

The role of the Bible play in Christian ethics with reference to child sexual abuse - Rev. Nishantha Fernando

The Biblical teaching about the status of Children and their protection –

The status of children in the Bible start in the creation story, when God create the world children were the significant creature of the procreation (Genesis 1: 28) and they were the special blessing and gift of creation as well as covenant with Noah (Genesis 9: 1)¹. Therefore children has a special place in God's creation because they were the sign of the Gods' blessing and they became the main characters in a family. According to creation story child represent the God's plan in the community as agents. The agent hood of God gave to a child to be a superior place in the society, the protection of a child was a Godly work because there was no existence of the society without a child. The role of a child continued as the central part of the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 17: 2, 6; cf. 28:3; 35:1; 48: 4)². If a women didn't have a child it has reflect her to a spiritual matter as well as social matter in Abrahamic community specially a boy child (1 Samuel 1: 11). In this situation child had a superior place in a family also child became a centre in the spirituality of the family life in the Bible. In the heart of the Israel's low bearing a child to a woman strongly emphasised (Gen 38, Duet 25: 5-10); if husband died, the brother of dead person should married his widow and to raise legal descendants to his brother³. To having a children to a widow from her husband's line shown how children were important to a family as well as a widow also has opportunity to have a protection through children.

Another protection that children had that, rights of orphans and widows were highly emphasised in the Bible. There is no possibility to abuse any widow or orphans (Exodus 22: 22, Isaiah 1: 17) also if someone has done an injustice to them God will heard their voice (Exodus 22: 23)⁴. Therefore special protection has governed within the Israel community nobody can violate that command. Cry of a orphans is very much recognised in Gods' side and God will act on behalf of a child because of perpetrators are violate the Gods' command. Therefore Prophetic voice was against to the leaders of the nation specially Isaiah's time because they didn't do the justice to orphans and widows (Isaiah 1: 23)⁵.

According to Hager and Ishmael story "God hears the voice of the boy; the point is twice spoken. God hears the voice of children; God is not deaf to the seemingly "minor" wailing of the little ones (Genesis 21: 14- 20)"⁶. Therefore it is significant that in a life and death situation of

¹ Marcia I. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, Beverly R. Gaventa (eds). *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008). P. 42.

² Marcia I. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, Beverly R. Gaventa (eds). *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008). P. 42.

³ Marcia I. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, Beverly R. Gaventa (eds). *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008). P. 7.

⁴ Marcia I. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, Beverly R. Gaventa (eds). *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008). P. 85.

⁵ Marcia I. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, Beverly R. Gaventa (eds). *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008). P. 87.

⁶ Marcia I. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, Beverly R. Gaventa (eds). *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008). P. 13.

little ones God concerned for their life and Gods' protection has been affirm. The God is not neutral in the midst of child abuse God is active and guide people to find the ways and means on behalf of children.

In the ministry of the Jesus children were included as subject of their own agency as he performed in age of twelve, he honoured them, valued them and healed them⁷. Jesus' attitude towards the children was very much positive and he took them as models for entering into Gods' kingdom (Mark 10: 15). In the same way He taught a lesson to the disciples about the importance of being like a child (Mark 10: 14). Also He was unhappy when the disciples prevented the children from being taken to Him and he rebuked them and blessed the children (Mark 10:16). Jesus gave the highest place to children in His ministry, which means He had a significant love for them and they were highly accepted. As James Francis describe, Jesus blessing of children is the culmination of his ministry to children⁸. Also " The compassion and love which Jesus showed towards the children who came to him and the obvious care he had for their well-being is counterbalanced by his anger at adults who, selfishly and without care, abused the trust of children (Matthew 18: 6-7)"⁹. Jesus was clearly condemn those who hurt children, endangered children's ability to trust¹⁰. There is clear note that extreme anger of Jesus' words and it indicate sin against young ones by Christian is a one of the worst crime any person can do¹¹. Jesus himself compared with children especially in argument of the greatest among the disciples. Jesus' sides for children against his disciples shows they have special place in God's realm (Luke 9: 48)¹². Church as a body of Christ it is significant no one can unaffected by betrayal of trust¹³. Therefore especially within the church circle there is no way to abuse children, if it is happened it is a damage to Jesus' body also the perpetrators' action is against Jesus not for a child. However it is worth to emphasize that child abuse is always criminal, and it can't justify in theologically or any other terms; it is an offence against the Gospel¹⁴.

Ecclesiastical emphasis of Child sexual abuse and their rights

It is important as a church to keep people's confidence about the issue specially many adults victims find that church is not a safe place to talk their experiences¹⁵. This experience is even

⁷ Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. "Time for Action" Sexual abuse, the Churches and a new dawn for survivors'(London, Church House Publishing, 2002). P. 124.

⁸ Marcia I. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, Beverly R. Gaventa (eds). *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008). P. 150.

⁹ Ron O' Grady. "The Hidden Shame of the Church" *Sexual Abuse of Children and the Church'* (Geneva, WCC Publications, 2001) .p.66.

¹⁰Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. "Time for Action" Sexual abuse, the Churches and a new dawn for survivors'(London, Church House Publishing, 2002). P. 124.

¹¹ Ron O' Grady. "The Hidden Shame of the Church" *Sexual Abuse of Children and the Church'* (Geneva, WCC Publications, 2001) .p.66.

¹² Marcia I. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, Beverly R. Gaventa (eds). *The Child in the Bible* (Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008). P. 190.

¹³ Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. "Time for Action" Sexual abuse, the Churches and a new dawn for survivors'(London, Church House Publishing, 2002). P. 125.

¹⁴ Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. "Time for Action" Sexual abuse, the Churches and a new dawn for survivors'(London, Church House Publishing, 2002). P. 124.

¹⁵ Patrick Parkinson. *Child Sex Abuse and the Church* (London, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1997). P. 2.

common to children. “According to Policy of the Church of England Statement of safeguarding Principles; we are committed to:

- The care, nurture of, and respectful pastoral ministry for all: children, young people and adults
- The safeguarding and protecting children, young people and all adults
- The establish of safe, caring communities which provide a loving environment where victims of abuse can report or disclose abuse and where they can find support and best practice that contribute to the prevention of abuse”¹⁶.

This commitment and the other part of the statement has given complete pastoral coverage to the victims as well as legal action to the perpetrators also guaranty of protection to other children in future. All the human being created by God’s image and likeness they have values and dignity as children of God; the duty of Christians to ensure the human values and dignity is protect and people are not to be harm¹⁷. Therefore working for children’s protection without any cast, creed or colour is a duty to God as honour to God’s image. Especially as Sri Lankan Christian there are enough opportunity to educate within the church circle such as through sermons, Sunday schools, youth fellowships, women fellowships, men’s fellowships and special workshops. But it is not in the Buddhist or Hindu religious environment; therefore it a task of Christians to share these knowledge with them and work together as ecumenically for child protection.

Every person is equal in God’s presence and each one whether male or female they are important to God ; respect and assurance is must for abuse one as well as to find out their identity is essential and church should be a healing place to them¹⁸. It is important that as religious people in the society invite other faith centres also to keep open place to abuse children to as healing places because if Christians invite them to church they may think it is for conversion. Doing justice to abuse children is a outworking of love; therefore listening to them in sympathetically without further damage and discourage them is a responsibility of the church¹⁹. As responsible people of the society help the abuse children in carefully to build up their life in positive manner is part of the mission. Handling those issues by train people is the best way and it will be a justice to a victim because they will deal them correct way. When God create the human being God created them live as in a community; if someone in a community suffer all are suffer, finding the grace to act righteously for abuse is a transforming experience of all through grace; that will lead to a better people and the church will be a safe place for all²⁰. Church should not be work isolate from the community because child sexual abuse not only a church problem it is a social problem; therefore work with the government organisations, other religious groups and social actives those who work for child rights give more opportunity to work strongly.

¹⁶ House of Bishops. “Responding Well to those who have been sexually abused” Policy and guidance for the Church of England’ (London, Church House Publishing, 2011). P.1.

¹⁷ House of Bishops. “Responding Well to those who have been sexually abused” Policy and guidance for the Church of England’ (London, Church House Publishing, 2011). P. 04.

¹⁸ Church of England. The Policy for Safeguarding Children in the *Church of England*. Protecting All. God’s Children. Protecting all God’s-NEW:Protecting all .. 4th edition 2010, Available from www.churchofengland.org/media/37378/protectingallgodschildren.pdf .p.10.

¹⁹ Church of England. The Policy for Safeguarding Children in the *Church of England*. Protecting All. God’s Children. Protecting all God’s-NEW:Protecting all .. 4th edition 2010, Available from www.churchofengland.org/media/37378/protectingallgodschildren.pdf .p.11.

²⁰ Church of England. The Policy for Safeguarding Children in the *Church of England*. Protecting All. God’s Children. Protecting all God’s-NEW:Protecting all .. 4th edition 2010, Available from www.churchofengland.org/media/37378/protectingallgodschildren.pdf .p.11.

How the Bible help us to work for rights of the sexual abused Children

“The Spirit of Jesus is the Spirit that commission God’s servants to bind up the broken – hearted, to comfort all who mourn, and to bestow upon those who grieve a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of spirit of despair²¹”. It is significant that when we work for sexually abuse children to keep in mind we are followers of Jesus; let the heart of the Jesus bind our heart and let we have a mind of Jesus. Then we can understand the pain of an abuse child then a child will become son/daughter, sister/brother, grandson/granddaughter to us. As represent of Jesus Christ it is the task and responsibility to work on behalf of Christ for the sake of children because there is no Christ hand in this world only our hands, there is no Christ legs in this world only our legs²². Through that we become an OLTOR CHRISTOS means another Christ in the society. It is the Jesus’ expectation that represent him in the midst of violation of human rights in the society; Christian life means giving life to others which those who do not have hope in their life. Christians are called recognized the unique state of children, Jesus warned to those who abuse and exploit the children; within the kingdom of God children matters and their rights are seriously taken²³.

The God of the Bible shown us from Genesis to Revelation how God’s intervene in human history to liberate them; the God’s story always liberate the human being; therefore protect a child from sexual abuse is a God’s work. The Bible gives us enough support to work for rights of sexually abuse children and their rights which I have mention throughout the essay. The ethics of the Bible always protect the innocent children as gift of God. Child as a gift from God it is a duty of the elders to look after them and protect them. God listen child voice special way when they are in trouble also God answer those who cry for their pain. The way how God here a voice of Ishmael in a death situation God listen children specially voice of abuse child. God in the Bible cares the needy, the outcast, the exiled; in Jesus God incarnate and live among in those people and transformed their lives and affirmed that in God’s sight every one valued as well as love is for all²⁴.

God special concerned to little flock in the Bible has shown how God’s concerned to minority in the society; Israel as little flock God concerned them in similar way God concerned sexually abuse children as minority voiceless in the community. Therefore it is a task of Christians that to be a voice to a voiceless abuse children in the society and against for perpetrators in the society, force them to confess their sin, help them to overcome from their sinful life; because Gods’ forgiveness for all those confess their sin in Jesus is available for all. Some time as Christian going

²¹Patrick Parkinson. *Child Sex Abuse and the Church* (London, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1997). P.3.

²² Media Unit of National Christian Councils of Sri Lanka. Kithunu Geetha (Colombo, NCCSL, 1988). P. 45.

²³ House of Bishop. “*Policy on Child Protection*” *A Policy Document*’ (London, Church House Publishing, 1999). P. 01.

²⁴ House of Bishops. “Responding Well to those who have been sexually abused” Policy and guidance for the Church of England’ (London, Church House Publishing, 2011). P.51.

for a legal action on behalf of an abuse child also a part of the ministry because justice should be done to a victim and society may learned the lesson that no one can escape.

Ethical values in the every society is clearly mention as what is correct and what is wrong there is no different in Christian ethical values and Buddhist ethical values as Sri Lankans. Issue of child sexual abuse can be taken as an interfaith work and find out the ways and means to prevent the issue as community because God is the God of Justice love and peace. Therefore work for common good in the community is a part of Christian ethics in wider level also to do justice for all inhabited human beings in the world.

Church is empowered by the Holy Spirit to manifest wonderful character of God; Christians are call to be a witness to the truth all the actions and reactions of Christians should reflect character of God and they are call to be part of the oppressed, the marginalise and the victim of injustice²⁵. Therefore according to the Biblical teaching it is a mission of the church to stand for justice of innocent children who were sexually abuse; for that guidance of the Holy Spirit is always be with Christians because power of the Holy Spirit always keep Christians as witnessing people in the society.

Conclusion

The Bible as the word of God it's contains the God's plan for human being that is release them from bondage of sin and have an eternal life; the way to that life is in the Bible. The ethical life of a person and the community is one of the main practice to that path; ten commandment and Jesus' teaching love your neighbour as you love yourself is the base for Christian love. Therefore the role of the Bible play in Christian Ethics in connection to Child Sexual abuse is highly emphasised in the Bible because child was always link to the spiritual life of the people as well as God and human being relation connected through a child.

²⁵ House of Bishops. "Responding Well to those who have been sexually abused" Policy and guidance for the Church of England' (London, Church House Publishing, 2011). P.51.