

Study Group: Religious Freedom and Mission

Paper Title

Indian Constitution and Challenges to the Indian Christian Identity

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India is a land of the Caste system. Due to some historically contingent factors and the nature of the missionary undertakings, the majority of the Indian Christian converts came from the depressed castes' background. Simultaneous to their Christian conversion, they had progressed in education and economic development spheres until the middle of the 20th century. However, since the year 1950, in order to preserve the vast fabric of the Hindu society, Constitutional guarantees were introduced for the non-Christian converts from the depressed castes in the form of "Reservations in Public Institutions and employment". This devise was (is) to discourage the pace of conversions and Christian converts were (are) excluded from certain State benefits that are being enjoyed by their fellow non-converts. In the quest for social development and material advancement, a great number of people from the depressed castes' background remained within the realm of Hinduism or Buddhism (where the benefits of reservation apply). Therefore, public life in India became a predicament for Christians from the depressed castes' background where they had to struggle between material benefits and spiritual life. Very often, Christians had relinquished their Christianity or assumed a 'dual religious identity' to gain privileges that were granted to their non- Christian counterparts. The discussion of this paper is aimed at bringing into light such challenges and the denial of social justice to the Indian Christians despite a Constitutional guarantee that prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
