

# Bullock-Cart Theology

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Bullock-Cart Theology pursued a theology that was truly Indian while trying to preserve the core of the Adventist message at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

## Background

The bullock cart was an apt symbol with its two wheels representing the Asian context and the Adventist message. Without either wheel, the cart would merely go round in circles.<sup>2</sup> The imagery was fitting because the bullock cart provided trustworthy transportation for the poor of India on a variety of unfavorable road conditions and with very low maintenance costs.<sup>3</sup>

The need for indigenous theology that spoke to India's poor inspired the publication of the Bullock-Cart Theology series of pamphlets aimed at contextualizing Christian message to Indian population. D. K. Sankeethamony stated, "Adventists in Asian countries have long felt the need for a theology that is truly Adventist and truly Asian."<sup>4</sup> A similar concept of developing self-conscious Asian Christian theology was initiated by Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese protestant theologian.<sup>5</sup>

## The Beginning

After completing his doctoral studies in systematic theology at the seminary of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Maryland, U.S.A. Brian de Alwis returned with "a hurry to formulate a 'praying, meditative, doing' theology in Southern Asia, with a burden to present the gospel differently from the way it was presented in the rest of the world."<sup>6</sup> The original plan was to ask the Adventist representatives of the "Third World" to hold a theology conference for the developing countries. The conference, it was hoped, would recommend a process that would take the cue from the planners and then go beyond, involving members and individuals from both developed and developing countries.<sup>7</sup> However, the conference did not materialize.<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis of Bullock-Cart Theology was to develop, learn, and implement a doing of theology from the perspective of the poor. The rationale was that conventional western religious philosophy emerged out of Euro-American theological ethnocentrism and philosophical ideas as the primary method of seeing God. Bullock-Cart

Theology was a call to Adventists in Euro-American countries to acknowledge that the best vessel to convey the Three Angels' Messages in Asia would be through a medium that was truly Adventist but also genuinely Asian.<sup>9</sup>

## The Publications

The Bullock-Cart Theology Series attempted to disseminate this "third world theology" that would fit the Asian context, particularly the Indian context. In the first publication in 1988, some very uncommon suggestions were made for the presenters and participants. De Alwis suggested doing theology with an experience of living in the "Third World" before formulating and writing any theological research.<sup>10</sup>

## Carrying the Task Forward

When in March 1990 Brian de Alwis passed away, his colleague D. K. Sankeethamony assumed the mantle. Sankeethamony had earned a doctoral degree in Tamil linguistics and another in philosophy. He completed a master's degree in theology and was pursuing a third doctoral degree in religion. Sankeethamony went on to publish sixty-five issues for the Bullock-Cart Theology Series. While several others contributed to the project with an article or two,<sup>11</sup> Sankeethamony continued to write the majority of the articles until his retirement in 2000.

Dr. Sankeethamony addressed several issues of the church in India, such as theology for the poor, the relevance of Ellen G. White's writings, the contextualized concept of the Trinity, injustice in casteism, and others. Each of the Bullock-Cart Theology series sought to examine and develop a contextual theology through the lens of the Indian worldview. The last issue of the series was released in November 2000, entitled "Meditation."

In his retirement years Sankeethamony was employed at the Anantha Ashram, a health-care facility in Hosur, Tamilnadu, operated by Sam Koilpillai, a lay Adventist member. Sankeethamony was placed in charge of the meditation center and spent considerable time at the hospital library. He continued to release a series of publications under the banner of the Anantha Ashram.

Over the years the Bullock-Cart Theology series has faded in history.

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## NOTES

1. D. K. Sankeethamony, "The Bullock-Cart Theology Series," *Doing Theology From the Perspective of the Poor*, 1992. See also Gordon Christo, "Staying Within the Boundaries: Contextualization of Adventism for India." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*. 13/2 (Autumn 2002), 7.
2. D. K. Sankeethamony, "The Bullock-cart Theology Series," in Caleb Rosado and Brain De Alwis, "Doing Theology From the Perspective of the Poor," *The Bullock-Cart Theology Series* (1988), 2.
3. D. R. Bankhead, "A Bullock Cart Theology," *The Bullock Cart Theology Series* (1988), 1.
4. Caleb Rosado and Brain De Alwis, "Doing Theology From the Perspective of the Poor." *The Bullock-Cart Theology Series*, 1988, 2.
5. Kōsuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* (New York, NY: United States: Orbis Books, 1999).
6. D. K. Sankeethamony, "Introduction."
7. Ibid, 4.
8. Ibid, 3-4.
9. W. Arden Clarke, *And the People Said, "We Will Serve the Lord": An Analysis of Church Government* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Services, 2001), 172.
10. Caleb Rosado and Brain De Alwis, 7-9. In the series, De Alwis strongly recommends that no research paper will be expected before the time spent among the poor. Each participant was expected to live among the poor in slums or villages, experiencing their challenges and needs. Based on those experiences, the participants had to write a paper developed with an incarnational experience while living with the poor
11. The list of all the Bullock-Cart Series volumes can be downloaded from the link.  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y\\_lFyXPRQp5kmWQLFRNYWk1TxYnWXlsg/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y_lFyXPRQp5kmWQLFRNYWk1TxYnWXlsg/view?usp=sharing).

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