forces and journeyed to Delhi to participate in a nearly two-year-long protest against the government's introduction of new agriculture bills. These bills sought to deregulate the market and diminish government involvement in the wholesale pricing of agricultural goods, thereby increasing the power of corporations. This deregulation could lead to a decline in the prices of agricultural goods, further reducing the income of farmers. Despite being one of the most extensive protest movements in history, and the loss of hundreds of protestors, the Indian farmers' protest did not receive the attention and support of the global media.

The three farmer's bills that were introduced in India were initially presented as a positive step towards improving the lives of farmers. However, upon closer examination, it has become clear that these bills may actually pose a threat to the well-being of farmers. The three farmer's bills that were passed in the Indian parliament and faced opposition from farmers are as follows.

- i. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020:

This bill allows farmers to sell their produce outside the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis, ie, the government's official vegetable markets to private buyers,

and e-trading platforms. However, farmers fear that this will lead to the dismantling of the APMC mandi system and leave them vulnerable to exploitation by big corporations.<sup>7</sup>

ii. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020:

This bill allows farmers to enter into contract farming agreements with private companies, which would provide them with technology, inputs, and other resources. However, farmers fear that this bill will allow big corporations to dictate prices and contract terms, leaving farmers with little bargaining power.<sup>8</sup>

iii. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020:

This bill removes the stockholding limits on certain agricultural commodities, including cereals, pulses, and onions. But the farmers fear that this will lead to hoarding and black marketing, leading to lower prices for farmers.<sup>9</sup>

Farmers have been protesting against these bills since they were introduced, and the protests lasted for two years. The small scale-farmers in India had realized that these bills appeared to be attractive mouth sweeteners that will ruin their lives in the long run. They feared that the government was trying to hand over the control of the farming sector to co-operations. The main demands of the farmers are the repeal of these bills and the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, which include a guaranteed minimum support price for crops and greater investment in agricultural infrastructure.<sup>10</sup> These three bills that seek to privatize the agriculture industry and reduce farmers' profits were created because

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<sup>7</sup> Kavya Dalta, "Farm Laws 2020: Who Are They Meant to Serve?" Down To Earth Latest News, Opinion, Analysis on Environment & Science Issues, India, South Asia, last modified December 7, 2020, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/agriculture/farm-laws-2020-who-are-they-meant-to-serve--74540>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

agriculture is becoming less diverse and more expensive for the government to subsidize. It was an unexpected and added struggle that Indian Farmers faced for almost two years. Their protests against these bills affirm that they are willing to take extra steps to overcome any struggle.

Despite their unwavering determination to overcome obstacles for the betterment of their families, the challenges faced by farmers on a daily basis can be truly devastating. Although they have the willingness to endure the hardships that come with farming, the challenges they face can take a heavy toll on their lives and livelihoods. From unpredictable weather patterns and natural disasters to crop failures and market fluctuations, farmers often find themselves struggling to make ends meet, and the strain can be unbearable. Despite their resilience, it is clear that more support is needed to ensure that farmers can continue to provide for their families and contribute to their communities.

### **1.3 Causes of Grief and Suicide Among the Indian Farmers**

The causes of Indian farmers' grief are listed under three main sections in this chapter. They are, a) Grief caused by crop failure due to ecological crisis, b) Social causes of farmers' suffering and grief (Caste-system and sharecropping System), and c) The grief caused by debt and its effect on the survivors of farmers' Suicide.

#### **1.3.1 Grief Caused by Crop Failure Due to Ecological Crisis**

India is a country with a highly diverse climate and geography, which makes agriculture a challenging and risky livelihood for many people. Climate variations in different parts of India, including fluctuations in temperature, rainfall, and extreme weather conditions, can have a significant impact on agricultural productivity and food security. Many farmers in India rely on agriculture as their main source of income, and the majority of the Indian population still lives in rural areas. These farmers face different challenges depending on their specific location

and the crops they grow. For example, farmers in dry regions may struggle with drought and water scarcity, while those in flood-prone areas may face crop damage from heavy rainfall.

Despite these challenges, farmers across India share a common struggle in adapting to changing climate conditions and maintaining their livelihoods. The effects of climate change on agriculture can have far-reaching consequences.

George Kodithottam S.J. in his article entitled “The Climate Crisis and Its Impact on the Environment and the Marginalized Population in the Indian Subcontinent.”, brings to our attention the humanly-caused ecological crises in India. He adds that the poor are the most affected by calamities or ecological crises.<sup>11</sup> There is an alarming suicidal rate among the farmers and daily wage earners in India because of the debt caused by crop failures from the ecological crises.

As mentioned above, Indian agriculture is highly climate-sensitive. Climate variations (floods, droughts, global warming, etc) make farming very risky. Many of the farmers take loans for preparing the soil but because of climate change, the crops mostly fail. George notes,

“Farming has become economically so dangerous that some of the farmers are committing suicide. Studies suggest that rising temperatures increase the suicide rate through an agricultural channel of lowered crop yield that leads to income insecurity. Suicides by farmers, taking place in increasing numbers, are the starkest manifestation of India’s agrarian crisis.”<sup>12</sup>

The farmers from different parts of India are affected by different consequences of ecological crises. In some places, crops are destroyed because of drought, in other places, destruction comes from heavy rain and flood.

India is the world's second-most populous country, and its rapidly growing population has put significant pressure on natural resources and increased vulnerability to climate change

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<sup>11</sup> George Kodithottam S.J. “The climate crisis and its impact in the environment and the marginalized population in the Indian subcontinent.” (Boston College: TMCE 80002, (Course Material), 2021), 110

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 110.

impacts. The Indian economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, which is vulnerable to climate change impacts such as droughts and floods. India is undergoing rapid urbanization, which has led to the destruction of natural ecosystems and increased vulnerability to climate change impacts such as floods and heat waves. Climate change is causing a rise in temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and increasing the intensity of extreme weather events, which are all contributing to the climate change impacts being felt in India.

A combination of geographical location, topography, population density, agriculture dependency, urbanization, and climate change caused by human greed is making India more vulnerable to various climate changes like floods and droughts. Some of the highly stressed effects of ecological crises faced by vulnerable Indian farmers are discussed in this section.

#### a. Unstable and Unpredictable Rainfall and Temperature Patterns

The reduction in crop diversity is a result of unstable and changing rainfall and temperature patterns. The total amount of precipitation in India has dramatically decreased, which is of concern because more than half of India's farmland relies on rainfall systems. The increasing temperature patterns of almost 1°C have led to changes in seasons of productivity, which also changes the supply of agricultural goods and sale costs.<sup>13</sup>

In recent years, the farmers in India have not been able to rely on rainfall. It is unsteady and unpredictable. The farmers in many parts of India have to use diesel pumps to irrigate their crops. Many sugarcane farmers in the northern part of India have complained that the sugarcane has no juice because of its stunted growth and dry yellow leaves caused by the lack of water. It is important to state that not only extreme rainfall but also intense heat and extreme cold

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<sup>13</sup> Z. Imran, "Climate Change in the Indian Farmers' Protest," New Security Beat, last modified February 4, 2021, <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2021/02/climate-change-indian-farmers-protest/>.

degrade the quality of the sugarcane juice and the overall quality of the final sugar product.<sup>14</sup> Millions of Indian farmers are suffering from the onslaught of climate change. More intense and longer droughts and floods, caused by climate change, are destroying their crops and plunging millions of farmers and their families into debt while creating dangerous working conditions.

In 2022, India suffered an extreme heatwave and recorded the hottest March in the last 122 years. Maharashtra recorded temperatures of over 46C and in Banda district in Uttar Pradesh temperatures reached 49C. According to a Lancet report, heat-related deaths of people over 65 years increased by 55% in India from 2000-2004 to 2017-2021. Following the heatwave, Maharashtra experienced heavy downpours [in July and October], which damaged many sugarcane crops..... In Uttar Pradesh, there were drought-like conditions until mid-September and “then we suddenly had heavy rain.”<sup>15</sup>

Agriculture requires stable weather. The current extreme weather changes are very harmful to farming. It adds great uncertainty and anxiety to the farmers.

#### Flood- A Case Study from Bihar, India

In recent years, floods wreak havoc in Bihar, causing extensive losses and deaths. This year, 7.54 lakh hectares of agricultural land have been destroyed. In 2018, the same figure was only 0.34 lakh hectares, and even last year was 2.61 lakh hectares. In fact, since independence, floods in Bihar have affected 2.24 million hectares of agricultural land in all and precipitated losses worth Rs 768.38 crore between 1953 and 2017. The districts most affected by the floods this year were Sitamarhi, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, East Champaran, Samastipur, and Saran. They had been facing flood threats due to surging water levels in the Gandak, Boorhi Gandak, Bagmati, and Lakhandei rivers, as well as the Adhwara group of rivers. The pressure from floods also destroyed half a dozen embankments along the Gandak

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<sup>14</sup> Arvind, Shukla, et al., "India's Sugarcane Farmers Struggle to Cope with Droughts and Floods," Climate Home News, last modified December 16, 2022, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/12/16/indias-sugarcane-farmers-struggle-to-cope-with-droughts-and-floods/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

and Boorhi Gandak rivers. The annual floods typically affect large swathes of north Bihar, through which more than three dozen rivers. Most of them originated in Nepal.<sup>16</sup>

Shashi Bhushan is a small-scale farmer from Ota village in the Mokama Assembly segment of Patna district, Bihar, part of the state's Taal region, a local name for the area spanning several districts. He mentions that the annual flood has brought lots of struggles to the people of the area. They are becoming poorer and poorer by the day. He adds that if a farmer from India is driven to commit suicide, then that farmer probably has is from this region.<sup>17</sup> Despite all these struggles, the farmers of this area do not give up. Annual floods not only destroy their crops but also their future and their hopes; yet they continue to strive, for their family. Mokama's Taal region is popularly known as the "lentil bowl" of Bihar. The route from Nalanda to Mokama passes through several agricultural regions, but most of them are underwater. The irony is that the residents of this region are forced to purchase lentils instead of producing them due to severe waterlogging in their fields. The fields resemble vast rivers and lakes, a consequence of annual flooding.<sup>18</sup>

Along the banks of the Ganga, about 1.06 lakh hectares of agricultural fields in Lakhimpura (popularly Known as Kisan Taal), Patna, Sheikhpura, and Nalanda districts are annually submerged by flooding. Pulses are the crops of choice in these parts. Normally, the receding waters leave behind fertile soil and farmers would then sow their crops. This generally happens before October 15, and farmers would get good yields, without much need for fertilizers or water. But in the last few years, the floodwaters haven't receded in time. This October, for instance, the fields remained submerged, the water waist-high in some places, and

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<sup>16</sup> Manoj Singh, "Floods in Bihar Destroyed 7.54 Lakh Hectares of Agricultural Land This Year," The Wire, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://thewire.in/environment/floods-bihar-agricultural-land>.

<sup>17</sup> Basant Kumar, "In Bihar's 'lentil Bowl' Region, Farmers Struggle for Income and Livelihood," News laundry, last modified October 30, 2020, <https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/10/30/in-bihars-lentil-bowl-region-farmers-struggle-for-income-and-livelihood>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

farmers said that there will be no crop this year and the government has paid no attention to the Taal region.<sup>19</sup> The farmers feel that the Taal region earlier had never been without a crop. But in the last few years, this region is underwater and they were not able to cultivate anything at all. Some of them feel that they have no other option besides killing themselves. However, they do not want to give up because they somehow want to support their families, despite this pathetic situation.

#### b. Low Production and Forced Usage of Pesticides

There are several reasons why farmers in India are forced to use insecticides and pesticides. One of the primary reasons is the ecological crisis that has affected agricultural production in the country. Dramatic environmental changes have reduced crop productivity, the soil has become depleted of nutrients, and pests and diseases have become more prevalent, reducing crop yields and farmers are struggling to make ends meet. To cope with these losses, farmers have intensified the use of pesticides and herbicides, which include those that have been deemed unsafe for use due to the potential negative health outcomes.<sup>20</sup> Most farmers felt that using strong pesticides is not only highly effective, but it is also the only viable option available at the moment. Therefore, despite significant health concerns, farmers have turned to insecticides and pesticides to protect their crops from pests and diseases. The use of these chemicals has led to several negative consequences, including the development of resistance among pests, the destruction of beneficial insects, and the contamination of water and soil.

In addition to this, the high cost of agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers and seeds, has pushed farmers to use cheaper but more harmful chemicals. Lack of knowledge about safe and

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> V. Chaudhary, "The Indian State Where Farmers Sow the Seeds of Death," *The Guardian*, last modified July 1, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/01/the-indian-state-where-farmers-sow-the-seeds-of-death>.

sustainable farming practices, poor access to credit and markets, and inadequate government support have also contributed to the widespread use of insecticides and pesticides.

The ecological crisis and other socio-economic factors have created a situation where farmers in India feel compelled to use insecticides and pesticides to protect their crops and livelihoods, despite the negative consequences for their health, the environment, and society as a whole.

#### Forced Usage of Pesticides - A case Study from Punjab, India

In Punjab, a major agricultural state in India, an opioid drug epidemic has resulted from in response to the debt farmers face.<sup>21</sup> Sadly, farmers in India face an impossible choice between using pesticides that make them sick or risking crop failure. Punjab also has the highest cancer rates in India, which is attributable to the prevalence of carcinogens in pesticides.<sup>22</sup> India's farming is heading toward a dangerous future. Due to the excessive use of chemicals, the poison has started reaching underground sources of water. Records show that there is 50 percent rise in cancer rates within the next decade due to the use of agrochemicals.<sup>23</sup> There is also the widespread social suffering of suicide, in which India's farming community faces one of the highest suicide rates in the country.<sup>24</sup> While farmers in India work to provide food for the entire country, which comes at the price of compromising their own mental and physical health. Climate change is causing crop failures and economic ruin, and the unsustainability of the industry has led to the debt. The lack of financial and social support for

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Nishant Sainia, "Pesticides Are Killing India's Farmers," Earth Island Journal, last modified August 31, 2022, <https://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/articles/entry/agricultural-chemicals-are-killing-indian-farmers/>.

<sup>24</sup> G. Arora, "Tracking impacts of poverty and climate change on the farmer's body," last modified November 19, 2021, n.d.<https://ghe.uwo.ca/blog/posts/tracking-impacts-poverty-climate-change-farmers-body.html>.

India's farmers has intensified the effects of climate change on lower-class farmers over the course of time through the collective suffering of cancer, drug use, suicide, and other health problems.

The sufferings of farmers in India are an example to understand the connection between climate change and poverty. The farmers' protest in India was not a simple issue of protesting in response to the new bills and policy changes. The environmental crisis plays an integral role in both the development of these new bills and the social suffering that farmers face.

### c. Destruction and Grief Caused by the Wild Animals

Farmers in India constantly make many efforts to save their crops from the dangers of pests, disease outbreaks, floods, drought, and unseasonal rain. While facing all these dangers, however, crop destruction by wild animals still goes on in many parts of India. Many farmers from various states in India have to struggle to protect their crops from the time of planting to harvesting. The forests destruction and lack of food in the forests result in the entry of wild animals into human habitats and the destruction of the farms. It is also a serious ecological crisis that the farmers in some parts of India have to face. The following notes from one of the farmers from Maharashtra, India describe the struggle and grief of poor farmers in protecting the crop from the wild animals.

whether your farm is fenced with barbed wire, solar fence or chain-link fence, you have to deal with the destruction of wild animals like Nil gay (wild cow), wild boar, monkeys, deer and rabbits. This fence can protect the crop to some extent, but it is not a permanent solution. There have been many incidents of wild boar digging a hole under the fence, and animals like Nil gay easily entering the field over the 5-6 feet high fence and damaging crops.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rushikesh Kalokar, "Farmers-wildlife Conflict and Laws in Maharashtra," Times of India Blog, last modified October 12, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/socialfront/farmers-wildlife-conflict-and-laws-in-maharashtra-45658/>.

It is to be noted that the cost of fencing is not affordable for a common farmer. Therefore, farmers from these areas have no other option other than guarding their fields. Such farmers have to work in the field throughout the day and may have to guard the farm the whole night. A few cases are known where the farmers had to face attacks from wild animals and being bitten by snakes while guarding their farms. "Many people suffer from crop damage caused by wild animals, but 90% of farmers in under the 'Eco-Sensitive Zone', 'Buffer Zone' around forest areas suffer from damage caused by wild animals."<sup>26</sup> Mostly, the farmers from the regions of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tami Nadu, Kerala, and Jharkhand have to face these challenges created by the wild animals.

#### Attacks by Wild Animals - Case Study from the Context of Kerala, India

The conflict between animals and humans has increased in Kerala over the last 10 years, resulting in deaths and injuries to farmers close to the forest areas and damage to crops. Such cases are happening not only in Kerala but also in many other states of India.

Records show that 1,233 people have lost their lives to wild animal attacks since 2011 just in Kerala. The Wayanad and Palakkad districts are particularly prone to wild animal attacks, but all thirteen districts of Kerala except Alappuzha have a history of such attacks, including damage to crops.<sup>27</sup>

Unofficial studies show increasing number of wild animals and reduction of food and water sources due to increasing numbers of exotic species displacing the native varieties in the forest.<sup>28</sup> These foreign species lead to wild animals invading human habitats and destroying the crops of poor farmers for food.

Recent newspaper accounts report shows that the number of attacks by elephants, tigers, and wild boars has increased in the state. The Department of Forest has attributed the rise to an increase in the number of wild animals, which has occurred because of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> A Neelambaran , "Human-Animal Conflict Increasing in Kerala, Farmers Demand Scientific Measures for Prevention," News Click, last modified January 21, 2023, <https://www.newsclick.in/human-animal-conflict-increasing-kerala-farmers-demand-scientific-measures-prevention>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

conservation policies and strict implementation of anti-poaching laws. But farmers are in the firing line and are craving the attention of the central and state governments.<sup>29</sup> The lack of provisions for compensating for the loss of lives and crop damages haunts the farmers, forcing them to withdraw from farming.

The farmers suffer from elephant herd threats. Tiger attacks are rampant in Wayanad, with the number of lives lost increasing to 6 in the last eight years. Recently a 51-year-old farmer died of tiger attack injuries in Suthan Bathery in the district. The government of Kerala announced a solatium of Rs 5 lakh to the family of the deceased. The forest department has recorded a whopping 34,785 wild animal attacks since 2011, leading to 1,233 deaths and 6,803 injuries. In the last 15 years, around 1,500 people have lost their lives in human-animal conflict-related incidents.<sup>30</sup>

Strict implementation of laws to protect forests and wild animals has increased the animal population, which in turn has increased the risk of wild animals attacking farmers and farmlands. The government is less receptive to the issues faced by such farmers. The major reason for the wild animals coming to human habitats is the destruction of their own forest resources; the destruction has led to a lack of sufficient food and water within the forests for wildlife.<sup>31</sup> Farmers in the affected areas are living under extreme stress and mental trauma. This serious situation demands immediate relief and a permanent solution. We can assume that ultimately, the problem is caused by greed-based environmental destruction that contributes to farmers' suffering and grief.

The list of the effects of climate change on the agriculture industry is long, but the few examples cited above depict the linkage between climate change and poverty. These trends drive the lower class and poor communities to become even poorer. In India, the reduction in crop productivity and unsustainability of the agriculture industry has led to a reduction in the profit margins of farmers. The environmental changes even force many farmers are growing the same crops because they are less risky to grow given the unpredictable weather, and this

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

has led to overproduction of certain crops, which has increased competition and decreased their sale value.<sup>32</sup> Such trends add stress on small scale farmers as they find it difficult to sell their product. Very often they do not get any profit. At the same time, agricultural productivity loss has resulted in financial strain on governments. Despite implementing programs to aid farmers such as free electricity and subsidized fertilizer, it is still not possible to sustain agricultural practices given the changing weather patterns.<sup>33</sup> The poor are the most vulnerable and experience the most intense effects of climate change.

### 1.3.2 Social Causes of Farmers' Suffering and Grief

According to N K Bose the relationship of caste and occupation in India, was the basic design of pre-British Hindu society. Thus, a person's economic opportunities were determined to a large extent by birth into a particular caste. Bose was of the opinion that this design remained in force till the colonisation of India by the British.<sup>34</sup> The caste-system or *Varna* (color or caste) system in Hinduism is a social hierarchical structure. It consists of four *Varnas* or classes namely Brahmins (priestly class), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (businessmen) and Shudras (servants).<sup>35</sup> The Brahmins are considered to be superior to all other castes. They have always maintained their ritual purity and social prominence in the hierarchical structure. The Shudras, on the other hand, always remained serving the other three caste groups. The unequal social status of the Shudras was justified from the religious Vedic laws of Manu called the *Manusmriti*. Manu states that the four *Varnas* were divinely ordained from the very beginning. From the mouth of the Self-Existent One - the God of creation, came the Brahmins, from his arms came the Kshatriyas, from his thighs came the Vaishyas, and from his feet the Sudras.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Z. Imran, "Climate Change in the Indian Farmers' Protest," *New Security Beat*, last modified February 4, 2021, <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2021/02/climate-change-indian-farmers-protest/>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Anand Chakravarti, "Caste and Agrarian Class A View from Bihar", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No. 17 (Apr. 28 - May 4, 2001), pp. 1449-1462, 1451.

<sup>35</sup> Sagarika Ghose, "The Dalit in India," *Social Research*, Vol.70, no. 1 (Spring 2003):84.

<sup>36</sup> John C B Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (ISPCK: Delhi, 2007), 3.

Those who came from the feet of the creator God were low and impure. The degree of purity and pollution and occupation played a central role in the caste-system and in Hinduism itself. The Dalits were even considered to be set apart from all these castes on account of their being born outside the body of the creator and “almost a different species” from the Self-Existent one.<sup>37</sup> Therefore they are considered as outcast people.

The word ‘Dalit’ means “broken, oppressed, crushed [under foot], split, opened, downtrodden, destroyed, torn apart and burst.” It comes from the Sanskrit term *dal* which means “to oppress, crack, break or tear asunder.”<sup>38</sup> The meaning of the term reflects the Dalits’ social, economic, emotional and spiritual brokenness and powerlessness that has persisted for centuries. High-caste groups looked down at them as ‘unclean’ from birth, polluting socially and ritually. Therefore, they were called ‘acchuts’ which means ‘untouchables.’<sup>39</sup> They could never escape the status of being perpetually unclean and polluting because of their birth in a particular caste group. Concern about pollution in the caste-system kept the Dalits away from public spaces like public wells, temples and many other public places. They have been pushed to a lower status in society through enforced poverty and degradation. As a result, they could never raise their voice in society.

The typical connection between caste and occupation has changed in many parts of India caused by factors such as the expansion of a cash economy, industrialisation, the spread of education, and the growth of occupations based on impersonal qualifications rather than hereditary caste status. However, it is a sad reality even today at least in some parts of India where caste plays an important role in the occupations and social status.

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<sup>37</sup> Sagarika Ghose, 84.

<sup>38</sup> Dionysius Rasquinha, *Towards Wholeness from Brokenness: The Dalit Quest* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 82.

<sup>39</sup> Sagarika Ghose, 87.

From this standpoint Bihar (a northern state in India) continues to conform even today to the basic design of traditional Hindu society, primarily due to its dismal economic situation. Because the state of Bihar as a whole is economically backward in this respect it has been deemed as 'the most backward' in the country.<sup>40</sup>

In Bihar, caste and land control are closely connected. According to Anand Chakravarti, the landless Dalits often become the victims of exploitation by the dominant class as labourers or as landless farmers who have to lease land for cultivation.

It should be remembered that this oppressive scenario is compounded for the landless because the character of the economy does not offer much scope for employment outside agriculture - be it industry or the service sector. Thus, one's birth into a landless caste would be the major determinant for being at the receiving end of a relationship of exploitation. It is important to underscore the fact that the present pattern of land control, or of landlessness, is, broadly speaking, a legacy of the colonial period, although it may have operated in earlier times too.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike the other parts of India, in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, by and large, landholders belonged to the upper castes. These dominant groups exercise the power over the subordinate tenantry and agricultural labourers. The 'untouchables' (dalits) were barred from holding land and were compelled to work as landless labourers.<sup>42</sup> Many of the underprivileged group in the northern part of India are either condemned to labour for others or depend on others for the lease of even a small tract of land from the higher caste landlord.

The landless Dalits typically cultivate the land of a landowner of a dominant caste in a sharecropping agreement of providing all the inputs and they undertake the actual tasks and risks of cultivation. In principle they are entitled to half the produce and the other half is payable to the landholder as rent. The Dalits who take the land for lease and cultivate have to face all the challenges and stresses that could lead to crop failure. The dominant caste groups do not

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<sup>40</sup> Anand Chakravarti, 1451.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,1451.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.,1451.

need to worry about it. They can sit back and enjoy half of the crop even if the landless farmer ends in loss. They also take out loans at heavy interest from the landlords themselves to meet their cultivation needs. The sad reality is that even if these farmers experience crop failure and huge losses, they still have to pay a fixed amount instead of the half crop sharing, excluding the loan payment. It leads the Dalits into a continuous dependence dependency on the higher class and the dominant group continues to enjoy the profits and benefits at the cost of the Dalits. “There is a high probability that many of them were indebted to their respective employers, and were therefore obliged to work exclusively for the latter as unfree labourers.”<sup>43</sup> Many of these landless farmers have to go through much higher challenges, leading to more suffering and stress than farmers in the other parts of the country.

After having informal conversations with several poor farmers from Taal region in Bihar, I sense that in Inia there is much grief, struggles, anxieties and hopelessness farmers face. Many of them worry that they will not be able to sow crops on time because of flood water. The people in this region depend on the crop of pulse for their livelihood. Every farmer is struggling. As they see matters, if the seed is sown within this period, the yields are good. If the seed is sown later, then the yield becomes significantly less, and sometimes the crop does not come to fruition. Many of them are helpless and express their concern how would they get money for their children’s education and weddings without farming. Even if they are not able to cultivate and harvest anything, they still have to pay rent to the landlord for the leased land. Their debt increases day by day. Many of them worry that if the situation continues then their children will not be able to study and will be forced to work as laborers. Some of them were also complaining about the silence of the government in supporting these farmers. A few of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1452.

them struggle even to feed their families. All of them say that even if there is no hope, they do not want to end their lives; for there is no one to look after their families if they die.

### **1.3.3 Grief Caused by Debt and its Effect on the Survivors of Farmers' Suicide**

There is an alarming spike in farmers' suicides in India. According to the World Health Organization, India has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, with an estimated 170,000 people taking their lives each year.<sup>44</sup> It is assumed that everyday about 48 (between 30-50) farmers in India commit suicide.<sup>45</sup> Small-scale farmers are faced with multiple challenges like high production costs, crop failure and price fluctuations. These small-scale farmers had to take out loans for inputs because they were expensive and cannot afford them. They cannot predict the price of the crops once harvested or what the weather is going to be like. Thus, when the price of the crops takes a downturn, the farmers do not have earnings to pay out loans used to buy inputs.<sup>46</sup> It results heavy debt and stress upon them. As most of the farmers do not have another source of income, they are obliged to take out more loans, incurring more debts, to purchase inputs in attempts of trying to repay the previous debts. In this case, they found themselves drowning in debts they cannot repay. This resulted in male farmers taking out their lives, leaving their debts to their wives and children.<sup>47</sup>

Although many farmers in India commit suicide because of the unbearable mental pain and hopelessness, that is not completely true with all the instances of farmers' suicides in India. There are many Indian farmers who end their lives, hoping that their death would bring compensation to their surviving family and take away their family's misery. They end their

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<sup>44</sup> Gunisha Kaur, "Opinion: The Country Where 30 Farmers Die Each Day," CNN, last modified March 17, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/17/opinions/india-farmer-suicide-agriculture-reform-kaur/index.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "The Struggle of a Smallholder Indian Farmer," UKEssays - UK Essays United States, last modified November 2018, <https://us.ukessays.com/essays/india/the-struggle-of-a-smallholder-indian-farmer.php?vref=1>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

lives hoping that the compensation given to family after their death would help the surviving family to pay back the debt and have a secured income. However, in most of cases the family of the deceased farmer do not receive the adequate amount of compensation, because of the corrupted government system.

The news about the farmers' suicide in India have been hitting the headlines of the newspapers for several years now. Though the Government admitted that crop failure, economic distress and indebtedness are the reason for farmers' suicide, there is very little is done for the welfare of the small-scale farmers.<sup>48</sup> The governments in various state in India decided to compensate about 2 lakhs rupees as compensation to family of the farmer who have died by suicide.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the intention to end their lives is for saving their families from debt and poverty; not as an escapism from their struggles. Tragically, very often the surviving families do not receive sufficient compensation due to the corruption in the government system and long procedures. The lives of the survivors become worse. The people left behind families affected by the epidemic of farmer suicides are elderly parents, wives and children. They share their immense grief in the wake of a death. The debt passed from one deceased son to another or to the wife, resulting in the possibilities of multiple suicides in one family.<sup>50</sup> The widow of the farmer or the son has to struggle to take care of the children. Their grief and struggle increase in many ways. A farmer's suicide leaves behind enormous challenges to the survivors

The trauma of losing a loved one to suicide is "catastrophic".<sup>51</sup> The grief process is always difficult. It is shocking, painful, unexpected, and adds more challenging for several

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<sup>48</sup> Lakhwinder Singh, Kesar S. Bhangoo, and Rakesh Sharma, *Agrarian Distress and Farmer Suicides in North India* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2019), 22.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>50</sup> Gunisha Kaur, "Opinion: The Country Where 30 Farmers Die Each Day," CNN, last modified March 17, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/17/opinions/india-farmer-suicide-agriculture-reform-kaur/index.html>.

<sup>51</sup> PB Behere and MC Bhise, "Farmers' suicide: Across culture," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 51, no. 4 (2009): 256, doi:10.4103/0019-5545.58286.

reasons.<sup>52</sup> Sometimes, the response to grief is marked by severe and prolonged distress.<sup>53</sup> Some cultures in India, consider the widow, as a bad omen and blames her for the death and misfortune in the family. In some cultures, the widows are forced into isolation from their community and even from other functions of their own families. The survivors may also blame themselves for failing to predict the death and to have effectively intervened.<sup>54</sup> Rejection and lack of support from society and family increase the risk of survivors' suicide syndrome. Findings from various researches demonstrate that the suicide rates in young widowed persons were much higher than the suicide rates in older widowed persons.<sup>55</sup> However, looking at the Indian realities, the widows of such farmer cannot simply end their lives. They have to fulfil their responsibilities of taking care of their children, seeing to their education, caring for elderly parents, and maintaining the farm and its buildings. Many of them have little time to spent grieving over the death of their loved ones. The death of the farmer in no way reduces the burden of debt, crop failure or poverty. It increases the burden and pain of the family. The survivors of farmers' suicides also do not want to give up, but to fight against the opposing currents in their lives.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

Farmers' protest still remains as a symbol of the grief and struggle of the small-scale farmers in India. The climate change caused by the human greed leads to crop failure and poverty which intensifies the gap between the upper and lower classes. The lower class is driven to experience increased financial instability, manifested in health issues and social suffering, both physically and mentally. The past experiences indicate that the NGOs and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>53</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>54</sup> PB Behere and MC Bhise, 257.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 257.

politicians mainly attempt to fix these issues only at the surface level; however, without policies addressing root causes like climate change and their contribution to failing systems, this will continue to harm the most vulnerable, especially the farmers, the Dalits and the poor.

It is a sad reality that many farmers in rural India often do not receive the full benefits of government policies due to a variety of factors, including corruption and inadequacies in the system. One major issue is corruption in the distribution of subsidies and other forms of government assistance. In many cases, government officials or middlemen may siphon off funds meant for farmers or manipulate the allocation process, resulting in only a fraction of the intended benefits reaching the intended recipients. Another problem is the lack of adequate infrastructure and logistical support for implementing government policies. For example, the distribution of fertilizers, seeds, and other inputs may be hindered by inadequate transportation, storage facilities, or communication networks, leading to delays or inefficiencies in the distribution process. There may also be bureaucratic hurdles and red tape involved in accessing government benefits, such as complex application processes or lengthy approval times. This can discourage farmers from seeking assistance or create opportunities for corruption and exploitation. Sometimes, political factors may also play a role in determining the distribution of government benefits. In some cases, certain regions or communities may be prioritized over others based on electoral considerations, rather than on the actual needs of farmers. All these factors contribute to a situation where many farmers in India do not receive the full benefits of government policies, despite the availability of resources and funding. Addressing these underlying issues will be crucial to ensure that farmers are able to access the support they need to improve their livelihoods and contribute to the sustainable development of the agricultural sector.

Unhealed and untreated sickness or injury or an unpaid debt or suicides of among farmers always remain as symbols of the problems a farmer's family in India faces. One of the dire effects is financial instability. No farmer is able to escape the hardships of farming and the continuous struggles discussed in this chapter. Any loss can be painful and adds grief and hopelessness. The small-scale farmers in India experience loss of their crops, stable income, livelihood, education of their children, dignity and hope. With all these losses most never give up. There are farmers' protest going on different parts of India, which is a sign that they want to fight bravely against the challenges and injustices they face. Farmers' fight is not for themselves but to support their families and country.

This grief of the farmer is a direct consequence of injustice. This grief is preventable.<sup>56</sup> The causes for Farmer's struggles in India discussed in the chapter are the outcome of human greed and exploitation. Therefore, there is an urgent need to respond to these suffering of the farmers as Christians in India. There are a few farmers who have been able to achieve success by adopting specific models. However, that is not true with majority of the small-scale farmers in India. There are initiatives that have been taken in certain parts of India that have contributed to the well-being of farmers who are struggling. In conclusion, In the last chapter, I will be discussing about these initiatives which have the potential to bring positive change and transform the lives of many farmers.

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<sup>56</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, 15.

## Chapter 2

### **Being Vulnerable and Recognizing: Resources for prompting solidarity with the grieving Farmers**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the biblical and ethical resources that may prompt recognition and solidarity with vulnerable Indian farmers and survivors of farmers' suicide. This chapter considers discipleship as the primary resource for being in solidarity with grieving farmers. The concept of being a disciple and following the lead of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. Every follower of Jesus is called to live a life in accordance with his teachings and example, seeking to love and serve others in the same way that he did.

This chapter takes into account the parable of the Good Samaritan as one of the powerful resources of this kind of discipleship for responding to the marginalized farmers in India. The Good Samaritan's actions embody the teachings of Jesus and serve as an example for the followers of Christ. This example is also reflected in this chapter in the ladder of the ascent of the Beatitudes and the major virtues. These qualities are essential for discipleship, as they help us to cultivate the kind of humility, compassion, and love that Jesus demonstrated throughout his life. Similarly, this chapter also explores major virtues that are essential for following the lead of Jesus as his disciples for being in solidarity with grieving farmers in India. Finally, this chapter concludes, by reflecting that the disciples of Jesus are called to be self-emptying, prophetic, and service-oriented, as Jesus taught. This requires humility, compassion, and a willingness to set aside our own needs and desires in order to care for others. By doing so, we can help to create a world that is more just, more compassionate, and more in line with God's vision for humanity.

Every Christian (disciple) is supposed to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Therefore, his chapter seeks to motivate Christians in India for living a life based on discipleship with Christ

and as a corollary, the development of virtues. The primary aim of this chapter is to encourage virtuous behavior among the Christians in India (disciples of Christ), so that they may respond and stand with the vulnerable farmers in India and all others who suffer.

## 2.2 Discipleship

Discipleship is the primary identity for anyone who wants to recognize and show solidarity with the people. A disciple needs to respond daily to the call of Jesus Christ, imitate him, and grow in identification with him. In order to understand what is to be a disciple of Jesus, we must look into the approach of the historical Jesus. It is within this context that we can speak about following Jesus in obedience and love, dedicating our lives to God's kingdom. According to Keenan, "the call to the moral life is a call of disciples to walk in the way of the Lord, which is a summons for true participation in the life of Jesus."<sup>57</sup> Keenan affirms Tillmann's insight that Jesus himself is the model and motive of the possibility for our following him. Our moral life and call to discipleship can be shaped by our participation in the life of Jesus who teaches us to love. Jesus' commandment to love God and love our neighbor appears in different forms in Matthew 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; and Luke 10:25–28.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, we can affirm that the primary quality a disciple should have been a loving heart.

The central theme of the New Testament is that Jesus as the Messiah came to this world as a vulnerable human being to establish God's kingdom on earth. "Jesus' idea of the kingdom of God was a radical message in his day in that a worldly king and kingdom were surrounded by pomp and pageantry. The kingdom introduced by Jesus, however, was defined by love, submission, humility, and peace."<sup>59</sup> The self-emptying (kenosis) of Jesus (Phil. 2:5-7) describes the humility and mission focus of historical Jesus' life and mission. Through his life

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<sup>57</sup> James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2022),18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>59</sup> Israel Oluwale Olofinjana, *Discipleship, Suffering, and Racial Justice: Mission in a Pandemic World Book*, (Published by 1517 Media, Fortress Press2021),17-18. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2nv8pxp>.

and mission, Jesus taught that those who want to be great must become a servant in order to be effective leaders (Mark 10:34-45). Every follower of Jesus must look at the teachings of Jesus in order to imitate him. Every word and action of Jesus highlights the virtues that every disciple must have.

Keenan reflects in depth the three questions posed by Alsdair MacIntyre in his book titled, *After Virtue*<sup>60</sup>. Those three questions are 1) Who am I? 2) Who do I want to become? 3) How am I going to get there? In order to answer these questions, Keenan focuses on discipleship and the virtues.<sup>61</sup> These questions help the persons to position themselves in the proper perspective and approach for preparing themselves to be true disciples of Christ.

According to Keenan, the answer to the first question must be a disciple of Jesus Christ, made in the image and likeness of God.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the primary identity of a Christian is that of a disciple. It is that identity which puts one not only in relationship with Jesus but also with other disciples because following Jesus is done in the community.<sup>63</sup> It is important to look at the view of Fritz Tillman that a Christian pursuit of good has to be within the frame work of being a disciple of Jesus.<sup>64</sup> Tillman argues that the primary sacrament for moral theology is baptism, not penance. Through Baptism every Christian is recreated and graced with the Holy Spirit to live as a child of God. According to him, Baptism provides all that is needed for living a moral life, which is a call to walk in discipleship with Jesus and to constantly grow in love of God, neighbour and self.<sup>65</sup> It is important to be aware that the call of discipleship is for every baptized Christian; it is not intended exclusively for religious and clerics. This understanding

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 24.

<sup>61</sup> James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (Baltimore: 1995): 711, doi:10.1177/004056399505600405.

<sup>62</sup> Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 49.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>64</sup> James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

of discipleship is an inspiration for every Christian in India to respond to the needs of the suffering people, especially the farmers.

Keenan suggests that the key virtues possessed by historical Jesus were love, obedience, and mercy. Therefore, the question for each disciple should become: Do I love? Am I obedient? Am I merciful?<sup>66</sup> One needs to love God specifically and one's neighbor specifically as they really are. In the same way, each person must love oneself as one really is. According to Keenan, it is one thing to love Christ in Jack and another to love Jack himself.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, a disciple is invited to love God and the neighbors as they really are. The call to discipleship should be built on love. Otherwise, the mission of the disciple will only remain as a formality. There will not be any difference between the works of a co-operate and the works of a disciple unless these works are the result of love.

I agree with Keenan's insight that for Christians that it is not the denial of suffering and death, but the close experience of the loss and suffering of another that we are led by the Spirit as Jesus' disciples were led to not only recognize the risen Christ but to unhesitatingly preach him.<sup>68</sup> Every disciple must enter into the sufferings of others as Jesus taught during his public ministry.

A disciple of Jesus must truly follow Jesus. In the gospels, we see that Jesus empowers the social outcasts, the poor, and the downtrodden. In Luke's Gospel, the mission statement in the temple proclaims his empowering mission by giving sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:16-19). In the same Gospel, the poor are referred to as socially, economically, and politically oppressed groups (Luke 6:20-26).

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<sup>66</sup> James F. Keenan, *Moral wisdom*, 93.

<sup>67</sup> Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 91

<sup>68</sup> James F. Keenan, S.J., "Grieving in the Upper Room: Vulnerability, Recognition, Conscience and the Holy Spirit.", (Boston College: TMCE 80002, Course Material), 10.

“The Contemplation on the Incarnation Meditation” in *the Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola communicates the powerful message of God becoming one among the poor. It can be a most transformative and meaningful spiritual experience for anyone who wants to follow Jesus. A disciple should become part of the sufferings of the other. The poor farmers and other grieving people should feel that they are not alone.

According to Dionysius Rasquinha, “Jesus was the poor person who lived a life of actual poverty in full identification with the poor...and of spiritual poverty involving total dependence on God...In these ways, Jesus empowered the poor.”<sup>69</sup> The Incarnation of Jesus is an experience of overcoming distance and strangeness between God and humanity. It invites Jesus’ disciples to identify themselves with the poor and the marginalized.

The healing miracles of Jesus are important resources for the disciples to learn how Jesus dealt with the inhuman experience of untouchability. Jesus spoke, touched, lifted, ate and sat with people showing his sense of solidarity and oneness with the outcasts (Matthew 8:3, 9:10-11; Mark 5:41; Luke 19: 10). He restored the dignity of a person during his Sabbath healing (Mark 1:23-2:6), These is the ‘Good News’ that everyone who wants to be the disciple of Jesus must follow.

### **2.3 Parable of the Good Samaritan as a resource for recognition and solidarity (Luke 10:25-37)**

The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates the love of the neighbor as a suitable resource for the practice of mercy and recognition of vulnerable people in our context. The good Samaritan was able to recognize and share in the grief and pain of the person who was suffering. He did not consider the ethnicity and social status of the person. He simply recognized the person as a fellow human being who was suffering and stood by him. The parable of the Good Samaritan portrays neighbour-love definitively as the practice of mercy. Recognizing others as

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<sup>69</sup> Dionysius Rasquinha, 273.

neighbor prompts solidarity with grieving people. This parable is an example for how a Christian should act when they see people around are suffering. The Samaritan's example should not be understood merely as an ordinary spontaneous act of kindness. This neighbour-love is example for acting with courage, compassion, and generosity in boundary-breaking solidarity to care for those most in need. It is the expression of the greatest commandment, that is to love God, neighbor and oneself. The necessary quality of anyone who wants to follow Christ must "Go and do likewise" like the good Samaritan.

The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* challenges every follower of Jesus to be good Samaritans; in a world that is indifferent to responding to the sufferings of others. Pope Francis urges us not to reject the prophetic call to be good Samaritans by turning away from the suffering of others. Keenan adds that by the end of the story, we are no longer looking at the neighbor who is wounded but rather at the neighbor who is caring. The scribe, therefore, answers that the neighbor is the one who shows mercy. In the beginning, we think the parable is about whom we should assist. But in the end, it is really about who we are called to be. We are called to be like the Good Samaritan by becoming a caring neighbor.<sup>70</sup> Recognizing others as neighbors prompts everyone to recognize their vulnerability and grief, to accept them as fellow humans, and moreover, to show mercy. Opting to become a good neighbor will be the right step toward becoming a true disciple of Christ. This parable addresses the general kind of life a Christian disciple should live. It underlines the challenge in Jesus' teaching about how to follow the Samaritan's example in present times. The standard for neighbor love can be analogically applied according to the "signs of the times" today.

The general understanding of a neighbor is always referred as a person who lives nearby. The command to love one's neighbor, then, was a mandate to honor mutual attachments

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<sup>70</sup> James F. Keenan S.J., *Moral wisdom*, 118-119.

and entitlements in reciprocal relationships. Jesus' teaching and healing ministry expanded the circles of respect, right-relationship, and social cohesion. He invited his disciples to enlarge their social group as inclusively as possible.<sup>71</sup> The parable of the good Samaritan is an example of extending our circle of neighbor relationships. It implies the need of being close to the poor and the needy. Given the expanding networks of social, economic, and political interaction, "neighbor" takes on a more complex meaning today. Globalization and digital connections transform how we might define what it means to be "nearby."<sup>72</sup> Today, each person's context presents new challenges for caring for neighbors near and far who experience much suffering. The example of the good Samaritan helps us to understand what it means to be a loving neighbor and to show solidarity as Christians in their suffering. Being open towards Jesus' command to "Go and do likewise," can be the moral vision of Christian neighbor-love committed to solidarity.

The example of the good Samaritan can be considered as a moral lens for responding to the suffering of others by going near them. This parable helps us to widen, deepen, and improve our focus for accurately seeing, recognizing, and responding to the suffering of others. The Samaritan could only know how to help the robbers' victims by going to his side. In the same way, we can recognize and respond in our context of marginalization and injustice, only by going to the side of the people who suffer. There can be always a temptation to ignore their cries like the priest and Levite in the parable. Christian disciples continue to fall short in understanding the depth of its meaning or in regularly following Jesus' command to take up such courageous, compassionate, and boundary-breaking actions. However, Jesus challenges and invites every follower to practice neighbor love as the Samaritan in this parable.

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<sup>71</sup> Marcus Mescher, "Doing Likewise: A Theology of Neighbor and Pedagogy for Neighbor-Formation," (PhD diss., Boston College, 2013), 9.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

According to Keenan, in the Bible, love is not one virtue or command along with others. It is prior to everything: it comes first. It is the foundation of moral life.<sup>73</sup> Keenan invites us to look at the story of the good Samaritan as “a response to the experience of God’s love for us.”<sup>74</sup>

The closest thing to a definition of God in the Old Testament appears in Exodus 34:6: “A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” And the New Testament stresses God’s love for us revealed in Jesus: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he has loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). The persistent message of the Bible is that God has loved us first, and the proper response to God’s love for us is to love God and to love the neighbor.<sup>75</sup>

Jesus has already given us the greatest commandment as the proper response to God’s love which is to love God and to love one’s neighbor. Affirming the insights of Thomas Aquinas, Keenan explains that the love of God finds itself in “union.” It is a sense of being one with God. According to him, we enter into union with God in prayer. He considers the Eucharist as the central way we receive the love of God and God’s offer to enter into a union through love.<sup>76</sup> The love of God and the love of neighbor are interconnected. According to Keenan, we become capable of loving our neighbor only by receiving the love of God.<sup>77</sup> He adds,

Many people think that we love our neighbor because God commands it; that is only partially true. The more important insight is that God makes love of neighbor possible. We know that the clearest way to love our neighbor is to “show mercy.” That is after all the directive that Jesus gives at the end of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), wherein Jesus answers the scribe’s question: “And who is my neighbor?” That parable is key in the history of the Bible’s ability to form our behavior because it is there that we learn that the love of God makes possible our love of neighbor.<sup>78</sup>

We can assume that the center of the story is not the wounded person who needs help, but the Samaritan who was ready to show love and mercy. This story becomes an invitation and inspiration for Christians to become neighbors who are ready to love and show mercy. The story of the Good Samaritan is a resource for everyone to have an open heart and mind in order

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<sup>73</sup> James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, 18.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

to become a good neighbor who is ready to love. As mentioned earlier, only a person united with God can become a true neighbor to the people who are suffering.

#### **2.4 The Beatitudes as a Key for Prompting Solidarity (Matthew 5: 3 -12)**

The Beatitudes can be considered as a source of inspiration for the Christian communities and organizations in India helping them to accept their vulnerabilities and grief; and to stand at the side of the grieving people, especially suffering farmers. The Beatitudes emphasize the basic attitudes of the disciple who are invited to be in solidarity with others. The insight from Lucas Chan's book, *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life* offers a good approach to the Beatitudes, especially in accompanying people who are grieving. The Beatitudes can be effective examples for practicing the virtues of Charity, faith, and justice, by the act of mercy, solidarity, option for the poor, and so on.

According to Chan, in the first Beatitude, we all are invited to turn our gaze, on 'the poor in spirit' who are the poorest of the poor, economically deprived and socially alienated.<sup>79</sup> It is evidently seen in the gospels that Jesus historically identified himself with poor people and showed an active and effective concern towards them. Jesus always stood with those who have been rejected and thrown away by the main stream society. Jesus preached with his life that he loves, listens to and stands with the broken, the forgotten and the outcasts and invites every Christian to do so.

Turning our gaze to the poor in spirit means recognizing the suffering of the poor and marginalized in a broader sense, which includes not only the materially poor but also those isolated from others, who suffer because they are not recognized as suffering. These include in India the farmers, the destitute, the illiterate, the socially outcasted, the physically handicapped,

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<sup>79</sup> Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan, *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 161.

the mentally ill, and all the vulnerable ones. “The term ‘poor’ also refers to those who are in special need of God’s help (e.g., Psalm 12:5) and have nothing to rely upon except God (e.g., Amos 2:6-7).”<sup>80</sup> Our own experiences of helplessness and dependency in various life situations is indeed an experience of poverty. Such experience of poverty (helplessness and dependency) can be a grace and offers a lens for recognizing the helplessness and sufferings of others. Our own experiences are a prophetic call to take the side of the oppressed poor and challenge their oppressors. Our prophetic action is aimed at bringing liberation for both the oppressors and the oppressed.

Many theologians propose that humility is the most elementary virtue,<sup>81</sup> which anyone who wants to follow Christ must have. The first Beatitude invites the followers of Christ to empty themselves in order to identify with people who are vulnerable. A humble person can completely trust and can have faith and hope in God. In Ignatian terms self-emptiness points to detachment. Here detachment does not mean “not caring” but gives the follower of Christ interior freedom, and willingness to love God and neighbor, especially those who are suffering.<sup>82</sup> Humility prompts a sharing attitude. When we share all that we have received from God (our time, our wisdom, our knowledge, our talents, and other resources) in standing with vulnerable ones, we are able to rejoice and be happy.<sup>83</sup>

By making himself poor and by standing with the poor, Jesus has taught us to open our hearts and minds in the service of the most vulnerable ones. Mary, the mother of Jesus is also a true model of humility and obedience. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the members of the Missionaries of Charity can be a living example for the church in India.<sup>84</sup> Their simple lifestyle

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<sup>80</sup> George Griener and James F. Keenan, eds., *A Lúcas Chan Reader: Pioneering Essays on Biblical and Asian Theological Ethics*, (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2017), 45.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

and the service among the poorest of the poor is an inspiring example for practicing humility and for recognizing the poorest of the poor. Therefore, humility is the virtue for standing with the poor in spirit.

The practices of voluntary poverty and humility are truly praiseworthy. If the disciples of Jesus are not able to recognize and respond to the contemporary realities of injustices, poverty, sufferings of the farmers, and so on, then it can remain only as a romantic ideology. The virtue of humility must challenge every individual, organization, and church to share their resources with those who are suffering.

It is often said that human pride has the tendency to possess wealth and power and dominate and manipulate others. This tendency can often force others into poverty and injustice.<sup>85</sup> Such injustices and forced poverty are very evident in the sufferings of Indian farmers. Therefore, the virtue of humility can help individuals not only achieve inner transformation in their attitudes but also can be a step towards responding to these suffering by standing with the people who are suffering.

In the second Beatitude, “Blessed are they who mourn,” we actually recognize those who already are mourning. In this second macarism, Chan considers those who mourn are therefore like “The Lord who is close to the broken-hearted” wanting to respond to “those who are crushed in spirit,” as the Psalmist says (Psalm 38:14). It is a call to have the preferential option for the poor.<sup>86</sup> James F. Keenan, S.J, in his article titled, “*Grieving in the Upper Room: Vulnerability, Recognition, Conscience and the Holy Spirit*” stresses the insights of Chan on the Beatitudes as follows

Chan notes that this is not a command to mourn, but rather the recognition of those who already are mourning. Reading the beatitudes along with the exegetical claims of Hans Dieter Betz, William Davies and Dale Allison, Jr., as well as the theologian Gerald

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>86</sup> Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan, *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes*, 163-169.

Vann, Chan argues that “the object of mourning is not so much one’s own suffering or sins, but rather the concrete human experience of poverty and suffering encountered by community members,” that is, “the poor in spirit. Mourning points to an other-oriented moral value.” Chan adds, “it is about a certain disposition that genuine disciples have with one another, such that if one suffers, the other mourns as well.”<sup>87</sup>

Keenan affirms that Chan’s insight on the Beatitudes is an invitation for us to have the preferential option for the poor. “The beatitude in Matthew also corresponds to Isaiah 61:2 which reads “comfort all who mourn.”<sup>88</sup> This Beatitude should be considered as an invitation to comfort the people who mourn. Thus, mourning is not a consideration of my own loss but rather the poor in spirit. In fact, as Chan suggests, everything is built on the first macarism. We are humble so as to welcome the poor in spirit, and now we mourn for the poor in spirit and therein become empathetic to their situation. In effect, this chapter is about how the community responds to the poor in spirit, in this case, the Indian farmer.

The word “mourn” refers to the response to the reality of desperation, suffering, grief of death, and great loss.<sup>89</sup> Hans Dieter Betz suggests that grieving in the second Beatitude can be understood as a natural response to the suffering of the poor mentioned in the first Beatitude.<sup>90</sup> This understanding makes good sense in the context of the sufferings of poor farmers in India. In Isiah 61, we see the context of Israel’s mourning.<sup>91</sup> They mourned over the oppressions, destruction, shame, and dishonors they have experienced. In the Beatitudes, Matthew brings a similar situation of the righteous people being persecuted. They need to be comforted by giving them the experience of God’s Kingdom of love, peace, justice and equality.

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<sup>87</sup> James F. Keenan, S.J, “Grieving in the Upper Room: Vulnerability, Recognition, Conscience and the Holy Spirit”, 8-9.

<sup>88</sup> George Griener and James F. Keenan, eds., *A Lúcas Chan Reader: Pioneering Essays on Biblical and Asian Theological Ethics*, 53.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

Reflecting on the depth of the second Beatitude, every disciple of Jesus must ask the relevant question how can the mourners in our context be comforted or consoled. There is a need to think and act concretely about how to bring God's justice and peace in the midst of their unjust suffering. Every disciple of Jesus must interpret this Beatitude beyond their own personal suffering or sinfulness. They need to be open to recognizing the experience of poverty, sinfulness, and sufferings experienced by the people around them. This understanding of "mourning" should point us toward "other-oriented moral values."<sup>92</sup> The above insights help us to understand the deeper meaning of the Beatitudes as the follower of Jesus – that is "when our brothers and sisters suffer, we cannot but mourn."<sup>93</sup> This can be understood as a suitable interpretation of this Beatitude in the context of suffering farmers in India as "the call to console"<sup>94</sup> them in their struggles. Mourning is part of any suffering. This Beatitude becomes a suitable resource to recognize the mourning of the people around us, especially the grieving farmers.

As we have seen above that the mourning, we talk about must be other-centered. In other words, this Beatitude invites us to have the other as the focus of concern. It prompts us to recognize and be in solidarity with others. Therefore, we can say that for a disciple of Jesus mourning means going beyond one's own comforts and well-being and recognizing and entering into the struggles of others in order to bring strength, comfort, and courage to the people who suffer.<sup>95</sup> This kind of openness to enter into the sufferings of others needs humility. It allows the person to go beyond oneself and consider the pain of the other as their own and thus be able to enter into solidarity with the mourning people.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 57.

The object of mourning can be understood as the various sufferings of the people around us caused by injustices. The suffering of Indian farmers is one among them. All these unjust sufferings are the cries of poor and vulnerable ones. The first and second Beatitudes are great resources for recognizing the cries of the poor while being in touch with one's own vulnerabilities and personal sufferings. The recognition of one's own sufferings and vulnerabilities helps the person to enter into the sufferings of others very easily.

Keenan's article "Vulnerability, Recognition, and Conscience: Making Connection" examines the reasons why some students "respond and others do not" to human suffering after taking classes in conscience formation.<sup>96</sup> Keenan effectively asserted that students fail to respond because they are not vulnerably disposed to recognize those in need. According to Keenan, "vulnerability is the human condition that allows us to hear, encounter, receive, or respond to the other even at the point of being injured."<sup>97</sup> In other words, vulnerability is a disposition or responsiveness to the need of the other. Keenan later claimed human vulnerability re-enforces recognition. When we are vulnerable, Keenan asserts, "we recognize that we are related one to the other."<sup>98</sup> Thus, we commit ourselves to reach out to those in need.

Pope Francis often invites all of us to listen to the need of others. Very often, we fail to listen to God and listen to one another. Keenan notes that it is sometimes very difficult to listen to silent suffering and grief of others. For instance, often suffering results precisely because a person is in pain and unable to express himself or herself. He notes,

In some instances, this inability to speak is an even greater suffering than the pain itself because the sufferer is acutely aware of her isolation and is unable to communicate it. In particular, the person in chronic pain finds often that the pain perpetually keeps the

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<sup>96</sup> James F. Keenan, SJ, "Vulnerability, recognition and Conscience: Making the connection", (Boston College, TMCE8002, 2021), 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid,10.

sufferer from speaking. Pain inhibits the sufferer from doing the only thing that the sufferer wants to do: communicate her pain.<sup>99</sup>

I agree with Keenan that in order to assist the one suffering we need to be aware of the empathetic quality of pain that helps us acknowledge the depth of the other's suffering. Recalling the experience of our own suffering will help us to understand the depth of others' suffering; even when they are not able to express their pain; we will be able to listen to them.

When we become aware of the narrative of pain within our own bodies, we become familiar again with the desire to give voice to our own pain, hopefully assisting us to learn to listen to another's own "silent" narrative of suffering. Revisiting the terrain of one's own past suffering establishes the groundwork for becoming a compassionate and perceptive listener. That the body can express the depth and complexity of suffering is very important. Where there is no voice to express the suffering, then we are reminded that "the body never lies." Thus, even when the sufferer cannot voice in any way her or his suffering, still the body may be able to communicate its suffering. Here we can accompany another as we read aloud the psalms of lament as a means by which a listener can enter into solidarity with those who can only groan out or twist and turn in their suffering.<sup>100</sup>

Realizing one's own pain and being able to listen to the silent mourning of the poor will help us to enter easily into solidarity with them. This is a grace from God, which gives us the inner strength to recognize and understand the pain of others; and to respond and to communicate God's hope and love to them.

Father Stan Swamy, a Jesuit priest from India, known for giving voice to the poor and standing with the Tribals in North India had to face persecution, imprisonment, and finally a tragic death in 2021. Fr. Stan was a priest who lived for the poor. He worked to light the world and do away with injustice. His work as the disciple of Jesus will continue to inspire others.<sup>101</sup> He lived the Beatitudes throughout his life. He was able to mourn with the people whom he served. Grieving for the other's loss, their alienation, suffering, or death is the beginning of the beatitudinal response of the call to genuine discipleship, that is, of responding to the poor in

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<sup>99</sup> James F. Keenan, *Moral wisdom*, 73.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>101</sup> "Jailed Indian Rights Activist Stan Swamy Dead at 84," CBC, last modified July 5, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/india-human-rights-1.6090818>.

spirit.<sup>102</sup> Fr. Stan Samy is an example of a genuine disciple who responds to the poor in spirit by recognizing their mourning.

According to Keenan, the third and fourth Beatitudes also help us to respond to the poor in spirit in a deeper way. Chan takes us up the ladder to the third Beatitude where we learn meekness so that we can give up our tendency to condescend when we seek to respond to the poor in spirit.<sup>103</sup> The meek are the ones who are humble and gentle, not seeking power or control. In serving the poor and marginalized, we must approach our work with humility and a willingness to be guided by the needs and perspectives of those we serve. In other words, this beatitude calls us to embrace humility and gentleness in our interactions with others. In the context of the farmers in India, who are currently facing significant challenges and obstacles, this beatitude invites us to approach them with a spirit of meekness and humility, recognizing our own limitations and shortcomings. As we stand in solidarity with these farmers, we recognize the power imbalances and systemic injustices that contribute to their struggles. Rather than seeking to dominate or control the situation, we must seek to listen to their voices, learn from their experiences, and work together to find solutions that honor their dignity and humanity. By embracing meekness and humility, we open ourselves up to a deeper sense of compassion and empathy for those who are suffering. We recognize that we are all interconnected, and that our actions have the power to impact the lives of others in profound ways. Through our solidarity with the farmers in India, we not only stand up for justice and equality, but we also affirm our commitment to the common good and the flourishing of all people.

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<sup>102</sup> James F. Keenan, S.J., “Grieving in the Upper Room: Vulnerability, Recognition, Conscience and the Holy Spirit”, 10.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

In the fourth beatitude, we practice hunger and thirst not as protests over the human condition but as ascetical practices so that we can really become the meek people that we seek to become, learning better how to respond to the poor in spirit.<sup>104</sup> Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are those who are passionate about justice and equity. In serving the poor and marginalized, we must be committed to working for systemic change that will create a more just and equitable society. We must also be willing to challenge our own biases and assumptions and to be open to new perspectives and ideas.

The fourth beatitude reminds us of the importance of pursuing justice and righteousness in all aspects of our lives. In the context of the farmers in India, who are currently facing numerous challenges and injustices, this beatitude calls us to stand in solidarity with them and to advocate for their rights and well-being. As we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we recognize the systemic injustices and power imbalances that contribute to the struggles of the farmers in India. We seek to understand their experiences and amplify their voices, calling for change and reform that will promote greater justice and equality. By standing in solidarity with the farmers in India, we affirm our commitment to righteousness and justice, and we recognize the inherent dignity and worth of all people. Through our actions and advocacy, we seek to bring about a world where all people can flourish and thrive, free from oppression and injustice

The fifth Beatitude is a call for us to be merciful because we have cultivated true mourning in order to feel with the other.<sup>105</sup> This beatitude reminds us of the importance of showing compassion and kindness towards others, particularly those who are experiencing hardship and struggle. In the context of the farmers in India, who are currently facing numerous challenges and difficulties, this beatitude calls us to stand in solidarity with them and extend mercy and support in any way we can. As we reflect on the plight of these farmers, we

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 9

recognize the injustice and inequality that they face, and we are called to respond with compassion and empathy. This may involve advocating for their rights, donating to organizations that provide support and resources, or simply offering our prayers and solidarity. Ultimately, the fifth beatitude reminds us that we are all interconnected and that our actions have the power to impact the lives of others in profound ways. By showing mercy and compassion towards those who are struggling, we not only demonstrate our commitment to justice and equality, but we also open ourselves up to receiving mercy and grace in return.

The sixth beatitude invites the one who wants to be the disciple, purely to serve, without expectation for reward.<sup>106</sup> It is the willingness to serve and being in solidarity with the poor in spirit (farmers here) by having the right motivations. Affirming Chan's reflection, Keenan writes that being merciful makes us other-centered persons with the purity of hearts.<sup>107</sup> Those who are pure in heart are sincere and authentic in their relationships with others. In serving the poor and marginalized, we must be honest and transparent in our interactions, and work to build relationships based on trust and respect. We must also strive to be guided by our values and principles and to act with integrity in all that we do.

The seventh beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God", calls upon us to be active agents of peace in the world. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to serve and show solidarity with the marginalized, including vulnerable farmers. Peace-making involves addressing the root causes of conflict and seeking to establish justice and reconciliation. In this beatitude, Jesus reminds us that peace-making is not a passive or neutral stance, but an active pursuit that requires courage, sacrifice, and a willingness to challenge injustice. May we strive to be peacemakers in our own lives, communities, and beyond, and

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<sup>106</sup> Benjamin C. Platz, "Transformation Happens at the Margins: Shaping Beatitudinal Character of Volunteers by Embracing Excluded, Marginalized, Inconvenient Others at Drop-In Centres," (PhD diss., Tyndale University College and Seminary, 2015), 46.

<sup>107</sup> James F. Keenan, S.J., "Grieving in the Upper Room: Vulnerability, Recognition, Conscience and the Holy Spirit," (TMCE8002, 2021), 10.

may we do so with the spirit of humility and love that reflects the heart of Christ. Becoming a peacemaker after the example of Christ must be the goal of every disciple. It requires the willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve peace.<sup>108</sup> This openness will lead us to become peacemakers who can respond to the works of justice, peace, and well-being of the poor.<sup>109</sup> It also means standing with them against systems that oppress and exploit them. The disciples are called to follow the example of Jesus, who was a peacemaker and who stood in solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed. By serving the marginalized poor and vulnerable farmers, we embody the love and compassion of Christ, bringing hope and healing to a broken world.

The eighth beatitude, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", reminds us that as followers of Christ, we may face persecution and suffering for the sake of doing what is right and just. As Christians, we are called to stand in solidarity with suffering farmers, listen to their stories, and speak out against the injustices they face. We are also called to take action, to work alongside farmers and other advocates for systemic change that will bring about greater equity and justice in the food system.

Keenan highlights that in the process of living beatitudes as disciples, we may encounter that fateful rejection so deeply that is so often the result for those who labor with and for the poor in spirit.<sup>110</sup> A true understanding of the Beatitudes will help us to see and respond to the injustices done to the poor with the eyes of Christ and to be with the people who are grieving as Jesus wants us to. Following the lead of Jesus, who embraced those who have been excluded, rejected, and marginalized, every disciple should stand with the marginalized, even if they have to face persecution and rejection.

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<sup>108</sup> Benjamin C. Platz, 47.

<sup>109</sup> James F. Keenan, S.J., "Grieving in the Upper Room: Vulnerability, Recognition, Conscience and the Holy Spirit," 10

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

## 2.5 Virtues that prompt solidarity with the grieving farmers

### 2.5.1 Mercy

As we have discussed earlier the virtue of mercy should be seen as the response to God's love for us. The historical Jesus remains the true model of merciful love. An act of mercy can be considered a necessary virtue to put into operation for bringing solidarity with people who suffer and mourn. Keenan very meaningfully defines "mercy as the willingness to enter into the chaos of the other."<sup>111</sup> Thomas Aquinas considers charity as the greatest virtue because through it we are united to God. According to him, mercy stands second only to charity. In other words, it is charity (love of God) that makes us merciful.<sup>112</sup> Pope Francis considers "mercy" a major principle in a world where personal indifference to the poor and suffering is rampant. Without mercy, there is no charity. Only persons with merciful hearts can genuinely recognize, feel with, and support the people who are suffering.

Legalism and living by the letter of the Jewish law were powerfully present during the ministry of Jesus. Compassion took the second place to the law. However, this was not the strategy of Jesus. His approach in the mission was focused on merciful love. According to Pope Francis; mercy is that "love which embraces the misery of the human person. Carrying the burden of others and helping them walk. Aquinas says that mercy arises from being affected by the sorrow and misery of another as if it were one's own."<sup>113</sup> Only when we identify with the suffering of others as our own suffering then only, we can truly be merciful.

Mercy is a medicine in our age against the virus of indifference (greed, profit-oriented activities, etc). The Church of the Lord must nourish the preferential love for the weakest.<sup>114</sup> It is the necessary quality of every follower of Christ to look with eyes of mercy on the sufferings

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<sup>111</sup> James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, 22.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>113</sup> Daniel Daly, *The Structures of Virtue and Vice*, (Washington Dc: George Town University Press, 2021)114.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

of poor who are beset by numerous injustices and tragedies. Keenan notes that without being merciful to others we cannot even think about justice. Mercy leads us to justice. By encountering the other, we are able to be awakened to the call of justice.<sup>115</sup> It is a crucial time to be awakened to that call of Justice, precisely because God values every person as an individual and respects their autonomy and agency.

According to Nichole Flores, mercy is not simply feeling bad for people who suffer. It requires concrete, situation-changing actions that place one in solidarity with those who suffer.<sup>116</sup> The work of justice is carried out not simply because one person enters into the suffering of another but precisely because a person has recognized that another or a group of persons are not being given what is due to them because of their humanity. The Indian farmers who lost their hope desire to survive amid so much uncertainty and difficulty. In such contexts, we can borrow Keenan's definition of mercy and respond to our vocation as human beings or as Christians or as disciples by exercising the "willingness to enter the chaos of another"<sup>117</sup> and bring them hope.

### **2.5.2 Justice**

According to Keenan, the virtue of justice guides everyone's relationships with others, whether friends, foes, or strangers, to be impartially fair and give each their due is justice. Relationships with others are not impartial. Out of fidelity and loyalty, friends, families, colleagues, students, neighbors, and fellow citizens look to us to sustain, support, maintain, cultivate, and accompany them in specific relationships. He adds that when a person calls his (or her) mother, for instance, he does it out of filial fidelity, not out of justice.<sup>118</sup> Thomas Aquinas acknowledges that justice without charity is not perfect justice, though for Thomas it

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<sup>115</sup> James F. Keenan S.J., *Moral wisdom*, 134.

<sup>116</sup> Nichole Flores, "Mercy as a Public Virtue," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 48 (2020), 463.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, 459.

<sup>118</sup> James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, 27.

is nonetheless a virtue.<sup>119</sup> Christians who want to work for the justice for farmers in in India should first of all cultivate a loving heart for them. Such an attitude would make their efforts for solidarity much more effective.

Justice seen as a virtue must be defined in the context of Scriptures and Christian tradition. Justice must also at the same time, be practiced as a response to the needs of the least and the marginalized people, as Jesus did. The practice of justice should be adapted to particular times and places. Justice as a virtue has a prophetic and pioneering function. It should be approached in a creative and continuous way by considering the needs of the society, in the image of the Kingdom of God.

The Christian God is a God of Justice who demands that justice “roll down like waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). The Hebrew Bible when speaking of justice addresses Yahweh as the “God of Justice” (Isiah. 30:18) who “executes justice for the orphan and the widows, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing” (Deut. 10:18). Advocacy for justice is at the core of the Christian witness, yet one does not need to look afar to discover the different interpretations of the meaning, tenets, commitments and nature of justice among Christians and their theologians.

In some cases, mercy is understood as an expression – the feeling of superiority over others. People whose lives are not centered on Christ may sometimes consider mercy as something that those in a privileged position freely give others what they do not necessarily deserve. However, true Justice is able to recognize as belonging to others what belongs to them, beginning with their dignity independently of the feelings they provoke in us. The objectivity

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 160.

of reason is not a myth<sup>120</sup>- "virtue is not gained by an act of decision, will or contemplation alone; virtue must be cultivated through habits which affirm the good"<sup>121</sup>.

Though philosopher John Rawls affirms that justice is “the first virtue of social institutions”,<sup>122</sup> there still persists the age-old diverse opinions as to the actual meaning, nature and definition of justice. While Aristotle in “The Nicomachean Ethics” defines justice “as a quality of character, a virtue that involves the right treatment of another person”,<sup>123</sup> Vic McCracken writes that “Justice is about giving people their due”.<sup>124</sup> Some Christian writers have also advanced to the next level of speaking of the social aspect of justice. “In this respect, justice by definition is social because it is interpersonal.

Justice is the most important moral virtue for Aquinas. The Thomistic conception of justice goes beyond the traditional requirements of commutative and distributive justice. Aquinas proposes the idea of social justice that considers the link between individuals and societies. He states “what is particular to justice among other virtues is that it orders a human being in those affairs which concern another.”<sup>125</sup> For Aquinas, then, the idea of justice calls for a relational virtue connecting an internal act of the will of a moral agent to an external effect on others. This is why he defines justice as the “habit according to which one gives to everyone what is right (*ius*) with a constant and perpetual will.”<sup>126</sup> Current situations like Indian farmers’ sufferings, climate change, global warming, violence across the world, the Russia- Ukraine

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<sup>120</sup> Miguel De la Torre, “Virtue Ethics: A Libertarian Response,” in *Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views*, ed. Vic McCracken (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 168.

<sup>121</sup> Elizabeth Philips, 142

<sup>122</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3

<sup>123</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics: Translation, Glossary, and Introductory Essay*, ed Joe Sach (Newburyport MA: Focus Publishing, 2002)

<sup>124</sup> Vic McCracken, “Social Justice: An Introduction to a Vital Concept” in *Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views*, ed Vic McCracken (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3

<sup>125</sup> *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 57, 1.

<sup>126</sup> *Somma Theologiae* II-II, 58, 1.

war, and social discrimination seem to me to be a wake-up call for human beings to reconsider their “vocation” to be persons with and for others.

According to Melissa Kelley grief born of injustice demands much from the disciple (minister) to be in solidarity. The immediate response from the disciple to the people who are in grief because of injustice and oppression is to offer the immediate comfort they need. The disciple must attend to them after noticing their suffering and stand by them after acknowledging their pain and cause.<sup>127</sup> Kelley adds that while caring for grieving individuals and communities, the disciples also must do what they can do for preventing the grief born of injustice.<sup>128</sup> Every disciple must respond like Jesus to prevent injustices and related sufferings. The Christian understanding of justice that comes out of love, which needs to be put into practice by every human being. Christian justice is centered on Jesus’ way of life. Catholic social justice tradition elaborates the understanding of justice with terms like the common good, solidarity, and the option for the poor.

a. Solidarity

Solidarity is a word that contains multiple meanings. It calls our attention to the fact that people are interdependent. Human interdependence is not only a necessary fact but also can be a positive value in our lives.<sup>129</sup> St. John Paul II repeatedly reminded us that solidarity is a necessary virtue. God not only allows people to depend upon one another but absolutely wills that humans live in the context of intimate as well as large groupings of our neighbors. Our destinies are linked to other people whether they are our friends nearby or strangers far from us.<sup>130</sup> Solidarity arises from an inner attitude; when it has fully taken root within a person, it

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<sup>127</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 16.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas Massaro, SJ, *Living Justice: Catholic Teaching in Action*, (NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 87-88.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

expresses itself through numerous activities that demonstrate a person's commitment to the wellbeing of others.<sup>131</sup>

Pope John Paul II refers to Adam's recognition of Eve as "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:18–21) to support his contention that "solidarity helps us to see the 'other' — whether a person, people or nation — not just as some kind of instrument," but as an equal partner sent by God to share in the "banquet of life" and stewardship of God's creation.<sup>10</sup>In addition, the recognition of the imago Dei in all persons (Gen. 1:27), which connotes equal dignity, enables the apprehension of human interdependence, or "de facto solidarity."<sup>132</sup>

Mary Vianney Bilgrien offers an interdependently oriented understanding of solidarity as a virtue, arguing that as we are all part of the human family, we should be focused on the communal common good, the dignity of all humans, and the preferential option for the poor.<sup>133</sup> According to Tisha M Rajendra, the practice of "unequals bearing one another's burdens" (Jon Sobrino's definition of solidarity) would lead to the flourishing of all persons involved.<sup>134</sup>

Pope Francis presents two sides of solidarity. It is a virtue that spontaneously produces actions that serve the poor and the common good. Secondly, it consists of habits of solidarity, which need to be practiced. It opens a way for structural transformation.<sup>135</sup> Therefore the principle of solidarity is a way to promote the common good by caring for the weakest.

Jesus always moved toward the margins. For Jesus the periphery became the center, the despised became honored and the rejected became chosen. In other words, with him, the first became last, and the last became first. The birth of the historical Jesus itself was an example for the solidarity with poor and the marginalized. He was born in a manger while his parents were on a journey. His birth was witnessed by the shepherds who belonged to one of the most

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>132</sup> Gerald J. Beyer, "The Meaning of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching," *Political Theology* 15, no. 1 (2014): 9, doi:10.1179/1462317x13z.00000000059

<sup>133</sup> Tisha M. Rajendra, "Burdened Solidarity: The Virtue of Solidarity in Diaspora," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2019), 95.

<sup>134</sup> Rajendra, "Burdened Solidarity," 109.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Massaro, SJ, 115.

despised groups in Jewish society. People of his place rejected him asking whether anything good can come from Nazareth. He stood with rejected people in society- the poor, sick, fishermen, sinners, and people of humble social standing. As we have discussed earlier, the teachings and lifestyle of the Historical Jesus challenged the conventional wisdom of his time. His approach brought danger to him. However, he refused to compromise his values. solidarity with the poor also sets forth a fundamental demand: the recognition of the full human dignity of the poor and their situation as daughters and sons of God.<sup>136</sup> Mary Jo Iozzio challenges the disciples of Jesus to stand in solidarity definitively with those who are poor and marginalized as their Master has done. She adds. God stands in solidarity with those who are poor, suffering, and oppressed by injustice of all kinds.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, everyone who wants to follow him is invited to have the preferential option for the weakest and poorest. It is an invitation to take Jesus and his values to the poorest of the poor. Solidarity is an important quality of a disciple.

b. Option for the poor

The option for the poor can be understood as an abiding commitment grounded in Scripture and tradition to support social justice by placing oneself firmly (as individuals or as a member of an institution) on the side of the vulnerable and the marginalized.<sup>138</sup> This option involves a commitment that implies leaving the road one is on, as the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches, and entering the world of the other, of the “insignificant” person, of the one excluded from dominant social sectors, communities, viewpoints, and ideas.<sup>139</sup> The words and deeds of Jesus were deeply connected with this option for the well-being of the least fortunate. The idea of a preferential option for the poor is strongly emphasized by its position as the

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<sup>136</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 2 (2009): 324, doi:10.1177/004056390907000205.

<sup>137</sup> Mary J. Iozzio, "Solidarity: Restoring Communion with Those Who are Disabled," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, 15, no. 2 (2011): 140, doi:10.1080/15228967.2011.565688.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Massaro, SJ, 117.

<sup>139</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, 318.

opening sentence of the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*. It calls to our attention that the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the (people) of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted should become joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.<sup>140</sup> The current environmental crisis which affects the lives of Indian farmers in many ways invites us to embrace firmly the charism of the preferential option for the poor. “Preferential option for the poor” is an essential component of discipleship.

c. Notion of the Common Good

There are many proper goals in life besides those that benefit us individually. As responsible people, we are called to look for opportunities to participate and contribute to worthy causes to improve the well beings of society. Everyone has a responsibility to promote the common good for the well-being of all.<sup>141</sup> The promotion of the common good is the responsibility of all for building a just society.

According to David Cloutier, the common good is primarily about relationships. Only secondarily it is about material gain. To be in solidarity means to have a common moral cause with others. Solidarity facilitates friendship among the persons who are in solidarity.<sup>142</sup> Every individual and every society or institution is meant to promote the common Good.

### 2.5.3 Hope

Giving hope to the poor and the afflicted is very central to Jesus’ teaching. Jesus always showed concern for the poor, marginalized, and sinners. The gospels make it clear that Jesus was a hope-giver by healing the sick, forgiving the sinners, raising the dead, and comforting those who were weeping. Hope can aim for a future good even in the midst of dim and dwindling possibilities. “Hopeful act from one person’s part can be a gift of hope for others,

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<sup>140</sup> *Gaudium Et Spes* no 1.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Massaro, SJ, 89.

<sup>142</sup> Daniel Daly, 211.

who may find it possible because of them continue living, to trust, and to be something of value can yet be attained.”<sup>143</sup> Every follower of Jesus must imitate his ways in their own context and according to their capacities.

When we recognize, identify, and stand with the sufferings of others who lost hope; we are giving them the hope that Jesus has given us. Keenan notes,

“Hope is to have confidence for things not yet seen. Hope, too, is a gift. Sometimes people think of Christian hope as what we have in light of success. But Christian hope is our aid in the face of adversity. By hope, we believe we will attain what even now seems so unattainable. I think it is important to see that Christian hope begins at the cross of Jesus. We are not foolish in hope; rather, we are realists. We understand the challenges of life, but we believe that by hope we can meet and overcome those challenges.”<sup>144</sup>

When I was reflecting on the virtue of hope in moments of grief, I was reminded of the mission statement of Jesus which we read in the Gospel of Luke (4: 18), “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” This mission statement of Jesus reminds us that the focus of Jesus was to give hope to those who are in grief. Therefore, Jesus identified himself with the vulnerable ones, stood by them, shared their suffering and gave them hope.

Hope can be given and also it can be destroyed. The hope of poor Indian farmers is destroyed due to the injustices caused by the greed and selfishness of a few. It said that hope is both an individual and social necessity. The unjust structures and unjust acts by the people take away the things on which the hope of the people depends.<sup>145</sup> It not only destroys a future that the people value, but also their lives. The people whose hope is destroyed go to sleep stressed, wake up stressed, and find no use in doing things. In such miserable situations,

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<sup>143</sup> Margaret U. Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>144</sup> James F. Keenan S.J., *Moral wisdom*, 97.

<sup>145</sup> Margaret U. Walker, *Moral Repair*, 43.

Christians could offer at least a ray of hope which, would help the people to find a reason to strive in their lives. Even a kind word can make a difference in the life of a person whose hopes are dim and dwindling. Our personal grief teaches us that what people need while grieving over their personal loss is our presence, not our soothing words. Our presence in moments of pain will give them the assurance that they are not alone. This is the grace of solidarity that helps us share the burden of others as our own.

Keenan shares in *Moral wisdom* that if anyone wants to be a disciple of Jesus, then they must become more like Jesus. This means one must share the virtues of Jesus – faith, hope, and charity.<sup>146</sup> Every follower of Christ must seek to respond in hope to human suffering. The crucified Christ gives the hope of resurrection. Therefore, the cross enables Christians to stand in solidarity with the victims of unjust suffering to give them hope, courage, and consolation.

## **2.6 The Three Keys to Follow Christ**

Self-emptying, prophetic, and service (servanthood) are the essential qualities or keys of discipleship. They are the culmination of all the virtues that Jesus taught. These qualities will help the disciples to become more like Jesus and respond to the poor and needy (especially the grieving farmers) just as Jesus did.

### **a. First Key : Self-emptying**

Jesus' act of self-emptying was an expression of true love, inviting all who follow him to offer themselves entirely to the service of the poor. Jesus' mission on earth was to save humanity by sacrificing himself as a lamb. He embodied a life of service, stating that he came "not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He humbly left behind his divine power and equality with God to share God's love with all. This self-emptying began with his incarnation. Although he was in the form of God, he did not

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<sup>146</sup> James F. Keenan S.J., *Moral wisdom*, 90-97.

regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness and being found in human form (Phil 2:6-7). Throughout his ministry, he lived this humble life, even saying that "foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). He denied the power and position that often came to him in his life. Many people called him king when he entered Jerusalem in triumph. He manifested total self-emptying on the cross by being obedient to his Father. Actually, he revealed his kingly role quite paradoxically from the cross where it was written 'King of Jews.'<sup>147</sup> He not only self-emptied himself but also, gave an invitation to others who wished to follow him. This self-emptying is an outcome of true love. Jesus' self-emptying act reminds every disciple of Jesus that only the persons who can love God and their neighbor are able to offer themselves totally to the service of the poor.

b. Second Key: Being Prophetic

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets spoke on behalf of God and in the name of God. They spoke out powerfully against the evil and injustices in the world. Similarly, Jesus took on a prophetic role, using His authoritative teachings and preaching to proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God. There are various instances where Jesus' prophetic role is evident in His teachings and actions. "The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee'" (Matthew 21:11). Jesus himself gave a hint to this truth when he says, "No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown" (Luke 4:27). He announced the new Kingdom of God through his life. To the risk of his life, he denounced the religious authorities for their hypocrisy (Matthew 23: 1-39). The prophetic mission and priesthood cannot be separated easily. Gerard O'Collins emphasizes this fact, as some scholars deny the prophetic aspect of his mission and priesthood in the gospels, by saying "In his proclamation of the

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<sup>147</sup> Gerard O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

kingdom or saving rule of God, Jesus' prophetic teaching and miraculous activity should also be characterized as priestly. His public ministry forms an essential part of the exercise of his priesthood."<sup>148</sup> The public ministry, the prophetic character of Jesus becomes a true model for the disciples to have the willingness 'to be sent out.'

Shawn Copeland points to the wounded body of Jesus, the word made flesh that challenges the system that devalues the body as impure and ugly. The Reign of God that preached, enacted, and ushered in by Jesus confronts the dehumanizing and disregarding of the person in the name of caste, race, sex, gender, sexuality, culture, and social order.<sup>149</sup> Jesus's ministry inspires everyone to be part of inclusion and solidarity with these persons who are persecuted and discriminated by mainstream society. The mission of Christ is to challenge and defeat evil - the prime source for all forms of oppression. This is a prophetic role every disciple of Jesus should have in the present age of oppression and injustices.

c. Third Key: Service and servanthood

Jesus' ministry was marked by a strong focus on service and servanthood. He tirelessly moved from place to place, preaching, teaching, healing, and forgiving those in need. Jesus travelled through various villages and towns, spreading the Good News. He came not to be served but to serve. The Gospel says that Jesus and his apostles did not have even time to eat. "For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat" (Mark 6:31). Service and mobility go hand in hand in the mission of Jesus. He was freely moving from place to place with the purpose of bringing the message of salvation. He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do" (Mark 1:38).

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<sup>148</sup> Gerard O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, 16.

<sup>149</sup> Mary S. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 57.

Jesus' mission stood in contrast to the priests of that time. Power and honor were primary for the priests, Pharisees, and scribes (Matthew 23:26). They associated priesthood only to the temple, but Jesus proclaimed a countercultural idea of the priesthood through his ministry. For Jesus power is to be measured in terms of servanthood and willingness to suffer for the Kingdom of God.<sup>150</sup> He called his disciples to humility and service and to be least among all. The authority Jesus offers to his disciples is service, not domination. Therefore. He constantly reminded the disciples, "whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). The word 'least' became a constant in the preaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:19, 11:11, 25:40, 45; Luke 7:28, 9:48, 11:8). He showed the disciples the meaning of service and servanthood during the Last Supper.

As the synoptic gospels focus on the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper, the Gospel of John instead of the words of institution describes the foot washing. Sandra Schneider, while discussing the foot washing in John's Gospel, highlights the servanthood of Jesus in the Last Supper, "That which Jesus is about to do is an act of serving, of literally waiting upon his disciples.... In the foot washing Jesus is presented as a servant and symbolically characterizes his impending suffering and death as a work of service."<sup>151</sup> She suggests that the sacrificial offering of Jesus is implied in the service of others. So, service and servanthood are the essential qualities of discipleship that Jesus enacts.

The world today is mostly focused on greed for power, positions, and wealth. In this context of domination and oppression, Jesus offers an alternative value system for those who want to follow him. Jesus turns upside down the value system of the world. The model of the authority in the church that Jesus offers is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. His death on the cross is the example that is set before us to show what is meant by a

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<sup>150</sup> Lucien Richard, *Christ: The Self Emptying of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 64.

<sup>151</sup> Sandra Schneider, "The Foot Washing (John 13: 1-20): An Experiment in Hermeneutics," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 43 (1981): 81-82.

good shepherd. His concept of authority is *diaconia*. Every disciple of Jesus is called to have an attitude of service that Jesus offers.

A disciple of Jesus should be an another-centered person. As discussed above, those persons desiring to follow Jesus must deny themselves, which means they must empty themselves as Jesus did. In other words, the disciples should not try to make a kingdom for themselves. Whatever the disciple should do, that should be out of love for Jesus and love for others. The disciple should build God's Kingdom. The disciple of Jesus should not have a hidden motivation for personal gain or name or fame. Every action of the disciple of Jesus should be Christ-centered and oriented towards the well-being of the other.

Mary, mother of God can be an exemplar for us as a true disciple. She is the model for all God-human dialogues. Her 'Yes' to the invitation to be the mother of Jesus is the free choice of her will.<sup>152</sup> Her 'yes' was the first step in becoming part of salvation history. When Mary said "yes" to the will of God she had to go through losses, suffering, and humiliation. She had to go through the humiliation of being pregnant before marriage, the pain of not finding a place to give birth to Jesus, losing Jesus in the temple, the pain of Joseph's death, the pain of being alone when Jesus was away in his mission, the struggle that she went through when people made accusations against Jesus and the pain of witnessing Jesus' passion and death. She never left the cross. She was at the foot of the cross. She accepted everything as the will of God and accepted the suffering with it because she knew it was for a higher cause – the salvation of humanity. She was able to let go of her personal suffering because she constantly thought of the salvation of humanity. She believed and lived to witness the resurrection.

According to Jesus' teaching, whoever wants to be Jesus' disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24). Mary, the mother of Jesus

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<sup>152</sup> Ronald Novotny, "Making Mary's Yes Our Own: A Study of Theological Personhood," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 56, Article 8 (2005): 101-122, 102.

exactly lived these teachings of Jesus in her life. As a disciple, she carried Jesus in her life and shared Jesus with others. It is the duty of every disciple to share Jesus - which means sharing the values of Jesus - love, mercy, forgiveness, hope, justice, peace, and so on with the people who are suffering.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The resources mentioned in the chapter will surely inspire the Christians and Christian institutions in India to imitate Christ and his values for recognizing and being in solidarity with all the vulnerable people, especially the farmers in India who are struggling. Being open to these resources will enable Christians in India, to be loving, merciful, self-emptying, and prophetic in their works for justice and solidarity. Many Catholic and non-Catholic individuals and organizations are already doing much to console and be in solidarity with suffering farmers in India.

Today the Church in India with its “preferential option for the poor” tries to live the authentic spirit of Jesus through various ministries. However, the Church in India, to some extent has to go a long way to be true to Jesus in her missionary approach. The lust for wealth, Luxury, and power, and the spirit of elitism and triumphalism are very much alive in a different form in Indian Church. The resources discussed in this chapter will hopefully inspire every Christian in Indian Church to enter into the suffering of others by showing solidarity with them.

## Chapter 3

### Accompaniment: Making Meaning in a Precarious Context

#### 3.1 Introduction

The chapter will explore the practical (ministerial) ways through which the Indian Christian community can accompany and provide meaning for grieving farmers in India. There can be numerous possibilities of efficient pastoral care in accompanying the highly stressed farmers in India who are on the verge of suicide and also the survivors of the farmers' suicide. The various challenges (as discussed in Chapter 1) leave the small-scale farmers in India struggling to meet their ends, leading to a sense of hopelessness and despair. As disciples of Christ, the Church in India has a unique opportunity and responsibility to accompany and support these struggling farmers and contribute towards giving them hope for a better future.

This chapter proposes some possible ways through which the Church in India can accompany these poor farmers and contribute to their well-being. The resources mentioned in Chapter 2 can be the motivation that would prompt the church in India to respond as disciples of Christ. Here, the reference to the role of the church and Christians in India is not just limited to church leaders, but all the Christians who embrace the path of Christ. Though the church leaders have a leading role to play, every Christian can be a partner in the mission of showing solidarity with the grieving farmers in their own unique way. This partnership can be extended beyond even the church to other organizations. This chapter emphasizes the responsibility of every Christian in India to respond within our own capacities to be in solidarity with the grieving farmers and set an example for others to follow.

There are a few locally existing models which contribute towards meaning-making in the midst of suffering, grief, hopelessness, and loss of faith. As the disciples of Christ, the Church in India could adopt some of these existing models for responding to the sufferings of

the Indian farmers in various parts of India. Pope Francis often reminds the Catholics that our church is for the poor.<sup>153</sup> The Church always had a deep commitment to caring for the poor and marginalized. The issue of the sufferings of Indian farmers is complex and multilayered, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, there are several ways through which Church in India can give hope to these farmers and improve their overall well-being.

### **3.2 Various Proposals for Accompaniment of the Grieving Farmers in India**

As previously mentioned, small-scale farmers in India face significant challenges. These challenges can range from economic difficulties to environmental issues to social injustices. Although the Church in India is doing a lot to provide support to farmers, both in terms of their material needs and their spiritual well-being, they are not present in all parts of India.

This section will explore various proposals for accompaniment through which the church can support farmers on the margins. The focus will be on creating a support system that addresses the specific needs of these farmers and helps them to overcome the challenges they face. Some of the existing successful models of accompaniment programs will also be discussed, including those that have been implemented by religious organizations and churches in particular regions. These models may serve as inspiration for new programs or provide guidance on how to tailor accompaniment programs to the specific needs of different farming communities in different regions in India. In order to highlight these various models, I will mark them as “Examples to Imitate,” for I believe that these models help us better to imagine that something can be done to better the conditions of others, particularly, in this instance, the Indian farmers. This section aims to highlight the importance of supporting farmers who are

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<sup>153</sup> Kenneth R. Himes and Conor M. Kelly, eds., *Poverty: Responding Like Jesus*, (Brewster: Paraclete Press (MA), 2018), 11.

living on the margins of society and to explore ways in which the church can play a role in creating a more just and equitable world

### **3.2.1 A Church that is Ready to be with the Marginalized Farmers**

The first step in accompanying farmers means to be there for them, willing to offer support and comfort. One of the important ways to do this is to be fully present to them by willing to enter their chaos. This requires listening to their concerns and understanding their needs. Farmers face a range of challenges, from crop failures to financial struggles, and from hopelessness to suicides. Providing pastoral care, such as offering emotional support by being with, listening, and counseling can help farmers cope with these challenges. Dr. Melissa Kelley rightly points out that human life is fundamentally grounded in stories.<sup>154</sup> Its ultimate meaning is love<sup>155</sup> which is found in and expressed by the union and healthy communication within the close circles. Nobody can make meaning alone, because meanings are co-constructed. Robert Neimeyer argues that meaning-making is central to effectively working through grief. Narrating the stories of loss helps the persons who experience loss (of any kind) to find a new direction and meaning in their lives. This can be done by sharing the stories of loss with someone and expressing their narratives through journal writing. However, they need guidance for directing them to make meaning and be resilient.<sup>156</sup>

Grieving people often seek safe contexts in which they can tell (and retell) their stories of loss, hoping that trusted persons or therapists can bear to hear what others cannot, validating their pain as real without resorting to simple reassurance. Ultimately, they search for ways of assimilating the multiple meanings of loss into the overarching story of their lives, an effort that professionals can support through careful listening, guided reflection, and a

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<sup>154</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, 76.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>156</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, *Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counseling the Bereaved*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 165.

variety of narrative means for fostering fresh perspectives on their losses for themselves and others.<sup>157</sup>

In this context, Indian farmers who are experiencing various losses will look for a trusted platform to narrate their stories of loss, in order to find meaning and hope. Therefore, it is important to listen to the struggles of the farmers with compassionate hearts in order to help them in meaning-making and becoming resilient. In that sense, ‘to accompany’ means ‘to be with’ others in their suffering. Being fully present to someone in their hopelessness and grief is a vocation. Empathetic listening is the first step in accompanying someone in their suffering. Empathetic listening involves being present with the grieving farmers, acknowledging their pain and suffering, and providing them with a safe and compassionate space to express their grief and loss. According to Keenan, empathetic listening allows and welcomes the sufferer to speak and to be heard.<sup>158</sup> It is the way that provides comfort, support, and understanding. Empathetic listening allows the person to enter into the suffering of others as their own and to be in solidarity.

Being fully present means making the sufferers feel that they are not alone. It requires love, undivided attention, patience, and allowing the person to share in their own space. Being present also means being available to them whenever they need. The Christian community in India is called to be sensitive in offering support to the farmers who are confronted with new lifestyles and difficulties. In short, the Christian community in India should imitate the merciful act of the Good Samaritan told in the Gospels (Lk. 10:25-35; Mt. 25:31-46), in order to be fully present to the suffering farmers in India.

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<sup>157</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, ed., *Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss*, (NE: American Psychological Association, 2001), 263-264.

<sup>158</sup> George Griener and James F. Keenan, eds., *A Lúcas Chan Reader: Pioneering Essays on Biblical and Asian Theological Ethics*, 59.

Example to Imitate: *Swanthna*<sup>159</sup> (Consolation): Counselling Program for those in Grief and Sorrow.

The Jesuit provincial of Patna, Donald J. Miranda, S.J., formed a group of volunteers under a group, named *Swanthna* which means consolation. It was the collaborative efforts of the priests and religious of Patna to reach out to the people online during covid -19 pandemic.<sup>160</sup> It was the time when many families lost their near and dear ones to the Corona pandemic that was raging in the country; and, in nearly all cases, ordinary ways of mourning or grieving were not possible. Many affected people were in their homes and/or hospitals, struggling to cope with the emotional, financial, and other forms of stress which is the outcome of this situation. It was the time when most people were at a loss as to what to say and to whom? This initiative has proved that psycho-spiritual assistance or accompaniment is an important service that is needed in the hour of stress, grief, and loss, besides the medical and economic.

Example to Imitate: “Friendship Bench” By Dixon Chibanda in Zimbabwe

Another model to imitate is the initiative of a talented young psychiatrist in Zimbabwe named Dixon Chibanda who decided to devote his career to the people who need the most mental health care but face financial, geographic, or cultural barriers to access.<sup>161</sup> After exploring several ideas for recruiting and training mental health practitioners, Chibanda found that there was, in fact, already a large cohort of experienced, empathetic, respected caregivers who were ready and willing: grandmothers. According to him the most important resource that

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<sup>159</sup> *Swanthana* means consolation in Hindi and Sanskrit.

<sup>160</sup> Donald J. Miranda to Patna Jesuits, “A Request to Volunteer to reach out to the Victims of Covid-19,” email, May 12, 2021.

<sup>161</sup> Kim Samuel, "A Group of Grandmothers in Zimbabwe is Helping the World Reimagine Mental Health Care," BostonGlobe.com, last modified February 2, 2023, [https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/02/02/opinion/group-grandmothers-zimbabwe-is-helping-world-reimagine-mental-health-care/?s\\_campaign=8315](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/02/02/opinion/group-grandmothers-zimbabwe-is-helping-world-reimagine-mental-health-care/?s_campaign=8315).

is left in most communities is grandmothers because they are custodians of the local culture and wisdom.<sup>162</sup>

He trained older women in a mode of evidence-based talk therapy known as “problem-solving therapy.” The aim was to reinforce the women’s capacity to listen, to make people feel heard and seen, to give patients a feeling of belonging, and to help them gain the confidence to find their own solutions.<sup>163</sup>

Their accompaniment for the people who suffer is called “Friendship Bench.”<sup>164</sup> These experienced women were ready to listen to the people in need any place where the person in need felt at home. Those who received the help felt the other belonged to them, listened to them, and understood them.

Through such accompaniments (both online and in person), the church will not only be able to console the people by listening but also be able to sense the real needs of the people, which will help us in discerning further forms of service that we can render to them as Christians.

### **3.2.2 Creating support groups**

Creating support groups for farmers can provide them with a sense of community and solidarity. These groups can offer emotional support, as well as practical advice. The church in India has a God-given responsibility to minister to suffering farmers. The church can form various support systems and groups that will enhance the comfort and well-being of vulnerable farmers. The following passages can be a great resource for the church to inspire the people to identify themselves with poor farmers and create different supporting systems for them.

- a. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

- b. “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” ( 1 Corinthians 12:26)
- c. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:15)
- d. “Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all in our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” ( 2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

The aim of creating a support group is to make the suffering farmers in India feel that there are still rays of hope in the midst of suffering and they are not alone in their suffering. These supporting group can be a community that can share the burdens of each other and supports each other.

“To take away people’s hope, to tell them that nothing is going to change, that nothing will get better, is to deny the gifts the gift of prophecy in the life of the Church.”<sup>165</sup> Prophets are called to spread hope, giving people a new vision and direction. Therefore, creating a supporting system is an important step for giving hope, vision, and direction to these farmers in India.

This section proposes a few existing examples of such supporting groups for the poor, which can be imitated as a model for supporting the farmers and the marginalized in different parts of Christian missions in India

### **i. Self-Help Groups**

Self-help Groups are informal Organizations of people who come together to find ways to improve their living conditions. They are generally self-governed and peer-controlled. People of similar economic and social backgrounds associate generally with the help of any

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<sup>165</sup> Kenneth R. Himes and Conor M. Kelly, eds., 16.

NGO or government agency and try to resolve their issues, and improve their living conditions.<sup>166</sup> Self-help groups are increasingly emerging as an alternative to the traditional top-down process for all planning purposes and are functioning at the grassroots in different villages of several states. Networking of SHGs will empower both men and women at grass-root levels to be part of decision-making processes about issues that affect their everyday lives. Such groups organize various activities for supporting one another in their struggles.

- They try to build the functional capacity of poor and marginalized sections of society in the domain of employment and income-generating activities.
- They offer collateral-free loans to sections of people that generally find it hard to get loans from banks.
- They also resolve conflicts via mutual discussions and collective leadership.
- They are an important source of microfinance services to the poor.
- They act as a go-through for formal banking services to reach the poor, especially in rural areas.
- They also encourage the habit of saving among the poor.<sup>167</sup>

Such SHGs networks can be a powerful structure to bring about radical social and economic change that promotes development as freedom. At every Christian social institution and Christian parish level in India, SHGs can play a vital role in supporting community members who may be facing financial, emotional, or other challenges. The suffering farmers can be one such group that needs to be supported by these SHGs. The following proposals can be the different steps of self-help groups in a parish for supporting each other:

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<sup>166</sup> "Self Help Group (SHGs) - Origin, Evolution, Functions, Advantages [UPSC GS-II]," BYJUS, last modified January 6, 2016, <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/self-help-group/#Self-Help-Groups---What-are-SHG?>

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

a. Formation of SHGs

The first step in setting up SHGs in a parish is identifying the needs of the community members and forming groups accordingly. Members may have similar interests, goals, and challenges. The farmers who are facing the problem and those who wish to work for their well-being could come together to form this group.

b. Saving and credit activities

In the parish SHGs, the members can contribute a certain amount of money each month to create a savings fund, which can be used to provide small loans to members. This helps members to meet their financial needs, meet the needs of cultivation, and to improve their economic status.

c. Capacity building and training:

These SHGs also could provide training and capacity-building activities to their members to enhance their skills and knowledge. This can include training in financial management, and personal development, different farming techniques and marketing techniques.

d. Supporting each other during crises

Members of these SHGs at the Christian institutions can support each other during difficult times, such as financial crises, crop failures, farmers' suicide, health issues, and any other family problems. They can come together to provide emotional support, share resources, and offer practical help.

e. Engraving a sense of community

These SHGs can also help to build a sense of community among their members. They can easily create a platform for members to interact, share experiences, and learn from each other. Even within families, it can be hard to talk about our deepest wounds. People often do

not know what to say or how to say it. However, even if it is hard to communicate, it is helpful to communicate effectively, clearly, and compassionately. Such communication builds or adds to each person's perspective on the meaning the grief and loss. People might feel much more comfortable sharing and listening to one another's stories in this group as most of them share similar burdens and pains as farmers. This group can also conduct some stress-releasing activities like yoga, picnics, and other educational and entertainment activities. As a community they can also help each other in cultivating and harvesting processes of each other and minimize the labor cost.

f. Coming together for prayer and other spiritual activities

These SHGs may also come together for prayer and other spiritual activities. This helps to build a sense of spirituality among its members and provides an opportunity for members to seek comfort, hope, and guidance from each other. As India is a multireligious country there can be multireligious prayer services and other religious services that might console and give hope to one another.

The above-proposed models of SHGs in catholic or non-catholic social institutions and parishes can provide a powerful platform for members to support each other, improve their economic status, and enhance their social and psychological well-being.

Example to Imitate: Fr. Davis' Model Weekly Market for the sale of farmers' products

Fr. Davis Chiramel is a Catholic priest who has been actively involved in supporting poor and marginalized farmers in India, particularly in the state of Kerala. He is well known for his innovative and successful approach to helping farmers by establishing weekly markets,

which enable farmers to sell their produce directly to consumers, without the involvement of middlemen who often take a large share of the profits.<sup>168</sup>

This initiative started when Fr. Davis realized that the middlemen were taking a significant cut of the profits that farmers were making from their produce. He wanted to create a system that would allow farmers to sell their produce directly to consumers, eliminating the middlemen and ensuring that farmers received a fair price for their goods. To achieve this, Father Davis set up a weekly farmer's market in his parish, which quickly gained popularity among the local community. The market provided a platform for farmers to sell their produce directly to consumers, bypassing the middlemen and ensuring that farmers received a fair price for their goods.<sup>169</sup> The market also helped to foster a sense of community among farmers and consumers, as people came together to share stories, exchange ideas, and build relationships.

Fr. Davis is helping to ensure that farmers receive a fair price for their hard work and that consumers have access to fresh, locally-grown produce. In addition to these weekly markets, he has also established a number of other initiatives aimed at supporting poor farmers, including programs focused on organic farming, soil conservation, and seed saving. He has also been a vocal advocate for the rights of farmers and has worked to raise awareness about the challenges they face. Father Davis's initiative has been widely praised as a model for supporting farmers in India.<sup>170</sup> Overall, Fr. Davis's initiatives to support poor farmers in Kerala serve as a model for others who are interested in promoting sustainable and equitable agricultural practices. Through his work, he has demonstrated the power of direct action and community organizing in support of vulnerable populations.

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<sup>168</sup> Tino Shoranur, "Fr. Davis Chiramel Nattu Chantha Exhibition Thrissur Kerala All Wed #journeywithpeopletinoshoranur," YouTube, May 8, 2022, <https://youtu.be/yJXueqpeXb4>.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

His initiative has been hailed as a model for others to emulate, as it has helped to increase the income and improve the livelihoods of many small-scale farmers in Kerala. He has been featured in numerous media outlets and has received several awards for his work. He has been always a good Samaritan to the needy. He started a foundation for donating kidneys to the needy. He himself donated one of his kidneys for saving someone's life. He has also opened a food and clothing bank for the needy. He has also taken initiative to give microfinance support to promote organic farming.<sup>171</sup> His innovative approach had very notable impacts on the local farming community as well as the poor in general.

Fr Davis Chiramel's work with farmers in a small village in India is an inspiring example of how innovative and compassionate approaches can help to address the challenges faced by marginalized communities. His dedication and commitment to helping farmers have improved the lives of many and serve as a model for others to imitate.

## **ii. Micro- Finance aid**

Emergency material support is an important aid of consolation in any crisis. Therefore, micro-finance aid for the farmers in times of extreme crisis might be a great help for their survival. It might help landless farmers to avoid accumulated debt by taking high-interest loans from landlords. Patna Jesuit's social action team had experimented with the method of lending money to the landless farmer for cultivation without any interest rate and allowing the farmer to pay back in installments based on crop income. This method had helped many farmers in that particular village from being burdened with highly stressed debt. This kind of micro-financing can be done in many other parts of India through various organizations within the church circles. The SGHs model of microfinancing would be an ideal model to imitate.

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<sup>171</sup> Anuja S. Varghese, "Enlivening the Gospel, Fr Chiramel Organises Cloth, Food Banks for Needy," The New Indian Express, last modified November 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2020/nov/01/enlivening-the-gospel-fr-chiramel-organises-cloth-food-banks-for-needy-2217757.html>.

Catholic Church provides financial and material support to vulnerable farmers through various Catholic organizations and charities. For example, Caritas India is a Catholic relief organization that works to provide emergency assistance and sustainable development programs to marginalized communities, including farmers. They offer a variety of programs such as water resource management, organic farming, and rural livelihood programs to help farmers increase their income and improve their living conditions. However, considering the population of India and the number of farmers in need the Church needs to look for a different fund-raising and micro-financing system which can support the farmers in need.

Example to Imitate: Being a banker to the poor

Muhammad Yunus is a Bangladeshi economist and social entrepreneur who is renowned for his work in poverty alleviation through microfinance. He is the founder of Grameen Bank, which provides small loans to the poor, particularly women, to help them start their own businesses and improve their economic circumstances. Yunus's approach to poverty alleviation is based on the idea that the poor are not lacking in skills or motivation but rather in access to credit and financial services. In 1974, Bangladesh was ravaged by famine, during which Professor Yunus decided to lend a helping hand. He established a rural development program to uplift the villagers by encouraging them to do small businesses that could help them to get their livelihood back on track.<sup>172</sup> He believed that small loans could make a big difference in their lives. He started to give micro-credit to villagers, which meant providing small loans to marginalized communities without any extravagant collaterals. In 1976, Yunus introduced micro-finance and started lending small amounts of money to poor women in the village of Jobra, Bangladesh, with the aim of helping them start small businesses. He found that these

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<sup>172</sup> Akanksha Saxena, "Why Is Muhammad Yunus Known As The 'Father Of Micro-Finance'?", The Logical Indian, last modified April 5, 2022, <https://thelogicalindian.com/history/muhammad-yunus-microfinance-34846>.

loans were enough to help these women start businesses selling products like bamboo furniture, handloom textiles, and handicrafts.<sup>173</sup> He believes that by providing them with the means to invest in their own businesses, they can create a sustainable income and improve their quality of life.

Over the time, Yunus expanded his microcredit program, and in 1983, he founded Grameen Bank, which became the first bank to offer microcredit loans to the poor. The bank's model is based on the idea of solidarity lending, where borrowers are organized into groups of five and are collectively responsible for each other's loans.<sup>174</sup> This approach has proved to be successful, with Grameen Bank boasting a repayment rate of 98 percent. In addition to providing loans, Grameen Bank also offers other financial services, such as savings accounts, insurance, and pension plans, to help its clients build financial security.<sup>175</sup> Yunus's work has had a significant impact on poverty alleviation, with millions of people worldwide benefiting from microfinance. Yunus's work has received many accolades, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. He has also inspired the creation of similar microfinance programs around the world, with many countries adopting his approach to poverty alleviation.<sup>176</sup>

Muhammad Yunus's work to support the poor through microfinance has helped to empower millions of people worldwide, particularly women, by providing them with access to credit and financial services. His approach has shown that small loans can have a significant impact on poverty alleviation, and his legacy continues to inspire new initiatives to support those living in poverty. This kind of micro-financing aid can be adapted to support the poor farmers in India to reduce their burden and stress in their extreme needs.

### **iii. Forming a movement to deal with the ecological Crises**

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

Although ecological crises affect everyone, the poor, especially the farmers are the worst affected ones. The effect of ecological injustices in India in the form of pollution, water crisis, displacement, deforestation, and the effect of climate change affect Indian farmers very badly. They are affected in numerous ways. In India the ecological movement began with the protest of the poor and marginalized, they saw their dwellings, their land, lifestyle, and livelihood being threatened.<sup>177</sup> The church in India has a responsibility to address these issues of the environment.

Pope Francis' exhortation, the encyclical "*Laudato si*" (*LS*) is indeed an inspiration for the Church in India to focus on the care of the common home. Pope Francis highlights that climate change and environmental degradation are harming humanity and especially the poor and marginalized. He states that the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet (*LS 48*). Therefore, there is a need to care for the poor, especially the marginalized farmers by caring for our common home.

According to *Laudato Si*, a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (*LS 49*). Pope Francis warns that environmental injustices are based on the false assumption that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods. Accepting this assumption leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond any limit. It is the false notion that "an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily

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<sup>177</sup> Clement Campos, CSsR, "Laudato Si: An Indian Perspective", *Theological Studies*, Vol. 78(1), (Bangalore: 2017), 213–225, 218.

absorbed” (*LS 106*). The poor are the least contributors to climate change and global warming, however, they are the most vulnerable to environmental disasters (*LS 16*).

*Laudato Si* is a powerful call to action for all of us to care for the environment and the poor. It highlights the urgent need for a holistic approach to the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation, and it calls on us to work together to build a more sustainable and just world. In India, the church has a unique opportunity to take the lead in caring for our common home and the poor. India is home to some of the world's most vulnerable communities, (including marginalized farmers and Dalits) and they are often the hardest hit by the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. The church can play a critical role in empowering these communities and promoting sustainable practices that protect the planet. It can also work to address the root causes of poverty and inequality, which are often linked to environmental factors.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si*, caring for our common home is not only a moral imperative, but also a matter of justice and human dignity. His reflections on the ecological concerns that affect humanity, especially the poor (here, the vulnerable farmers) challenge every disciple of Christ to take responsibility personally and collectively to care for our common home. The initiative to care for the ecology will lead to caring for the weakest, especially the farmers. Although there are many initiatives taken by the Church in India towards caring for the common home and care for the poor, that remains inadequate because of the increase in the ecological challenges Indian farmers (and the poor) face. The church can help to build a more just and sustainable society in India, by taking the initiative to care for our common home and the poor. It can also inspire others to take action and join in this important work.

## Example to Imitate: Tarumitra, India

“Tarumitra, (meaning “friends of trees” in Hindi and Sanskrit) is a movement that evolved from the Forum for Environment that students started in 1988, with a focus on the conservation of biodiversity and promotion of ecological sensitivity.” Fr. Robert Athickal S J is the man behind this institution. This students’ movement is now working in 23 states of India and with around 2,000 schools and colleges in the country.<sup>178</sup> Its main branch is in Patna, India which is a bio-reserve and eco-spirituality center that promotes the importance of caring for the common home.

Tarumitra strongly advocates extending the green cover, especially the planting of rare, endangered, and medicinal flora which caters to indigenous groups. This movement has always taken a stand for alternative sources of energy, organic gardening, and farming, green and eco-friendly activities, vermi composting and mulching, waste management and other green practices that minimize the carbon footprint.<sup>179</sup>

“Tarumitra also collaborates and networks with local, state, and central administrative authorities such as the State Pollution Control Board, the Department of Forest, Environment and Climate Change, the Municipal Corporation Body, and the State Department of Agriculture, among others.”<sup>180</sup> This movement of students, inspires the student to be responsible for the care of mother earth. This organization gives the students to think and practice many creative ways to protect mother earth and protect the people who are affected by the current ecological crises.

When rampant cutting of trees takes place in public places or unhealthy practices are undertaken and increasing pollution levels, the Tarumitra clubs of various school and colleges respond unanimously through road shows, human chains, signature

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<sup>178</sup> Ecojes Admin, "The Green Journey of Tarumitra with the Youth," Ecology and Jesuits in Communication, last modified March 29, 2023, <https://www.ecojesuit.com/the-green-journey-of-tarumitra-with-the-youth/>.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

campaigns, flash mobs, street plays, and other similar group actions to create higher awareness on urgent issues that contribute to global warming and climate change.<sup>181</sup>

Tarumita also gives the students an opportunity to learn about different sustainable farming methods like mixed crop- planting, organic rice planting, and the System of Rice Intensification (SRI)<sup>182</sup> method that was synthesized in the 1980s by French Jesuit Henri de Laulanié who started to work with rice farmers in Madagascar in 1961.<sup>183</sup> It gives the students a rich experience to learn about SRI, a system of rice cultivation using less water and chemical inputs.<sup>184</sup>

Tarumitra received the UN Special Consultative Status (ECOSOC) in 2005, enabling them to participate in events like the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development where progress on the Sustainable Development Goals are reviewed with UN member-states. Students representing Tarumitra participate in UN Summits and these young green leaders have time and again addressed General Assemblies on ecological concerns. Students from various parts of the globe such as Zamorano Pan-American Agricultural School (a non-profit private university in Honduras, Central America) and Lehigh University (a private research university in Pennsylvania, USA) have come to Tarumitra India for internship programs.<sup>185</sup>

Tarumitra's green journey is animated by committed youth who actively respond to and engage with urgent environmental global issues, and in caring for our common home, and strongly advocates that "the whole world is my family."<sup>186</sup> According to Fr. Robert Athickal, "students are not only the future but the present as well. When students become aware of eco-friendly and green ideas from their childhood, the possibility is greater that they would refrain from activities which are harmful to the environment."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> SRI is a method of rice cultivation that increases the productivity of irrigated rice by changing the management of plants, soil, water and nutrients. SRI leads to healthier soil and plants, supported by greater root growth and the nurturing of soil microbial abundance and diversity. The SRI method is now taken up in about 40 rice-producing countries

<sup>183</sup> Ecojes Admin, "The Green Journey of Tarumitra with the Youth," Ecology and Jesuits in Communication, last modified March 29, 2023, <https://www.ecojesuit.com/the-green-journey-of-tarumitra-with-the-youth/>.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

This students' movement is a model for dealing with different issues which give rise to environmental crises. The poor, especially the farmers are the most affected victims of ecological crises. Therefore, Tarumitra is a model for every Christian institution for promoting awareness to protect the environment and support the marginalized. Such institutions can also raise their voice against the systems that cause ecological crises. Such movements will be focusing on long-term goals that will be not only beneficial for the farmers but for everyone.

#### **iv. Becoming a prophetic voice for the voiceless farmers through various responses**

Becoming the voice for the voiceless is the responsibility of the disciple of Christ. The Church in India has been taking the sides of the poor by becoming their voice in many different ways. However, there is a need for more concrete involvement by the Church in India not only by supporting the marginalized with material support but also by being prophets who are ready to become the voice of the farmers and other marginalized through writings and various activities. The Catholic Church in India has a long history of advocating for the rights of the marginalized and the oppressed. In recent years, the Church has taken a more active role in supporting the farmers who have been facing numerous challenges and difficulties. As a religious institution that promotes social justice, the Church has recognized the plight of the farmers and has become a true prophetic voice for them.

The Church in India has been actively involved in supporting farmers' protests, providing them with relief materials, legal aid, and medical assistance. The Church has also been raising awareness about the issues faced by farmers and advocating for their rights. Through its various initiatives and organizations, the Church has been working to empower farmers and help them to raise their voices and organize.

The Church's involvement in supporting the farmers is in line with its mission to serve the poor and marginalized. As a religious institution that promotes social justice and human dignity, the Church has a moral obligation to speak out against injustice and work towards creating a more just and equitable society. The Church's prophetic voice has the power to inspire and mobilize people towards positive change, and its involvement in supporting the farmers is a testament to its commitment to social justice.

The Church in India has the potential to become a true prophetic voice for the farmers by continuing to advocate for their rights, raising awareness about their struggles, and working towards creating a more just and equitable society. Through its various initiatives and organizations, the Church can continue to empower farmers and provide them with the support they need to improve their lives and livelihoods. There is a need to recognize that the church, in India has pledged solidarity with thousands of Indian farmers who were protesting on the borders of New Delhi demanding the repeal of three controversial farm laws.<sup>188</sup> The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has been vocal in its support of farmers' rights and has called on the government to enact policies that protect farmers from exploitation and ensure fair prices for their products. They have also spoken out against the recent controversial agricultural laws that have led to widespread protests among farmers. It was a sign of discipleship to see that many church organizations, theological institutions, and different dioceses expressed solidarity with farmers by being part of their protest in Delhi and various parts of India and also supporting the protesting farmers with food and other relief materials. Many Christians, including priests, and religious, through their writings and other works continue to challenge the unjust systems that add stress to the farmers.

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<sup>188</sup> UCA News reporter, New Delhi, "Church Supports Indian Farmers' Struggle Against Lopsided Laws," Ucanews.com, last modified November 30, 2020, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/church-supports-indian-farmers-struggle-against-lopsided-laws/90503>.

## Example to Imitate: Formation of Farm Committee that Evaluates and Supports Farmers

“The Church, including the Jesuits and their collaborators, has been trying to respond to the crises. A Farm Committee has been constituted by the President of the South Asian Jesuit Conference.”<sup>189</sup> This visits the areas where the farmers, including women farmers, landless laborers, and children, and explores different possibilities to support and be in solidarity with them in their struggles. They speak in different forums about their determination to fight for Justice and Dignity right till the end.<sup>190</sup> This forum encourages the people around about the urgent need of supporting and becoming a voice for the farmers who are struggling.

These kinds of initiatives by some church organizations in India might inspire many others to bear prophetic witness not only by engaging in relief works but also by doing advocacy on behalf of the farmers in their distress.

### **v. Ambedkar’s Model: Educate – Agitate - Organize**

B.R. Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution (also the Father of Dalit Transformation in India), believed in the power of education, agitation, and organization as keys to empowerment and social change. Ambedkar called on the oppressed community to reach out for the education of the next generation, which they had been denied by the dominant castes on the basis of mythological religious, social, and cultural reasons. The call is to stir up marginalized communities to realize their own bondage in the discriminative social system and struggle to overcome it. However, the key to this struggle is to agitate peacefully. The call to organize is meant to bring all sections of the depressed classes together not only to stand for

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<sup>189</sup> Tony Dias, SJ, “Jesuit intervention in farmers protest at Delhi borders”, *SAAJN* (New Delhi: (JCSA), 2021), <https://jcsaweb.org/saajn/saajn-2021/jan/pdf/farmer.pdf>.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

their right but also to affirm their existence as a dignified group<sup>191</sup>. The Church in India can adopt these three keys in supporting the farmers and promoting social justice.

Education is a key component in empowering the farmers and creating awareness about their rights and issues. The Church in India can promote education and awareness among farmers through various means such as workshops, training programs, and awareness campaigns. By providing farmers with the necessary knowledge and skills, the Church can help them to make informed decisions and take action towards improving their situation. Offering training and education to farmers can also help them improve their agricultural practices and increase their income. This can include teaching them about new technologies, best practices for crop management, and financial planning.

Agitation is another key component in bringing attention to the issues faced by farmers. The Church can support the farmers by participating in peaceful protests, rallies, and marches. By advocating for the rights of farmers and raising awareness about their struggles, the Church can mobilize people toward positive change. Advocating for farmers' rights is an essential part of accompanying them. This can include working to secure fair prices for their crops, ensuring access to credit and insurance, and advocating for policies that support their welfare.

The organization is the third key to empowering the farmers and creating a strong and unified voice. The Church can support the farmers by helping them to organize themselves into farmer groups and other organizations. By working together, farmers can build a stronger and more effective movement to advocate for their rights and work towards improving their lives and livelihoods.

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<sup>191</sup> Arun Kumar, Hari Bapuji, and Raza Mir, "'Educate, Agitate, Organize': Inequality and Ethics in the Writings of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2021, 82.

These three keys of Ambedkar can also be a tool for the transformation of the oppressed group. Transformation is not only meant for the inferior groups but also the dominant groups of India because it invites to educate the society with ethics, to agitate its collective minds through such education, and to organize it for reformation and transformation. It is a prophetic call for every individual towards building the *beloved community*.<sup>192</sup> A beloved community means; a community of love, caring for one another, dignity, mutual respect, freedom, justice, equality, equity, security, fraternity, and liberty. Howard Thurman advocates the idea that when all the people consider the other members of their place as children of God; there will be a change of attitude and actions for social change and the kingdom of God will be at hand.<sup>193</sup> Such an attitude will help everyone to take steps to be in solidarity with the vulnerable farmers who are also children of God, in their struggles and to work for transforming our community as beloved community.

The Church in India can adopt the three keys of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar - educate, agitate, and organize - in supporting the farmers and promoting social justice. By providing education and awareness, participating in peaceful protests and rallies, and supporting the organization of farmers, the Church can become a powerful force for positive change and empowerment in the farming community.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Accompanying farmers in a more pastoral and social way requires a holistic approach that addresses their practical, emotional and spiritual needs. By building relationships,

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<sup>192</sup> Mary S. Copeland, "The Fierce Urgency of Now" (lecture, STM, Boston College, Boston, April 4, 2018).

<sup>193</sup> Walter Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber, eds. *A Strange Freedom: The Best on Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life* (Boston: Beckon Press, 2006), 130.

providing concrete support, and advocating for their rights, we can help farmers to overcome their challenges and build a brighter future for themselves and their families.

This feeling of "not being alone" boosts an individual's optimism, courage, and willpower, and can easily become resilient. In that sense, it is the duty of the Church in India to make the vulnerable farmers feel that they are not alone in their difficulties. By healing the sick, forgiving the sinners, feeding the five thousand, raising the dead, and giving life for us on the cross Jesus communicated to the vulnerable humanity (us) that we are not alone. The Church of India has a great responsibility to respond like Jesus by being with marginalized farmers.

The existing examples of initiatives and organizations in supporting farmers in India by the Church, mentioned in this chapter have shown some degree of success in advocating the farmer's rights and improving their situation in specific regions. However, there is still a long way to go in supporting farmers in India. The existing examples demonstrate that initiatives and organizations can play a crucial role in advocating for their rights and improving their situation. Drawing inspiration from the proposals and the existing models given in this chapter, the Church in India can become a powerful force for social justice and empowerment in the farming community. The Church in India has a responsibility to respond like Jesus to the suffering of Indian Farmers.

The proposals and models presented in this chapter offer a promising way to improve the situation of farmers in India and prevent suicides. These proposals and models presented in this chapter provide a holistic approach to improving the situation of farmers in India. They address both the economic, ecological and mental health challenges faced by farmers. The Church in India can work and inspire many people towards creating a sustainable and prosperous agricultural sector in India, where farmers can thrive and feel valued. There are

many ways in which Church in India can help to give hope to suffering farmers, from providing material support to advocating for policy change to offering pastoral care and emotional support. Moreover, by working together as disciples of Christ working together, Christians in India can help to create a more just and equitable society for all.

## **Conclusion**

The first chapter serves to raise awareness about the situation of the farmers and highlights their suffering and grief and emphasizes the urgent need to address their struggles. However, it is important to note that the challenges faced by farmers can vary significantly based on factors such as geographical location, crops grown, and access to resources. Additionally, India has a diverse range of cultures and agricultural practices, so the specific challenges faced by farmers may differ depending on the region and community they belong to. Therefore, the examples of farmers' suffering in India mentioned in the first chapter do not bring out every problem of Indian farmers. The selected examples mentioned in the first chapter serve as an awareness of the situation of Indian farmers and the urgent need for supporting them.

The second chapter of this thesis highlights the resources that can prompt solidarity and encourage action in response to the suffering of farmers. It calls the attention of Christians to respond like Jesus, becoming his disciples and following his teachings, especially by the parable of Good Samaritans, and Beatitudes, and cultivating the virtues and values that enable Christians to stand with those who are oppressed and suffering, especially the farmers. This chapter serves as a reminder that it is in the spirit of Christ-like love and compassion that we can become modern-day disciples who can stand with the poor and vulnerable, advocating for justice and standing in solidarity with those who are most in need. I hope that these resources will inspire the Christians in India to follow the example of Jesus, for responding to the sufferings of farmers and all those who are marginalized.

The existing successful models presented in the third chapter can be a great example to imitate to make a change in the lives of struggling farmers in India. These models have the potential to provide a solution that could be helpful and bring hope to farmers. However, these

models may not be fully effective in every region because of geographical, cultural, and situational differences. But the evidence shows that it can make a lot of difference and make the life of the farmers in India better.

I believe that this thesis can be a source to encourage Christians to respond like Christ by being his disciples and following his values. It calls the people to become good Samaritans to others in need. According to Keenan, we imitate God when we practice this vulnerability and its accompanying mercy, that is, the willingness to enter into the chaos of another. That merciful act often entails an elective suffering for the sake of others.<sup>194</sup> He adds that embracing the suffering of another is an imitation of Christ, an act of vulnerable love.<sup>195</sup> Therefore this thesis is an invitation for the Christians in India to use vulnerability, recognition and accompaniment as strategies for responding to the situations of grieving farmers in India, as disciples of Jesus, for bringing hope, healing and transformation to these farmers and the survivors of their suicide.

The approaches mentioned in this thesis can be applied not only to the farmer's issue but also to other types of suffering and grief of vulnerable people, such as poverty, caste-system, gender discrimination, and religious intolerance.

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<sup>194</sup> James F. Keenan, *Moral wisdom*. 83.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

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