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Contemporary Quest
for Freedom and Liberation

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Jnanadeepa: **Pune Journal of Religious Studies**

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Contents

Editorial	3
Quest for Freedom and Psychotherapy	5
<i>Abraham Mattakottil, CSC</i>	
The Liberative Spirituality of Bhagavad Gita	27
<i>Sebastian Painadath, SJ</i>	
Hierarchy, Equality and Liberation	34
<i>George Karuvelil, SJ</i>	
The Quest in Zen Buddhism	54
<i>Selva Rathinam, SJ</i>	
The Tribal People of the Northeast:	
A Liberative Quest for Identity, Equality and Respect	63
<i>Peter Haakip</i>	
Women and Power	73
<i>Astrid Lobo Gajiwala</i>	
The Quest of Women Religious	86
<i>Rekha Chennattu, RA</i>	
Human Freedom: The Finite Quest for the Infinite	93
<i>Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ</i>	
Jesus, the Mystery of Freedom in History	108
<i>Jacob Parappally, MSFS</i>	
Freedom in the Church	119
<i>Isaac Padinjarekuttu</i>	
Freedom and Liberation	131
<i>Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ</i>	
Changing Perceptions of Indian Christians in Independent India	149
<i>Lionel Fernandes</i>	
Document: Jesuit Provincials Support Their Theologians	164
Book Reviews	166

Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies

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Editorial

The quest for freedom and liberation is not altogether a new phenomenon. Throughout history humans have been engaged in this quest. Think, for instance, of slave revolts, ancient and modern, in Rome, in Rio, and in Maryland or peasant rebellions in different parts of the world against feudal lords and tyrannical monarchs. These were expressions of the oppressed people's quest for freedom.

And yet, the contemporary quest for freedom and liberation is something new. For one thing, it is quite widespread today. Many different groups comprising large numbers of people are engaged in this quest: the poor, the Dalits, the tribal people, women, to mention a few. Add to this all the liberation movements you have heard of during the last 50 years. For another, the quest for freedom and liberation has now become strong, powerful and irresistible. People everywhere are refusing to bear the burden of oppression and exploitation and are clamoring for freedom and liberation.

It is in this context that this issue of *Jnanadeepa* has chosen to discuss the contemporary quest for freedom and liberation. The secular quest for freedom and liberation is discussed in an article on psychotherapy. The quest of psychotherapy is an open-minded and open-ended search for freedom to unfold. And the religious quest is dealt with in an essay on Zen Buddhism where it is pointed out that the quest here is for liberation – a liberation which is not merely individual and other-worldly, but also communitarian and this-worldly. There is another article on the liberative spirituality of the Bhagavad Gita. Gita's way of liberation is holistic, comprising as it does all the aspects of life – personal and social, emotional and rational, historical and cosmic.

One of the articles discusses the quest of the tribal people of the Northeast for a clear recognition of their ethnic identity and for the space to shape their destiny freely without undue interference from others. This is in no way a demand for secession from India. Another article deals with the all-pervasive caste culture of India and says that ethical equality does not find a place in it. Hence, it is not conducive to the liberation of the oppressed masses and the creation of an egalitarian society envisaged in the *Constitution of India*. There is one article which discusses human freedom from a philosophical point of view. The paradox of human freedom, it asserts, lies in this that it is a finite quest for the infinite.

Two papers deal with women's issues. The first one discusses women and power. It is the author's contention that women's liberation and empowerment involves both a struggle *for* and a struggle *with* power. The other deals with the quest of women religious for freedom and liberation. Basing herself on the findings of a small empirical study, the author points out that religious life as it is understood and lived today is probably not a liberating experience for many women religious.

There are three articles written from a Christian point of view. The first one discusses Jesus Christ and freedom. It shows how Jesus was a supremely free person whose mission it was to liberate humans from all that stood in the way of their growth and happiness. The second deals with freedom in the Church. While maintaining that it is fundamental to the nature of the Church to be a community of freedom, the author indicates that *historically* this has not always been the case. The abuse of power in the Church has been largely responsible for this. The Third article contends that the Church's vocation is to be a community of radical freedom and that its mission is to work for the liberation of humans today. It also discusses the dimensions of freedom in the life of the Church and indicates areas of liberation to which the Church should pay special attention in our time.

There are two new features in this issue. One is a paper on the changing perceptions of Indian Christians in Independent India. It is an insightful account of the changes that have taken place in the Church during the last 50 years with regard to its inner life as well as the understanding of its place and role in the country. Though the article does not directly deal with the theme of this issue we have decided to publish it. In future, too, we plan to be flexible in this matter.

The other one is a document issued by the leaders of the Society of Jesus in South Asia. These leaders show genuine understanding of the difficult and challenging task Jesuit theologians and others are engaged in and offer them their support and encouragement. It is not often that one comes across Church leaders who appreciate the work of theologians and defend their legitimate freedom of thought and expression. That is why we are all the more glad to publish this document.

Kurien Kunumpuram, SJ
Editor

Quest for Freedom and Psychotherapy

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Introduction

Quest, as I understand it, is a continual search for Truth and forms of Truth. Quest, as a search for Truth, is open-minded and open-ended. An open mind, as Tart¹ observes, is curious and enjoys using its powers and testing its limits. It recognises its limits as current limits rather than absolutes. It cherishes and grows from its doubts. It always takes its beliefs as working tools, and not as absolutes. It believes that forms and representations of Truth evolve.

In this article I will discuss what is the 'Truth' or forms of Truth that the therapist, the client and the process called psychotherapy are or should be in continual search for and open-minded pursuit of. For that purpose I will try to look at the therapist, the client and the process of therapy from an integral framework and an evolutionary-developmental perspective. I will try to situate the quest or the search for Truth of psychotherapy in the evolutionary movement of developmental unfolding. I will discuss the specific functions of the therapist in terms of "facilitative accompaniment" of persons who are in the ongoing process of unfolding and becoming. In understanding the process of unfolding I will stay away from technicalities and time-schedules of any particular school (or culture) of develop-

mental theorisation. I will only highlight the dynamics of unfolding and the significant turning points in the development of the "compound" individual called the person. I will examine the developmental dynamics in terms of what is considered to be the fundamental evolutionary processes of identifying, differentiating and integrating. Consequently, I will describe the developmental unfolding in terms of the integration or failure of integration of the body, emotions, mind, needs, roles and rules, relationships, autonomy, and so on – the components of the "compound" individual.

I will then examine the role of psychotherapy in facilitating the freedom of the self in unfolding toward its farther reaches. In doing so, I will consider the basic functions and processes of psychotherapy – dealing with developmental failures and their after-effects – as prerequisites for facilitating the self's freedom for the life-long movement of evolutionary unfolding. Next, I will look at what I consider to be the fundamental processes and functions of psychotherapy underlying its various efforts in assisting the self in its unfolding – *understanding, validating, negating, and being around*. Finally I will examine the quest for freedom of psychotherapy within the context of the spectrum of development ranging from the pre-personal through the personal to-

ward the trans-personal realms. From that perspective, I will concern myself primarily with self's *freedom to* become, which, of course, presupposes the self's *freedom from* whatever holds the self back from the process of becoming.

I want to acknowledge that the flavour of my understanding of psychotherapy and the quest of therapy is influenced by the fact that I participate, at the deepest layers of my psyche, in the culture of my land. This culture sets the primary context-within-context from which my understanding and meaning making arise. I am becoming increasingly aware of a kind of psychic resonance that I experience with this primary context which seem to have survived the impact of the Western and Judaeo-Christian education and formation that I have had, especially since I joined religious life. That might partly account for my natural disposition toward a metaphysics and world-view that perceives Reality as a seamless unfolding of the One in and through the Play of the Many. I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to two authors in particular for the development of the ideas discussed in this article: Ken Wilber and Robert Kegan, references to whose works are given in the body of the article.

Differing Perspectives

There are literally dozens of approaches to psychotherapy ranging from classical psychoanalytic psychotherapy lasting four to five years with four to five sessions per week to a single-session brief therapy. The stated goals and

objectives of psychotherapy range from complete reconstruction of personality through protracted analysis to solving a specific emotional, behavioural, or situational problem of living through brief therapy. The transpersonal approach which is regarded as the fourth force in psychology (the other three being the psychoanalytic, behavioural and existential-humanistic), would consider the awakening in pure awareness to the Ultimate Consciousness as the goal of the therapeutic journey.

Similarly, there are concepts of the human being ranging from the deterministic-mechanistic to the open-ended transpersonal. On the one end of the continuum is the classical psychoanalytic view according to which the human being is essentially determined and conflict-ridden. The only hope of the person, within such a framework, consists in learning to manage the mostly unconscious conflicts (arising largely from the repression of emotional-sexual drives) so as to be able to live and work. Within the Jungian variation of the psychoanalytic perspective, human beings are in a process of individuation (becoming one's own unique person in relation to the larger context of life and reality). Individuation involves differentiating, strengthening, assimilating and integrating the various parts of the psyche like the conscious and the unconscious, the shadow (the repressed, unexamined, the undeveloped aspects), and the persona (the consciously developed and shown-outside aspects), and the anima (the feminine principle) and the animus (the masculine principle). On the other end of the continuum is the transpersonal view, which considers the human being

as a manifestation of Consciousness and internally impelled to evolve to finding its destiny by awakening in pure awareness to the realization that the individual is Consciousness or Spirit itself. In between, we have the Behaviourists who would consider humans as simply determined and conditioned and the task of growth as consisting in learning adaptive behaviours and unlearning the less adaptive behaviours so as to fit better into and function effectively in society. We have the existential-humanistic view of human beings as beings in the process of becoming with the innate potential for and the natural tendency toward actualising their highest potentials, if given the necessary and sufficient conditions for being and becoming.

In Search of an Integral Understanding

There is neither a commonly agreed upon definition of psychotherapy nor a consensually validated set of goals and objectives of psychotherapy from which one could extract or synthesise the underlying quest. The differences of views and divergences of perspectives need not be discouraging if we look at them as valid but partial contributions to the understanding of the whole. Wilber, in *the Eye of the Spirit*,² points out that reality is multi-dimensional and every inquiry should be aware that its “object” of inquiry consists of, at least, four distinct dimensions or faces, so to speak. They are the individual interior or the *intentional*, the collective interior or the *cultural*, the individual exterior or the *behavioural* and the collective exterior or the *social* dimensions. All these dimensions have been objects of quest and the discoveries and forms of truth from

all these pursuits, if honoured and incorporated, can help us to have a more integral understanding of reality.

The Intentional. A thing or a person has an individual interior (*intentional*) aspect, which may be described as consciousness, depth, interiority, the subjective aspect, the view from inside, the experience or “the feel” from within. This is true in the case of an atom as well as in the experience of a human individual. No matter how rudimentary, dense, and little self-conscious matter is, it is “conscious” and it has an individual subjective interior. When a new particle is introduced into the “context” of an atom, the subatomic particles behave as though they “know” (prehension) the new situation and both the new particle and the existing ones “respond”, make adjustments to each other’s “presence”. In the case of lower organisms, we speak of their “sensitivity” or “protoplasmic irritability” with which they “respond” to one another and the environment. We speak of more complex organisms (like a dog) as “knowing”, “recognising” and “responding with affection”. In the case of humans, we speak of awareness, subjective depth, interiority and consciousness, which cannot be reduced to an object. Joy or pain or a thought is a subjective experience, which can be correlated with but not reduced to “objective” observables like brain, components of brain, or physiology of brain.

The Behavioural. Every interior also has a physical or *behavioural* dimension. An interior event like a thought or a perception or subjective meaning is manifested materially, physically, bodily

and behaviourally. A depressing thought or a joyful disposition will be manifested most obviously in my body stance and actions and, in less obvious ways, in my blood chemistry, endocrine secretions, neuro-immunological changes, body temperature and in my brain-wave patterns. Even if all these manifestations are carefully observed, quantified, measured and interpreted, one will never get to know what they mean except through having access to my “subjective” interior space. One simply has to depend on my truthful communication of my subjective intentional world.

The Cultural. The individual interior dimension does not exist in a vacuum. It emerges, evolves, and functions within an inter-subjective context, described as the collective interior (*cultural* dimension). For us humans, this context is our culture, our world-view, our collective and shared meanings, our language and symbol systems. This cultural or collective interior dimension not only provides the context but also heavily influences and, in some instances, determines the scope and nature of the emergence and evolution of my individual interior, depth, consciousness, or subjective world. A single thought, for instance, cannot emerge in my interior awareness except within the context of my language and symbol system. This inter-subjective context is in fact context-within-context-within context. For example, the first intimate context I encounter in evolving my sense of self is my “mothering culture” which itself is set within the larger context of the family system, which in turn is placed within other larger contexts of clan, ethnic group, religious group, nationality and so on.

The Social. My culture and the intersubjective context, again, do not exist in a vacuum. They are correlated with developments in the evolutionary movement of society. That is the *social* dimension. In his book, *Up From Eden*³, Wilber gives a fascinating account (basing his research on actual cultural-anthropological evidence) of the evolution of the collective exterior. He describes the evolution of human societies from foraging to horticultural to agricultural to industrial-technological and their correlates in the evolution of their shared interiors (their world-views, their myths and rituals) and the unfolding of the individual interiors (the structures of consciousness).

Thus, the quality, depth, and developmental maturity of our individual interiors, where interpretations are made and meanings are constructed, will influence our inquiry and our quest for truth. Our inquiry and quest for truth will be set within the intimate “contexts-within-contexts” provided by our world-view, the shared meanings and symbol systems of our culture, which in turn is shaped by or set in the context of society and its structures. Therefore our quest and inquiry must respect and honour truths about all the aspects of reality. The focus of our inquiry may be any one of these aspects. But our perspectives should be set within a larger framework capable of honouring all the aspects of reality. In other words, our quest for truth must be as integral as possible.

Quest, as described earlier, is the open-minded and open-ended continual search for truth with the awareness that

Truth is eternal but the maps of Truth, the made-meanings of Truth, the “context-within-context-bound” interpretations and expressions of Truth evolve⁴. An integral quest for Truth will honour truths coming from the intentional, behavioural, cultural and social spheres. A map of Reality that is capable of providing directions to the maximum number of travellers from the maximum number of backgrounds to the maximum area of the Territory is definitely a better map for the explorer to use. That does not mean that we do not need some “close-ups” of particular territories (sections and sub-sections) showing the terrain in greater clarity and specificity of details. We use those close-ups as part of the larger map of the Territory and as part of the larger Journey or Quest for Truth.

The explorations of depth psychology of various flavours (psychoanalytic developmental psychology, object-relations theory, self psychology, etc.) are very useful sectional maps detailing terrain and contours of the individual interior. The objective scientific investigations of physiological psychology, neuropsychology and psychology of behaviour are excellent sectional close-ups of the individual exterior. Investigations of cultural anthropologists, sociologists and social psychologists of different persuasions are extremely valuable close-ups of the collective interior. And the contributions of sociological and political sciences provide us with valuable insights into the collective exterior.

The intuitive-empirical (empirical because the findings follow strict scientific criteria: instrumental injunction, di-

rect apprehension of data and communal validation or rejection)⁵ map of perennial philosophy apprehends Reality as a “great Chain of Being” and sees the terrain as a “play of the One and the Many”. It views this “play” as a “spectrum of consciousness”,⁶ and describes the master motion of Reality as development, unfolding, or evolution. The map of the seamless (not formless) unfolding of Being ranging from the least consciousness to the most consciousness, from matter to Spirit, from unconsciousness to superconsciousness can provide a larger map of Reality. In relation to this larger or more encompassing map (with the humbling awareness that map is not the territory) the detailed, sectional and sub-sectional maps of the four domains of Reality can make more sense.

The Unfolding Self

Both Psychotherapy and the quest of psychotherapy are about human persons. It is the person of the therapist who engages the person of the client in and through the intersubjective dialogue known as psychotherapy. Both the therapist and the client are “compound individuals” made up of various aspects and dimensions which are at different levels and degrees of unfolding and integration. The therapist brings into the process of therapy his or her own person and history of unfolding just as the client does. Ideally (but not necessarily factually) the therapist brings along a more evolved and integrated self, a wider and more encompassing world-view, a more universal and developed moral stance, and a deeper and more interior faith style than the client. For us to continue our discussion of the quest

of therapy, we need to take a look at the processes involved in the human unfolding. From among the various dimensions and levels of the human unfolding, we will examine the unfolding self, the changing world-views and the developing moral stance.

One of the meaningful ways of understanding the human unfolding is provided by Kegan in his well-acclaimed book, *The Evolving Self*.⁷ Human beings are meaning making organisms, says Kegan. Before an event, internal or external, is assimilated and responded to, it has to be made meaning of or made sense of. It is that sense or meaning which determines the nature, quality and intensity of one's inner and outer response. "The zone of mediation where meaning is made is variously called by personality psychologists the 'ego', the 'self', 'the person'."⁸ Person is, therefore, an ever-evolving motion or activity giving itself form through the meanings it makes of events after events from the moment of birth or even from the moment of conception. In other words, an individual or a person is a dynamic process or activity "constructing" herself or himself by giving form. There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception independent of a meaning-making context (the individual interior) in which it *becomes* a feeling, an experience, a thought, because we are the meaning-making context. As we will discuss later, this meaning-making context is a context-within-context-within context.

For example, a compliment, a critical feedback, a failure, realization of an unpleasant aspect of me, can have dif-

ferent impact and produce different responses depending on the subjective zone of mediation, the dynamic process of meaning-making, the intimately personal context in which I make sense of the event. A compliment may affirm my self-esteem, a feedback can challenge me to move forward, a failure can provide me with an opportunity for further and deeper learning, and the unpleasant discovery about myself may lead me closer to authenticity and truthfulness. The impact they have on me and the responses they elicit from me can be quite the opposite. I may find the compliment not good enough, the feedback a put-down, the failure a catastrophe and the unpleasant discovery about myself a loss of face. The individual interior, the zone of mediation, the meaning making activity and its structures and components and their evolutionary or developmental "health" are going to make the difference.

If you want to understand another person, says Kegan, in some fundamental way you must know where the person is in his or her evolution. A lifelong process of evolution or adaptation is the master motion in personality⁹. The zone of mediation – the activity of meaning making, the context in which events become meanings and experiences, the process we call person – is developmental. If we want to understand the person in some intimate way, we need to understand this life-long motion or activity of meaning-making. We need to understand the dynamics and the structures and phases of this movement.

The Dynamics of Unfolding. Central to the understanding of development or unfolding, as pointed out by

Kegan, Wilber and the psychodynamically oriented developmental theories, are the concepts of *identification* (being embedded) with a given stage of development, *differentiation* (being contradicted and negated) within that stage, and *transcendence* (including the previous stage and integrating it in the new) to the next stage of unfolding. For example, the “mother-and-I-are-one” experience of the new-born infant is an undifferentiated fusion state from which the separate self-sense has to eventually emerge. It is absolutely important that the infant is fully and effectively identified with this “mother-and-I-are-one” or “the-me-and-the-world-is-one” state. The infant should be allowed and assisted to fully embed or immerse in that state before it can be helped to negate, challenge, and contradict that state of embeddedness in preparation for differentiating from it. What is equally important is that the infant is helped to differentiate without dissociating from its embeddedness or identification so that the newly emerging self-sense will be capable of transcending and including what is being transcended. Only then, will the infant be on the way to becoming not only an individual but also an “embeddual”¹⁰, and eventually construct not only a sense of autonomous self but also a sense of a self-in-relation.

The fundamental dynamics of unfolding, therefore, involves several things. The self needs to firmly identify with a given stage of developmental unfolding. It needs to clearly differentiate from, die to, negate and release the hold on the current stage with its securities and comforts. It has to transcend

to a higher developmental stage, including and integrating the previous structures in the newly emerging stage. It needs to have a context or culture to be embedded in and held by, to be contradicted and challenged by in a climate of safety and reliability. These are basic requirements not only for the emergence of the separate self-sense of the new-born but for all stages of human development and unfolding. From the developmental point of view, these are processes involved in the growth of self into wholesome “compound individuals” integrating body, emotions, mind, needs, relationships, rules and roles, autonomy, and capacity to move toward the farther ends of the evolutionary spectrum. Let us now take a look at how these dynamics operate in the significant structures and stages of the human unfolding.

Body. When, as an infant, I am identified with and embedded in my reflexes, sensing and moving, I need a mothering culture to hold me literally and figuratively and to acknowledge my dependence and merger with that culture. My mothering culture should “know” and affirm the truth of myself at that time: the truth that I cannot really make out the difference between my inside and outside, my own body and the body of the mothering one, my biting a thumb and biting the blanket. If I have to grow into a person eventually, my embeddedness needs to be challenged and negated by decreasing the holding and encouraging displays of independence. If I have to successfully negotiate this difficult task, my mothering culture should reliably be there and permit itself to become part of my growing

context and bigger culture, that is, my family. Then, and only then, will I successfully differentiate my physical self from the physical environment and construct a genuine sense of a distinct physical self or “identity”. If my culture of embeddedness fails, for some reason or other, to hold me, challenge me and be around, I may never successfully emerge as a distinct physical self. I may remain “stuck” in my prior undifferentiated or fusion state which may result in my life-long inability to distinguish my inside and my outside, to make out the difference between my thoughts and fantasies on the one hand and the reality on the other.

Emotions. Even when my physical self-sense has emerged and has been established, I am still confused between my feelings and the feelings of the other especially those of the mothering culture. As a result, I tend to imagine that “what I feel is what the world around feels,” “what I want is what the world around wants,” “what I see is what the world around sees,” and “my own perspective is the only perspective in existence”. My “emotional boundaries” are fluid and shifting, and I am not yet a separate emotional self. I gradually learn to differentiate my emotional-psychological life from that of others, particularly from that of the mother. If my culture of embeddedness fails to *hold, negate, and be around* as I negotiate this difficult task of establishing my emotional boundaries, I may remain, all my life, a person with very weak emotional boundaries and vulnerable to be flooded by the outside world resulting in excessive anxiety, depression and even thought disturbances. I may differentiate with-

out ever successfully reintegrating, in which case I may get lost and an over-differentiated, over-adult, “realopathic” quality may take over. Or I may never successfully differentiate, in which case an over-integrated, loose-boundaried, “pretend-adult” style may get its start.¹¹

Mind. Once my physical self and emotional self have emerged and established, I have to begin the difficult task of establishing a stable mental self, so to speak. That is an extremely important time for me when I will have gone beyond mere sensing, moving, reflexes and mere feeling. By then I will have learned not only to form images which are mere pictorial representations of what I sense, and form symbols which are non-pictorial representations of concrete objects, but also to form concepts which are non-pictorial representations capable of standing for not only concrete objects but a whole class of objects. By now, I am no more a bundle of sensations, impulses and emotions, but I possess a set of symbols and concepts using which I can control impulses and body-functions. I become capable of imagination and anticipation and, along with them, of anxiety and worry. I become capable of recalling the past and, as a result, experience remorse, guilt and regret. This is a very crucial time both for me and for my culture of embeddedness because in my new-found mental powers and freedom from body, impulses and feelings, I may go overboard and do several things that can hurt me in the future. While accomplishing the important task of differentiating my mind from its embeddedness in body, impulses and emotions, I may dissociate from them. While objectifying

my body, emotions, urges and impulses for the purpose of differentiating, integrating and internalising my newly emerging self-sense, I may make my body a mere object outside of and away from my new-found toy, that is, the mind. Instead of transcending and including my body and emotions into my mental-self, I may simply dissociate and repress them. If this repression is severe and prolonged, I will have to pay a price in and through neuroses in later life.

The family triangle and the parenting culture form the major culture of embeddedness as I struggle through the emergence of my emotional and mental self. The culture of embeddedness should hold me and affirm me in my exercises of fantasy, intense attachments and rivalries. It should, at the same time, recognise and promote my emergence from egocentric fantasy and impulse. It should promote my ability to control my impulses and fantasies, hold me responsible for my feelings, set limits for me where limits are required. While the culture of embeddedness recognises and promotes my new-found self-sufficiency, it should also assert, at the same time, the other-sufficiency of the world around me. Then I am more likely to learn to differentiate rather than dissociate, integrate rather than fragment, transcend and include rather than repress my body and emotions, sexuality and aggression.

Having achieved a remarkable sense of self-sufficiency and autonomy, having learned to “take charge” of my body and its impulses, having learned to control my feelings and fantasies, and

having developed my language further, I become equipped with the fundamentals necessary for further unfolding. That I have negotiated the psychoanalytically most fundamental of the turning points in my development (the emergence of the physical self, the emotional self, and the mental self), does not mean that the unfolding of my self is over. On the contrary, I am now “psychologically born,” so to say, to continue my unfolding or development.

Roles and Rules. I recognise as growing in me enduring dispositions, needs, interests, and wishes. I also begin, for the first time, to have the ability to take mental roles and form mental rules, to take the role of the other and follow rules laid down by institutions of authority like my parents, school, and even peer group. My family, school and peer group should, on the one hand, hold and affirm me in my new-found self-sufficiency and its displays, affirm both my competence and competitiveness and my needs, interests and wishes. The important issues for me, at this moment, are self-esteem, competence, self-display, and personal enhancement. Therefore, I need to be confirmed in the truth of me at this point, even in the midst of my mercantile morality, my advertisement for myself, my scratching to be scratched. On the other hand, I need to be challenged to recognise and take into consideration the needs, interests and wishes of others. I should be called upon to compete without losing my ability to compromise. I should be challenged to step into the skin of the other and see the world from the other’s perspectives. I should be helped to understand and affirm the different rules and roles that

are constitutive of life, and to hold my end of mutuality and relationships with increasing trustworthiness. Otherwise, I may be tempted to get egocentrically embedded and stuck in my “self-sufficiency”, my needs, wishes and interests without being able to genuinely take into consideration the perspectives, needs, wishes or interests of other human beings. Then, I may see the world as an extension of myself and a stage for me to perform on, and others as being there to take care of my needs, wishes and interests.

Membership and Scripts. Along with my needs, interests and wishes I also experience a strong desire to fit in, to belong and to find my place or role among other roles. I strongly feel the need to understand the rules with a correlative fear of losing face, losing role, and breaking the rules. As a result, I may over-differentiate from my needs, wishes, and interests and begin to live scripts others have written for me. I may surrender my “self-sufficiency” to the other, the authority structures and the group to which I belong. I may become embedded in a particular society’s rules, injunctions, prohibitions, myths and dogmas, with no way to transcend that membership hunger, and thus destined to play out the roles and rules of a particular and isolated society. That society may be my family, my tribe or clan, my linguistic-ethnic group, my religious affiliation, and so on. In the process I may begin to tell myself lies: lies about who I am, what I feel, what I need, what I can do and become, and what I should believe about the other and myself. These lies when repeated hundreds of

times become pseudo-truths for me, they become my belief system. I reach a point when I cannot really distinguish between real truths and the pseudo-truths about me, when I cannot distinguish between the real me and the pseudo-me.

Relationships. With the developing ability for mutuality, role-taking and rule-forming, I begin to enter into and nourish the experience of interpersonal life, individual and collective. I begin to enjoy the culture of mutuality and interpersonal concordance. I feel thrilled to share, in intimate contexts, my inner world of feelings, moods, desires, interests and expectations with a similar other who is willing to reciprocate in mutuality. In some sense I become my interpersonal relationships. I need to be affirmed in my capacity for self-sacrifice and collaboration, in my ability to share my subjective world with another, and in the intensity and authenticity of my feelings. But I need help to gradually move out of my embeddedness in interpersonalism and hearken to the inner voice saying “you are responsible for your life and you are on your own”. I need to be challenged to recognise that relationship is not fusing of personal boundaries and that I have to assume responsibility for my initiatives, preferences and independence. I need the challenge but not violent pushes because the letting go of my “interpersonal identity” can be painful, life-disordering. I may experience the threat of the loss of my most important relationships as abandonment and refusal of care in the process of unfolding into an autonomous person.

Mature Ego. Growing out of my interpersonalism and becoming responsible for my life, I develop a greater sense of autonomy within myself. On the cognitive plane, I begin to enjoy the power of mind to think about thinking , to think about possibilities, to think about future, to think and dream with passion about possibilities and ideals. I become a mature ego with my own ego-boundaries and a self-sense distinct and separate from those I am in relationship with, whether individuals or groups. I learn to take my own initiatives, make my own decisions, and become my own person, so to say. With my increasing capacity for self-reflection, I can evaluate and norm the norms given to me. I can think in “as if” and “what if” terms. I begin to critique the injunctions, prohibitions, rules, roles, myths and dogmas. Then, ideally speaking, I choose to be who I want to be, I choose my career or vocation, I follow my dreams, I trust my reason, I become independent, I choose to have my relationships (I am not my relationships), I actualise my potentials, and so on.

Beyond the Ego. The processes described above form the typical, though idealised, itinerary of an evolving self proposed by developmental psychology. According to this scheme, the arrival of the mature rational ego is the end-point of developmental unfolding. Robert Kegan proposes a further point of unfolding characterized by the self’s differentiation from its embeddedness in autonomy toward becoming an inter-individual¹² capable of self-surrender, interdependence, and true intimacy. According to Wilber¹³, the average mode of consciousness of modern humanity

is “egoic-rational” though there are signs of evolution manifested by the “growing tip” or the “farther ends” of humanity. Maslow¹⁴ proposed a stage beyond self-actualisation called it the self-transcending stage. For Perennial Philosophy, the birth of egoic-rational consciousness marks just the end of the pre-personal and personal realms beyond which lies the entire spectrum of transpersonal realms. Wilber, in *The Spectrum of Consciousness* and several other subsequent books, attempts to pool together the insights from modern developmental psychology and the major contemplative traditions to present a spectrum model of development ranging from pre-personal, through personal to transpersonal domains.¹⁵ For the purpose of our discussion, we merely note that mystics, sages and contemplative practitioners of all major religious traditions have reported states of consciousness beyond the egoic-rational. Psychology has begun to acknowledge with a certain amount of reluctance that these reported states of trans-personal consciousness are more than mere regressive states as understood by psychoanalysis.

It is interesting to note that similar to, though not necessarily along with, the developmental unfolding of my self outlined above, my world-view,¹⁶ my moral stance,¹⁷ and even my faith experience¹⁸ and expressions undergo evolution from developmentally less evolved to more evolved phases. The therapist, the clients and the persons constituting the contexts-within-contexts, search for truth and meaning within each one’s specific world-view, moral stance and faith experience.

Unfolding World-Views

When I began emerging from my embeddedness in the world around me, when I began to experience myself as a distinct being capable of sensing, moving, and making images, I discovered that I could make the world go dark by merely closing my eyes and make it bright again merely by opening them. That was the beginning of discovering my “magical” powers. As I continued to grow and make pictures of concrete objects around me, I could not initially tell the real difference between the pictures I made and the reality outside. I used to confuse the two often. I even thought that I could manipulate the objects outside by manipulating the images of them. I thought that the world of objects knew my intentions, obeyed my commands and even existed for my sake. I thought the moon followed me when I moved up and down and it did so because it knew my intentions and wished to respond to my intentions. That was already full-blown magic. And that was already the magical world-view. That is, the world was populated with objects and persons which shared my intentions, obeyed my commands, and did all that because of me. You may call that magic, animism, and anthropocentrism. Well, that was the truth of the world I was able to construct at that time, given the development of my consciousness.

Then came the time when I realised the world existed more or less independently of me, and I really did not have the magical power to make it obey me and follow my egocentric wishes. I discovered that I did not possess those

magical powers. Hence, I began looking for those who could do what I was not capable of doing. I knew that my big daddy could do what I could not do. If not my real daddy, some other daddies could do. Mythical daddies, heroes and gods began populating my inner space. Magical manipulation was replaced by “mythical rites”, that is, correct performance of actions and words which would ensure that the mythical powers would ensure that my egocentric desires and wishes would be addressed. If I attended church worship for a specified period of time or a specified number of times in a specified manner without fail, my wishes and intentions would be granted by those capable of doing so. If I planted signs of the cross on four corners of my bed, my guardian angels would ensure that no devils come in with scary dreams. Again, that was the truth of the world I was able to construct at that time, given the development of my consciousness.

With the arrival of fully developed mind and the ability for introspection, interpretation and meaning making shifted – away from magical relation with the outside world and forces of nature, from reliance on the mythical “gods”, and from the membership communities and their myths and dogmas – toward the inner space of reason, possibilities and vision. As a result, my magical mythical beliefs began to give way to rational understanding and “scientific explanations”. That does not mean that the magical and mythic layers of consciousness were entirely replaced by rationality. Those layers continue to remain within me to surface under certain conditions and circumstances. For

example, the most rational me can slip into religious, ethnic or national fundamentalism constituting new mythic communities, enforcing new mythic membership claims, new mythic injunctions, dogmas and prohibitions.

Evolving Moral Stance

My sense of right and wrong began within a “reward and punishment” framework. What was wrong consisted in what would bring punishment. What was good then was obedience to rules and the resulting avoidance of punishment. It was an egocentric point of view in which interests of others did not figure much. From this moral stance, I would not steal because I was afraid of being punished and I would not commit a sin because I was afraid of going to eternal hell.

Then as I began to recognise the interests and needs of others and even as I continued to be self-centred in my general orientation, my moral stance shifted from mere obedience in order to avoid punishment toward an individualistic stance which, in some ways, was a kind of “mercantile morality”. That is, a moral stance based on a “fair” mutual agreement, a “deal”, and an “equal exchange” between my needs and the other’s needs, my interests and the other’s interests. It was an individualistic perspective. From this moral perspective, I will not steal your pencil and you should not steal my pen because we are friends. We may steal the neighbour’s fruits and we can even do so together.

As I learned rules and roles as son, brother, friend, etc., my moral stance also

shifted from individualism of mutual agreement to interpersonal conformity. What was right consisted in living up to what was expected of me as son, brother, friend and so on. “Being good” through keeping mutual relationships like trust, loyalty, respect and gratitude became important to me. That was the perspective of the individual in relationship with other individuals. A further step from here was when I could differentiate my interests and needs as well as the interpersonal agreement and motives from the societal point of view. What was right was also what contributed to the society or system as a whole and hence the obligation to fulfil the actual duties I had agreed to. Functioning from this moral space, I feel obliged to keep my street clean, obey traffic rules and pay taxes because I owe it to my society to do so. If I do not keep my end of the obligations, society cannot function effectively and I am the loser in the ultimate bargain.

Then I begin to recognise that there is a plurality of values and opinions which are strictly speaking relative to my group. I recognise that there is a “social contract” that I am part of and I should uphold these relative values, opinions and rights of individuals for the smooth functioning of the society except in cases where non-relative values like life and justice are at stake. These non-relative values should always be upheld regardless of majority opinion. From this moral perspective, I am willing to comply with the beliefs, dogmas and rituals of my “people” even when I do not find them rationally convincing or inter-culturally applicable because such compliance is important for the overall smooth

functioning of my society. But I will protest and even defy the authority if basic principles of life are violated.

If I keep growing I may reach a moral stance within which right and wrong are decided not on the basis of egocentric needs, not on a merely individualistic perspective, and not even on the basis of conformity to expectations of my group or society at large but on universal moral principles to which I feel internally and irresistibly committed. Universal moral principles take me beyond my ethnocentric boundaries and commitments, including those of my culture and religion. From this moral stance, I will respect you and defend, at any cost, your right to be. I will do so not simply to earn a reward or escape punishment. I will not do so merely because you are my friend or just because you are part of my people. I will not do so primarily for your love and esteem or merely for the sake of peace and harmony in the community. Rather, I will defend your right to be, principally because you deserve to be, because you are a sentient being, a human being, and a spark of the Divine.

Summary. The point of it all is not to establish that there is any conclusively proven developmental scheme valid for all cultures, genders and individuals. Neither is it implied that developmental unfolding would proceed through neat stages following neat schedules. It is not implied either that all structures and phases of development are equally basic or significant.

However, from the foregoing discussion, one thing becomes clear. Evolution or developmental unfolding is a

master motion of life and this master movement is evident in all spheres of existence – the individual interior, the collective interior, the individual exterior and the collective exterior. Evolutionary unfolding is also evident within the different lines of development of the individual interior – cognitive structures, world-views, moral stance, faith styles, etc. Evolutionary unfolding is developmentally hierarchical (not dominator hierarchies) moving from less complex to more complex, less unified to more unified, less deep to more deep, less encompassing to more encompassing and so on. This unfolding takes place within intimate context-within-contexts-within contexts. Each unfolding unit is relatively whole, autonomous and self-sufficient and, at the same time, is merely a part in relation to an emergent larger whole. It is perfectly normal and healthy to affirm and be affirmed in the relative autonomy at any stage of unfolding. Yet, at the service of the master movement of life, the relative autonomy, the identification with and the embeddedness in a given relatively autonomous stage should be surrendered and released so that the newer and higher whole may emerge. Or stated differently, it is absolutely essential to honour both the stage-specific wholeness as well as partness of any given evolutionary unit. The evolutionary balance consists in robust identification with the given, courageous dying to the current, and transcending to (and including in case of basic units of evolution) and consolidating the emergent.

Accidents can occur along the way – over-identification, over-differentiation, dissociation and repression – and

they may leave behind developmental lesions and evolutionary scars that can affect the entire “developmental curriculum” with their “faulty syllabi”, “faulty maps” and “faulty” if not dishonest “scripts”. Conventional psychotherapy, by and large, is designed to attend to these accidents that may have occurred along the way and their after-effects, so that the individuals can function more effectively and more productively. Psychotherapy, in my opinion, is called upon to do more than just that. When viewed from an integral-developmental perspective, psychotherapy has a twofold function. On the one hand, psychotherapy is meant to deal with the *individual* as and where he or she developmentally is (including the developmental accidents and their after-effects) and, on the other, it has an obligation to facilitate the unfolding of the *person* along the continuum toward its farther ends.

Functions and Processes of Therapy

From an integral (honouring truths from all quarters and all levels) developmental (recognising developmental unfolding as the master motion of life) framework, I would define or, rather, describe the function and process of psychotherapy (in its twofold function) as follows. Psychotherapy, as I have come to understand it today, is both the art and science of “facilitative-accompaniment” offered to persons in their journey of evolution, unfolding, and development in all spheres and at all levels of development. Facilitative accompaniment would consist of the following tasks, which are similar to those assigned by Kegan to the culture of embeddedness¹⁸:

- (1) *understanding* of both the partness and the wholeness of persons;
- (2) *validating* the existential integrity of the developmental or evolutionary space in which a person is;
- (3) *challenging*, negating or contradicting developmental validity of the current evolutionary balance; and
- (4) “*being around*” as the persons negotiate the earlier deficits and/or the current turning points of their developmental unfolding.

Understanding of both the Partness and the Wholeness of Person. A person, a thing or a structure of unfolding is a “whole”, in one sense, and a mere “part”, in another sense. That is, everything is simultaneously a whole in its own right and a part in respect to a larger whole. The wholeness aspect of a thing or person manifests itself in the relative autonomy, the right to self-preservation, the tendency for self-enhancement, the propensity for self-assertion, and the demand for independence. On the other hand, the partness aspect shows itself in the ability to let go, the capacity for dying to itself, the tendency to accommodate and communicate, the ability for self-adaptation and the propensity for interconnectedness.

As a therapist, I need to understand and honour in my clients both the wholeness (the relative autonomy) aspect and the partness (being part of a larger emergent whole) aspect of their current self-sense, personal rights, needs and preferences, world-views, religious meaning-making and moral choices. How I interpret (more in the hermeneuti-

cal than the psychoanalytic sense) these aspects will be influenced by the map of the whole that I have at my disposal. As mentioned earlier, a map of Truth that is capable of providing directions to the maximum number of travellers from the maximum number of backgrounds to the maximum area of the Territory is definitely a better map to be guided by. The map of the whole I have come to tentatively adopt is *the spectrum model of development* within which the person is an evolutionary process of becoming from the pre-personal through the personal toward the transpersonal-spiritual realms.

I should also keep in mind that a person, a thing or a structure of unfolding also manifests the capacity for further evolution, development, transcendence, transformation as well as for dissolution and breakdown. For example, I, as an individual person, enjoy relative autonomy, have basic rights, have an inclination to enhance myself, and so on. At the same time, I have the ability to self-adapt in relation to what is larger than me, to let go some of my autonomy and personal rights, and die to myself in different ways for the good of the larger whole of which I am a part. I can release my hold on my present "relative wholeness," "die to myself," "let go" of my present self-preservation and self-assertion and transcend to a higher mode of "relative wholeness". I can as well, under the weight of stagnating self-perseveration in the present "relative autonomy", breakdown to lower modes of "relative wholeness". I can, in my developmental unfolding, either become more universal, more pluralistic, more unifying, more integrated, more appre-

ciative of paradoxes and uncertainties and more compassionate. I can also become more parochial, more fundamentalist, more divisive and exclusive, more fragmented and compartmentalised, more rigid, more self-righteous, more narcissistic and so on.

Validating the existential integrity. When I engage my client in a genuine intersubjective dialogue, when I begin to listen to what my client articulates and fails to articulate, and when I try to "interpret", make sense of, and make meaning of that communication, I am likely to realise more accurately how my client is in a process of becoming and unfolding. With the help of my overall map and as well as sectional and sub-sectional maps, I may help the client to recognise the developmental "lesions" that may have occurred during his or her tenuous journey of development. We may together recognise instances of overidentification that may have occurred resulting in fixations and developmental arrests (like confusion between self and environment), over-differentiation that may have resulted in dissociation (like between body and mind), failed integration resulting in repression (like repression of sexuality and aggression). We may discover that while the cognitive development was on schedule, the emotional development lagged behind, the development of moral sense failed to evolve beyond the reward and punishment stage, or the maturation of self-needs failed to get beyond those of security and safety. Similarly, we may recognise that the world-view of the client and his or her corresponding map about self, the other and the

Ultimate are still contaminated by magical and mythic hangovers and concrete literal meaning-making.

It is important to realise, in the context of the intersubjective dialogue which constitutes psychotherapy, that the therapist, in some ways, provides a temporary culture of embeddedness to the client. It is my function, then, to “hold” the client, affirm and validate the existential integrity of his or her evolutionary or developmental state. Rogers¹⁹ emphasised, along with genuineness and congruence, the need for unconditional positive regard on the part of the therapist. Unconditional positive regard is my ability to affirm and validate the client exactly where he or she is at a given moment in the process of becoming, unfolding, developing, evolving, with implicit trust in the evolutionary unfolding. It is the ability of the therapist to non-judgementally “hold” the client exactly where he or she developmentally is so that he or she can “identify” with and make robust contact with the truth of the present. Robust identification and contact with a given stage of developmental unfolding is a prerequisite for differentiation from and negation of the current stage with its securities and comforts, in favour of a higher developmental state. I cannot let go what I have not adequately “held.” I cannot die to an aspect (or developmental phase) of the self that I have not yet “found” with any stability. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for me to become “nobody” before I have become “somebody” to begin with²⁰.

Challenging, negating, contradicting developmental validity. There

are several questions I am confronted with as a therapist, as I engage myself in the inter-subjective dialogue with my clients. Am I interested in just the *individual* or am I interested in the *person* who is in the process of becoming, evolving and unfolding? While I *hold* with unconditional positive regard the existential integrity of the individual as he or she is at the moment, what do I do with the developmental validity of his or her current individuality, partness-wholeness balance, autonomy-communion balance, identification-release balance, and so on? As implied by Kegan in his discussion of the role of cultures of embeddedness, the therapist’s commitment must be not just to the individual but primarily to the person who is in the process of becoming and, therefore, to the master-motion of evolution. As the temporary culture of embeddedness, the therapist has to exercise the function of contradicting, that is, challenging the developmental validity of the present evolutionary balances of the client. The therapist has to facilitate disidentification (of course, identification in some cases), differentiation and transcendence. The therapist has to do so both as the temporary culture of embeddedness and as a facilitator of the unfolding of consciousness. The therapist has to be at the service of the “omega pull”,²¹ inviting the person to keep unfolding to the farthest reaches of the spectrum of development.

The initial identification with a particular structure of unfolding is normal, necessary and phase-appropriate. This identification is the honouring of the wholeness aspect, the relative autonomy, and the right to self-assertion

and self-enhancement of the evolutionary stage or unit. How do I relate to the partness aspect, the relative aspect of the autonomy? Does the therapist, as an agent of facilitative accompaniment in the journey of developmental unfolding, have an obligation to hold a mirror before the partness aspect of the client or client's current evolutionary phase? Am I there, as a therapist, only to repair the "failed metabolism," the "developmental lesions," and the "subject-object imbalances" of the earlier years? Do I have an obligation to my clients beyond modifying maladaptive behaviours, helping the ego negotiate the battle between the id and the superego? They all form part of my task as a therapist. But my fundamental commitment goes beyond them to the person in the process of becoming, the self in the process of evolving, and the "omega pull" beckoning the unfolding self to its farther reaches. We speak of people getting "stuck", "lost", "left behind", and so on. If the self were not going somewhere (the omega pull), concludes Wilber²², it would not experience getting stuck, lost or left behind. I have an obligation toward the "going somewhere" of the self, the unfolding of the self toward its farther reaches.

The pattern that seems to connect the unfolding across aspects and dimensions of self is a movement toward diminishing egocentrism, divisiveness, fragmentation, alienation, dissociation and repression, toward greater compassion, unitiveness, integration and communion, depth, interiority, and simplicity. My fundamental commitment as a therapist is to that movement though I may have to do lots of repairs, fixing,

structure-building, uncovering, interpreting, and so on.

Being around. Despite the poetic and symbolic expressions about growth such as "turn around gracefully and embrace the truth of yourself," "come home to who you are, and where you belong," and "unfold yourself to what you can become," development is a painful and, in some sense, frightening affair. Kegan refers to it as developmental "earth quakes". Erikson²³ speaks of developmental *crisis* points which he describes as moments of heightened potential and increased vulnerability. Both for the infant and for the growing adult, dis-identification with a given state or balance of development in favour of what has not yet emerged and consolidated is like being thrown into a no man's land and left alone and helpless. That is the time both an infant and a growing adult would need a secure culture of embeddedness, which will not only challenge, contradict, or negate the current self-sense and securities but also will genuinely and convincingly stand by as the self negotiates the next stage of evolution. A reliable and supporting culture would make a real difference to the self as it differentiates and integrates, develops a new view of reality, experiments with a new sense of self, constructs new moral stances, tries out new faith expressions and spirituality, and so on. This is all the more important when the individual, who is actually an "embeddual" (individual embedded in a context within context), has to swim against the current of his or her own larger culture of embeddedness. The therapist who is the temporary culture of embeddedness for the evolving per-

son in therapy must appreciate how hard the process of negating, contradicting and releasing is and “be around” with authenticity, genuineness and truthfulness.

I have seen countless number of times in individual and group therapy contexts, how very difficult it is for an “over-agentic” individual (who holds on to and defends his or her absolutised autonomy) to recognise and integrate the partness aspect or the need for being in communion. A person who over-differentiated from and repressed the body has to struggle hard to reclaim the body with its sexual-emotional energies. A typical woman in India (and, to a large extent, women in general who are culturally programmed and, perhaps, even genetically predisposed) who is over-identified with the communion aspect would find it very hard to reclaim her “agency” and differentiate her relative autonomy. An individual with an over-developed persona is going to find it hard to recognise and integrate the shadow aspects of his or her self. Similarly, great is the struggle of a need-embedded individual who has over-identified with his or her likes and interests, in taking the perspective of the other. An “over-scripted” individual who has come to live the injunctions, attributions and dogmas of his or her group will have a painful struggle in discovering his or her own true identity. An over-identified interpersonal self who has become his or her relationships (rather than having relationships) is going to find it hard to become a person in his or her own right.

Similarly moving from a developmentally limiting world-view to a more

freeing one is hard for individuals. World-views can be said to operate like one-way mirrors arranged in concentric circles with the least evolved world-view at the centre and the more developed ones around it arranged in a developmentally hierarchical manner.²⁴ As a result, persons operating in the most developed world-view like, let us say, the mystical world-view can understand and relate to reality as constructed by prior world-views like the rational, the mythical and the magical. Unfortunately the opposite is not possible. That is, from within the space of a less developed world-view like the magical-mythical world-view, one cannot recognise and relate to reality accessible to trans-rational and mystic world-views. If my world-view is centred around a central religious or ethnic myth and its doctrines and dogmas, it would be very hard for me to make sense of the mystic Truth forms and expressions lying beyond my world-view. I will then find it difficult to relate to genuine paradoxes, authentic pluralism, and the seamless manifestation of Reality as the Play of the One and the Many. For example, it will be sincerely hard for me as a fundamentalist adherent of any institutionalised religion who is literally entrenched in the dogmas, doctrines, and myths of my “people” to make sense of genuinely pluralistic Truth forms and Truth expressions contained in other world religions. Imagine embracing them without feeling guilty!

For an individual operating from an egocentric and need-embedded moral stance, stepping into the shoes of the other, seeing reality from the other person’s point of view and making moral

choices from that interpersonal space is very hard. For someone functioning from within the individualistic-interpersonal moral stance of mutuality based on mere self-interest, making moral choices on the basis of the “greatest good of the largest number of people” is almost beyond reach. Similarly for someone deeply entrenched in an ethnocentric-conformist moral stance, critiquing the myths and dogmas of his or her own cultural group and making moral choices based on universal-spiritual principles is almost impossible. For instance, it will be difficult for an average citizen of a country entrenched in his or her ethnocentric-conformist moral stance to norm the norms of his group. It will be very difficult for him or her even to consider that the death of innocent children in another country due to lack of food and medicine caused by my country’s economic choices might be unethical (from the universal spiritual ethical stance).

What is important for the therapist to realise in those instances is that “reality” (including that of self) is actually constructed by the individual, that the world not only appears to be such and such but is actually constructed thus from the specific evolutionary space. Hence the identification with a particular developmental phase, a particular world-view, a particular self-sense, a particular moral stance and a particular self-need is actual and “genuine”. As a result, negating any of those identifications is real terror-inducing “death”. Hence, the crucial significance of providing that temporary culture of embeddedness characterised by the ability to “be around”.

Conclusion: The Quest of Psychotherapy

The quest of psychotherapy, when viewed within an integral-developmental framework, is an open-minded and open-ended search for freedom to unfold. A freedom, first of all, from what has made the self get “stuck,” “lost,” or “left behind” in its journey of unfolding. A “freedom from” (the developmental “lesions” and evolutionary “scars”) that is necessary for the individual to function effectively and productively from where he or she developmentally is at a given moment. This “freedom from” is at the service of a larger “freedom for” the further unfolding of the self towards its farther reaches. The facilitation of the “freedom from” could be described as the immediate task of psychotherapy and that of the “freedom for” as its ultimate quest.

The quest of psychotherapy, therefore, is the freedom for the unfolding of consciousness toward its farthest ends facilitated through a genuine intersubjective dialogue between the therapist and the client. A facilitation characterised and influenced, on the one hand, by the therapist’s genuine gentleness of holding, congruent firmness of contradicting and truthfulness and authenticity of being around. The quality of this facilitation is determined, on the other hand, by the client’s truthfulness in self-understanding as she or he negotiates the old “lesions” or the current “fulcrums” (turning points) of developmental unfolding with their accompanying pains of dying, fears of letting go, and anxieties of the unknown. This intersubjective dialogue should be essen-

tially open-minded and open-ended with a willingness to surrender with a sense of mystery to the “omega pull” guiding the self through the prepersonal through the personal toward the transpersonal-spiritual realms.

Though a professional therapist may devote himself or herself mostly to facilitating of the unfolding of consciousness in the prepersonal and personal realms, he or she can, if he or she so wishes, remain open to the emergence of transpersonal-spiritual structures and stages in the intersubjective dialogue. He or she may have neither the experience nor the required “maps” to effectively accompany the person into the transpersonal realms and, therefore, should make appropriate referrals. But he or she can remain genuinely and respectfully open and open-ended. That will require a genuine spirit of willingness, which, as pointed out by May,²⁵, implies a surrendering of one’s self-separateness, and an entering into and an immersion in the deepest processes of life itself. It also implies a realisation that one already is a part of some ultimate cosmic process and a commitment to participation in that process. Willingness is saying yes to the mystery of that

process. Willingness implies letting the Ultimate unfold relaxing my “wilfulness” (the opposite of willingness) and drive to mastery. Therapists, spiritual directors and educators, by their inner call, should be at the service of this Ultimate process, this Ultimate Unfolding with an attitude that is open and open-ended. Everything else is at the service of the Spirit unfolding and Truth evolving: everything else including our favourite theories, theologies, dogmas, forms of spirituality, forms of religion and methods of therapy. In this context, Wilber²⁶ makes sense to me when he says that the Ultimate psychology is the psychology of the Ultimate. Ultimate freedom, could we say, is the freedom in the Ultimate? Ultimate quest of therapy, then, is the freedom for the unfolding of the Ultimate in the developmental journey of men and women, therapists and clients, spiritual directors and spiritual seekers, teachers and students. Psychotherapy lays the foundation for this Ultimate Process by attending to the “freedom from” (developmental accidents, evolutionary scars and their after-effects) aspects and remains at the service of this Process by facilitating the “freedom for” (unfolding towards further ends) dimension of the evolving self.

Notes

1. C. Tart, *Open Mind, Discriminating Mind: Reflections on Human Possibilities*, New York: Harper and Row, 1989, p. ix-x.
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The Liberative Spirituality of the Bhagavad Gita

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The basic concern of all authentic Scriptures of World Religions is the integral liberation of human beings. They show ways of salvation from the existential estrangement of human life. They point to the state of ultimate self-realisation. The process towards this state of *mukti* is not a denial of this world but a transformation of the ambiguities of this world to a liberated state. This soteriological concern is dominant in the Bhagavad Gita. What is significant is that the Gita's way of liberation comprises the diverse aspects of life, personal and social, rational and emotional, historical and cosmic. This becomes evident when the text is read in the religio-cultural context of its composition.

The Theological Context of the Gita

The world-view of the Vedic times (ca. 1500-900 BC) was based on an intuitive perception of reality in its totality and interdependence. The power that preserves this ontic unity of reality is *rta* (RV. 1,24,8. 10,133,6. 7,86). Through *rta* the Divine is immanent in the universe. God's being is being-in-the world; God's being is *becoming*. *Rta* is the cause of integration in human persons, harmony in society and order in the universe. Liberation consists in a life of harmony with others, with nature and ultimately with the Di-

vine. By attuning oneself with the *rta* of the cosmic totality one gets liberated from the ambiguities of life. The Vedic hymns present an integrated attitude to all aspects of life. "The Vedic optimism is not anthropological but on the whole cosmological...It starts from a more holistic perspective which views man and cosmos as a dynamic unity in which both are engaged in the very existence of the Universe."¹ The Vedic hymns are addressed to the *devas*, which are actually personifications of the cosmic powers of life. The cultic performances (*yajnas*) were originally meant to preserve the cosmic order and social harmony. But towards the end of the Vedic period they were manipulated by the dominant priestly class and converted into magical forms of procuring favours for those who perform them.² The immanent power of the Divine thus got reified in the idols of ritualism, and social life was fragmented into a hierarchical caste structure.

The Upanishads evolved as a spiritual protest against this ritualistic culture. The Upanishadic sages (ca 1000-500 BC) in their passionate quest for Self-realisation turned into the depth of their own being. "When we pass from the Vedic hymns to the Upanishads we find that the interest shifts from the objective to the subjective, from brood-

ing on the wonder of the outside world to the meditation on the significance of the self. The human self contains the clue to the interpretation of nature. The Real at the heart of the universe is reflected in the infinite depths of the soul.”³ The major concern of the contemplative pursuits of the Upanishadic masters has been ‘to see the Self in the self through the self’.⁴ Integral liberation is achieved through this introspection (*jnana*). When the inner light of *jnana* shines forth, the veil of ignorance (*avidya*) is removed. The enlightened one is then enabled to ‘see the Self in all things and all things in the Self’ (Isa Up. 6). Hence, the unceasing prayer: “From the unreal lead me to the Real; from darkness lead me to the Light; from death lead me to Immortality” (Brih. Up. 1.3.28). All values of social life are subordinated to this normative experience of achieving *jnana* through mystical introspection. Consequently, the Upanishadic schools gradually became rather elitist in their life and thought. They were insulated from the existential struggles of social life and hence unreachable for the common people.

Buddhism emerged as an ethical protest against the trends of ritualistic objectification in the Vedic circles and of the mystical subjectification in the Upanishadic schools. Siddhartha penetrated right into the root-cause of suffering and discovered that desirous passion (*thrishna*) is the cause of all suffering in the world. Desire gives rise to attachment (*upadana*), greed (*kama*), anger (*krodha*), delusion (*moha*), lust (*mada*) and aggressivity (*matsarya*). With these, human life is

bonded to the cyclic process of birth and death (*samsara*). Liberation from this bondage is possible only through a radically new way of life. For this, Buddha proposes the eight-fold path: right grasp of reality, right resolve to follow the Truth, right speech in harmony with Truth, right action with due respect for life and Truth, right livelihood with a morally sound profession, right endeavour to conquer evil, right mindfulness focused on the ideal of life and right meditation.⁵ Emphasis on ethical demands is evident in these elements of liberative praxis. However, Buddhism refuses to relate them to the experience of a personal God or to the transcendent Divine reality. There is, however, a great emphasis on radical renunciation in pursuit of the high ideals of life. The common people still searched for an integrated way of liberation: a spiritual path (*marga*) that would integrate mystical introspection with social commitment, ritual performances with concern for nature, devotion to the personal God with the awareness of the transcendent Divine. It is partly to meet this spiritual need that the Bhagavad Gita was written (ca. 300 BC).

The Gita accepts the holistic vision of reality found in the Vedas and upholds the need for nourishing the cosmic powers of life (*devas*) (3:9-13). But it is highly critical of the ritualistic culture of the later Vedic times (2:42-44, 7:23). However, the Gita advocates the need for rituals in as much as they are genuine expressions of surrender to the divine Lord (9:23-26) and hence means of inner purification (18:5). In fact rituals are ways of deepening one's atten-

tive devotion to the Lord (*sraddha*) (7:21-22). Thus, the Gita bridges the gap between the Vedic extroversion and the Upanishadic introversion.

Much of the mystical insights of the Gita are taken from the *Upanishadic* pursuits of meditation. *Jnana* is extolled as the paramount way of spiritual integration (4:38, 7:18). The goal of meditative introspection is described in Upanishadic terms as ‘seeing the Self in the self through the self’ (6:20). Such an inner culture liberates the individual from bondage to egoism (*ahamkara*) and awakens the person to integral self-consciousness (*atmabodha*) (4:37-42). With all this, however, the Gita does not advocate an elitist culture in spiritual pursuits. The unfolding of *jnana* is to take place right on the battlefield of life, in the midst of the struggle to determine what is right and what is wrong (2:7). The inner enlightenment is meant to perceive one’s proper duty (*dharma*) in society (18:45). Solitude leads to solidarity.

In developing the ethical perspectives on life the Gita owes much to teachings of Gautama Buddha. In *Buddhist* terms the Gita describes the networking of inordinate passions in the psyche (2:62-63) and upholds the need for ascetical practices for getting liberated from bondage to them (2:55-61). A liberated individual is a merciful one endowed with virtues like compassion (*karuna*), friendliness (*maitri*), joy (*tushti*) and equanimity (*samadarsana*) (12:13-19). He is not bound to a stable home, not affected by praise or calumny, not swayed by enmity or attachment but passionately

committed (*ratah*) to the welfare of all beings (12:18, 14:24, 6:9, 12:4). In these attitudes of asceticism and concern for the world some of the basic values of Buddhism find their entry into the Gita. However, unlike Buddhism Gita gives centrality to devotion to the personal divine Lord (*bhakti*) in spiritual life. In unambiguous terms Gita emphasises that ‘only through *bhakti* one could know, see and enter into the Divine’ (11:54) Hence, the ultimate state of integration is not that of self-extinction (*nirvana*) but that of ‘living in the Lord, becoming one with the divine Lord’(12:8, 14:19)

The Cultural Context of the Gita

It is not easy to offer sufficient documentary evidence for an analysis of the cultural milieu in which the Gita was written. Two dominant spiritual movements which significantly shaped the attitudes to life were Buddhist monasticism and Sankhya dualism. In both of them there had been overtones of ascetical values. Buddhism advocated the impermanence (*anitya*) of reality and Sankhya upheld the irreconcilability between the two ontic principles of spirit (*purusha*) and matter (*prakriti*). Consequently, the Buddhist monks found in a life of radical renunciation a higher form of liberated life and the Sankhya preachers motivated seekers to a life of withdrawal from all forms of involvement in *secular* life in order to liberate the spirit from the cave of matter. “The age was dominated by the ideas of renunciation and retirement from active life. ... A school of thinkers preached that spiritual realisation could only be achieved by an intensive

pursuit of that ideal which necessitated the renunciation of all active life. Retirement from active life was necessary for spiritual relaxation, and after the attainment of that goal action was unnecessary. This attitude resulted in the popularity of the doctrine of renunciation. Different orders of monks, ascetics and friars prevailed.”⁶ Under the inspiration and persuasion of these ascetics a trend has developed in various circles to neglect domestic responsibilities and social duties. Any involvement in the realm of *material* life was considered bondage to the principle of *matter*, and hence a block to the liberation of the *spirit*.

The Gita was composed to counteract this world-denying and hyper-ascetical trend of culture. In this sense the Gita could be understood as a book of a spiritual counterculture. The Gita considers matter as sacred and the material universe as the ‘body of the divine Lord’ (7:4, 11:13). Hence, one does not have to forsake the world with all the domestic responsibilities (6:1) and social duties (3:20) in the pursuit of spiritual liberation. The way to liberation consists not in a life of inaction but in commitment to action out of inner freedom from attachment (*nishkama karma*). What is to be renounced is not action as such (6:1) but the greed (*kama*) (6:24) that poisons one’s action and causes bondage (3:9). Positively this would mean that one does one’s duties in the world ‘out of being united with the divine ground’ (2:48), with a sense of responsibility (*adhikara*) and with skilfulness (*kausalam*) (2: 47,50). Instead of turn-

ing one’s back on the world one has to get involved in the affairs of the world in view of ‘bringing about the integral welfare of the world’ (*lokasamgraha*) (3:25). This world-affirming and world-transforming perspective of the Gita has contributed significantly to the formation of an integrated spirituality for generations of seekers in India.

Liberation in the Life of the Individual

The Gita describes two different attitudes to life: one motivated by egocentredness (*ahamkara*) and the other enlightened by self-consciousness (*atmabodha*). The ego emerges as the pivotal centre of life when greed (*kama*) becomes the dominant value of life. On the other hand, one lives from a deeper consciousness of one’s true self when life is guided by a sense of integration (*dharma*). Actions out of *kama* bring about bondage, while actions out of *dharma* lead to freedom. Liberation in the life of the individual is therefore the process of being progressively freed from the grips of *kama* and of being integrated with *dharma*. For this Gita proposes the threefold path of knowledge, devotion and action (*jnana*, *bhakti* and *karma*).⁷

At the beginning of this liberative process one needs spiritual inspiration and guidance from outside. One has to study the sacred Scriptures and seek instruction from masters in order to enter upon the path of *jnana*. (4:34, 16:23). Initially *bhakti* needs to find expression in offerings (9:26), worship of gods (7:21-22) and rituals (18:5). Similarly, *karma* starts with a sense

of duty in response to the demands of elders and social customs (2.31-33, 16:24). But the Gita demands that one has to grow beyond this initial stage of spirituality, for ‘not by the study of the Scriptures or grim, ascetic practices, not by giving of alms or sacrifice’ can one really reach the Lord (11:53).

Growth in the liberative spirituality consists in a progressive interiorisation of what has been learnt from outside or expressed in rituals and works. Through the regular practice of meditation (6:10-46) the initially acquired knowledge is transformed into an experiential insight (*jnana*). The inner eye of the self is enlightened (11:8) and one is enabled to “see oneself in the divine Self, and the Divine in oneself” (6:20). Deep within the core of being (13:18) the devotee experiences the presence of the Lord who loves him/her intensely (18:64). This experience of being loved by God liberates the human self from its bondage to existential loneliness within the grips of the *ahamkara*. The devotee is moved to total self-surrender to the Lord (*bhakti*) (12:8-11, 18:62, 65-66). With this emerges the realisation that God is the ultimate subject of one’s self. One finds oneself as an instrument in the hands of the divine Lord. Consequently, actions are performed with the awareness of participating in the divine work of establishing *dharma* in all realms of life. The work (*karma*) that one has to do in the world is done in an attitude of having ‘surrendered all actions to the Lord’ (12:6, 9:27). When God becomes the sole agent and ultimate goal of one’s life, one is freed from ‘clinging on to the fruits of actions for oneself’ (6:1, 2:47).

Doing one’s duty with this sense of inner freedom is the basic dynamics of spiritual growth in the Gita.

Spiritual *maturity* consists in an integrated vision and way of life. The one who perceives the Self in oneself sees the same ‘Self in all things and all things in the Self’ (*jnana*) (6:29). God is experienced as the source and goal, life and abode of the universe (7:10, 9:17-18). The entire world is permeated by the power and presence of the divine Lord (9:4, 6:30). Once the world is experienced as the ‘body and temple of the Lord’ (11:13, 13:3) one surrenders oneself to the divine Lord present in all things (*bhakti*) (10:8). Life then becomes an experience of ‘actively moving in the sphere of the Divine’ (6:31). With this vision a new motivation emerges for working in the world (*karma*): concern for the integral welfare of the world (*lokasamgraha*) (3:25). Not only human beings but all beings come into the orbit of this *passionate* concern (3:11, 5:25). With a keen eco-sensitivity Gita states: ‘those who cook food only for themselves are sinners, for they eat sin!’ (3:13).

The liberative message of the Gita is therefore freedom from an ego-centred life to a world-oriented, world-transforming life that draws strength from a deep mystical experience of oneness with the Divine. This transition is a process in which all forms of sterile ritualism and life-negating asceticism are overcome. The Gita advocates spiritual discipline and renunciation, not for the sake of withdrawal from responsibilities in the world, but for developing inner freedom and a divine perspective

on the world. The truly integrated person according to the Gita is one who is genuinely committed to the cause of integral justice and harmony (*dharma*) in all realms of life.

Such a spirituality of integration brings about liberation from the cycle of rebirth too. The Gita accepts the fact of rebirth as a natural course of life's evolution towards the Divine (2:13,22,27). But it also announces a supernatural way of salvation from the 'ocean of birth and rebirth' (8:15). Even if a person is considered to be 'born of sinful wombs' (9:32), and looked down upon as 'the worst of sinners' (4:36) liberation from bondage to the process of rebirth is possible, if that person pursues assiduously the integral way of *jnana*, *bhakti* and *karma*: "Those who cast off all their works on me (*karma*), totally dedicated to me (*bhakti*) and meditate on me with single-mindedness (*jnana*), these will I lift up high out of the ocean of recurring death, and that right soon, for their thoughts are fixed on me" (12:6-7).

Ultimately liberation is a work of divine grace. The human person can only dispose the self to receive the divine light and grace. It is the divine Lord who confers on the human intellect the light of wisdom (10:10), moves the heart with the divine power of love (18:65) and transforms all works into the means of final integration (18:56). Only with the *divine eye* can one truly see the cosmic form of the Lord (11:8) and only with divine grace can one reach the 'final abode of peace' (18:62). With this perspective the Gita relativises all religious practices in favour of a life of

inner freedom and outer commitment.

Liberation in the Evolution of Society

The basic fabric of society at the time of the composition of the Gita was shaped by the caste system with all its cohesive and divisive ingredients. The Gita unfolds the inner contradictions of the prevailing caste system. As a *kshatriya* Arjuna was duty-bound to fight for safeguarding the caste (2:31-33). However, he found that war would only ruin the integrity of the caste (1:39-45). Fulfilling the caste duty leads to the destruction of the purity of the caste! This paradox was the deeper cause of the 'utter confusion' that Arjuna felt on the battlefield of *dharma*.(2:7). The Gita tries to resolve this ambiguity by offering an integral world-view. The role of an individual in society has to be determined not by birth (*jati*) as is the case with the rigid caste system, but by the inherent quality of the individual (*guna*). It is a fact of life that people are born with different temperaments and talents. The differentiation of roles in social life is to be determined by these qualities born of one's being (18:41). Accordingly, everyone has to discover his or her proper role (*swadharma*) in society and thus pursue the personal way of integration (18:45). The traditional caste system that is based on a rigid pattern of birth-bound stratification is a block to this new perception. Hence, the Gita demands that the truly liberated person should actually 'consider in the selfsame way the Brahmins and the outcasts' (5:18). No social distinction is to be made between the elite and the downtrodden for 'even those who are

considered to be born of sinful wombs reach the Lord through genuine *bhakti*' (9:32). A spiritual vision of life takes one beyond the distinction between 'saints and sinners' (6:9)

One might ask if this social perspective is effective enough to overcome the alienations caused by the traditional caste system. The spiritual vision of the Gita, however, contains a great amount of liberative potential for the transformation of social life. The individual is enabled to overcome the narrow confines of social aristocracy and religious elitism. One finds oneself as part of the totality of reality. The Gita strongly criticises all forms of alienation coming from social or political, cultural or religious patterns of domination and exploitation (16:13-20). Each one is called to a life of freedom; social life is the orbit wherein this free-

dom is made possible. At the same time the social fabric is created anew by liberated individuals. It is a freedom that comes from the realisation that the evolution of the life of individuals and of society takes place within the horizon of the unfolding of the divine Self. The individual *karma* of human beings is inserted within the universal process of *dharma*. The divine Lord is the ultimate *subject* of the liberative actions of human individuals (5:9-10) and the ultimate *ground* of the social reality of *dharma* (14:27). The entire message of the Gita may be summarised in one verse:

Being grounded in the divine Self
fulfil your work in the world without any sort of greedy attachment;
Be equal-minded in success and failure:
Equanimity is spirituality (2:48).

Notes

1. R. Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, London: Darton, 1977, p.238
2. Satapadabrahmana, 9,5,1,12; 2,2,8-14; 8,6,1,10
3. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, Delhi: Oxford, 1991, p.49
4. Ibid. P.73
5. A. Fernando, *Buddhism Made Plain*, Indore: Satprakashan, 1985, pp.64ff
6. G.S. Khair, *Quest for the Original Gita*, Bombay: Somaiya, 1969, 144
7. For a detailed reflection on the threefold marga: Sebastian Painadath SJ, "Bhagavad Gita's Contribution to the Future of India," *Jnanadeepa* 1(1998) 1, pp.19-23

Hierarchy, Equality, and Liberation Some Reflections on Indian Culture

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What are the prospects of liberation for the poor in our country? By 'liberation' I do not mean the release of an individual from the cycle of *karma* and *samsara*, of birth and rebirth, but rather freedom from injustice and oppression, poverty and inequality, so that every Indian can live with others with a sense of dignity and self-worth. It is the sort of freedom which Tagore dreamed about in his immortal poem, "Into that heaven of freedom..." and that which is envisaged for our society in the Constitution of India.

When liberation is so understood, Indian society and culture offers us with seemingly insolvable puzzles. We have ethical theories and philosophies that are incomparable. Who cannot but be impressed by the comprehensive and holistic outlook offered by the theory of *varnashrama-dharma* and *yamaniyamas*, which not only provides an ethics for all (*samanyadharma*) but also for the different groups in society and even for the different stages in a person's life? Even more, unlike most Western ethical theories which restrict themselves to the human realm, our ethics seem to make room for the whole of creation. It seems really impressive. And yet we still have bonded labourers. On the one hand *dharma* is said to be deeply social.¹ Even the very word

dharma as 'that which holds together' seems to have a social implication. *Advaitic* philosophy as interpreted by Aurobindo and Vivekananda also has tremendous social implications. "I should love my neighbour not because he is in the neighbourhood... but because he is myself."² On the other hand, if "my God is the poor", as Vivekananda teaches, then, why such disparity in Indian society? Even a lay person's observation would suffice to show that we are far from achieving the goal of liberation of the poor. That it is not because of a lack of material resources (at least not primarily) is clear: there has been a phenomenal growth in that sphere without a corresponding growth in our concern for the less privileged. Our respect for life is so great that Maneka Gandhi has a special scheme for taking care of stray-dogs; but human beings are slaughtered like cattle in caste and communal riots. ('Like cattle' may be a wrong expression, since slaughtering of cattle requires special permits). There seems to be a deep cleavage between our theory and practice, our visions and their execution. According to Ashish Nandy "activism and commitment in the public sphere tend to lack prestige (among Indians) and there are few inner pressures to actualise one's ideals."³ How does one explain this?

This feature is not limited to our concern for the poor. *Dharma* is said to be the principle that regulates one's pursuit of *artha* and *kāma* and yet ours is one of the most corrupt societies in the world. The same feature is at work when responsible leaders seek to divide society on communal and caste lines so as to build a vote-bank. Clearly, it is the pursuit of political power at the cost of *dharma*, that too in the name of Ram, the very embodiment of *dharma*! Tolerance is a hallmark of our culture; not only is it an undeniable fact of Indian history, but it is also immortalized in such sayings as *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. Then, whence comes the intolerance of the Muslims and now the Christians? If past history was an *alibi* to take on the Muslims, how to explain the present day demonising of the Christians of the country? After all, at least a section of these Christians has existed in the country much before Christianity was known in the West. From where comes the present threat perception? Again, is it on account of the cynical pursuit of power at the cost of *dharma*? Can we blame it all on unscrupulous politicians? Or is there something much deeper at the heart of our culture that lets politicians not only get away with such cynical games but even get rewarded with power?

Apart from such large issues, the same paradox is encountered in matters of everyday life, like purity, one of the precepts of common *dharma*. Scholars like Dumont considered this to be so important as to make it the key principle of Indian social organization. However, its practice is more ritualistic than actual. It is not unusual to find even the people

of the upper castes (who pay great attention to cleanliness of one's own body and home) paying scant attention to the cleanliness of the street right in front of the home (that is, assuming that they do not actually throw the dirt from the house on to the public road outside). In such cases not only is any developed ethical sense missing, but even ordinary civic sense seems to be missing. How do we explain this?

India Today very correctly labelled this feature of our culture as "double-think, double-speak."⁴ It is as if the plan of an incomparable mansion drawn up by the best architects were to get moth-eaten for lack of resources to execute the plan. Or as if a most beautiful car has been built but cannot move for lack of fuel. Obviously, if we are to actualize contemporary India's quest for freedom and liberation, it is important to trace the roots of this typically Indian version of schizophrenia. Somewhere at the heart of our cultural system there seems to be a deep contradiction. Where are we to locate it? This paper is an attempt to explore this question.

We may be mistaken in looking at the well articulated philosophical theories for the root of our cultural malaise since they may not be representative of the lived philosophy of our people. Therefore, in place of an exclusive focus on written philosophy which could be a view of the elites, we need to look at our society as a whole to find the key to what we are in search of. Empirical studies are not enough either, since they are often unable to provide the larger picture. It is here that the approach of

Louis Dumont becomes important. The focus of his study is on the ideology of caste, i.e., "as a system of ideas and values."⁵ Complaining that "nowadays, ideology is often sacrificed to the empirical aspect, but sometimes the reverse is done, or else the two may be opposed absolutely to each other,"⁶ he undertakes a study that is meant to be both textual and contextual. This seems to me to be the correct approach.

Besides the approach, the subject matter (caste) is important in itself for inquiring into the prospects for liberation. This is especially so because Dumont sees a fundamental opposition between hierarchy (identified as the fundamental value in caste system) and equality. Therefore, we shall take caste as the focus of our study to see if it can provide a clue that will explain the puzzling features our culture. In the process we will also examine whether there is a basic opposition between caste and equality.

Studying caste from the perspective of the disadvantaged, J.P. Mencher makes two observations. First, for the people at the lowest level of the caste hierarchy "caste has functioned and (continues to function) as a very effective system of economic exploitation. Second, one of the functions of the system has been to prevent the formation of social classes with any commonality of interest or unity of purpose."⁷ The latter feature explains – partly at least – the failure of Independent India's attempts to abolish caste. But it also raises the question: how does caste prevent the formation of social classes? This will be another of

my concerns in this paper. In trying to find answers to these questions I will be approaching caste as cultural system, and not primarily as a system of social stratification.

1. Caste as Culture

1.1 Terminology

So far I have been using the words 'culture,' 'society,' and 'hierarchy,' in an intuitive manner. Now is the time to bring more precision to these concepts. By 'culture' I mean a humanly constructed world of language, concepts, ideas, technology etc. As such, culture is contrasted with nature: tables and chairs come in culture; rivers, trees and stones belong to nature. However, the natural world, in as much as it is experienced and articulated by humans in a language, is also a part of the cultural world because language and ideas are a part of the cultural world. We talk of a cultural "world" because a culture is always a system, an ordered whole. That is to say, the different items found in a culture are not discrete, unconnected entities, but are always ordered in a such a manner as to form an integral meaningful whole. Therefore, a culture is always a cosmos, as opposed to a chaos. And in as much as meaning is a function of such ordering, a cosmos is a meaningful whole whereas a chaos is made up of meaningless, unconnected entities. Thus, we can define culture as the meaning-system in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their conduct in society. Due to this function of guiding one's conduct, culture has an intimate link with ethics.

What about ‘ideology,’ the term used by Dumont? Ideology, as a system of ideas, beliefs and values, may be taken as identical with culture for the present. I shall point out later that culture is a larger whole that could include more than one ideology.

A society, in contrast to culture, is the actual organization and the rules according to which one’s conduct is guided in relation to others.⁸ One is a logico-meaningful integration, whereas the other is a causal functional integration.⁹ While the two are related, one is not reducible to the other. According to Firth,

If ... society is taken to be an organized set of individuals with a given way of life, culture is that way of life. If society is taken to be an aggregate of social relations, then culture is the content of those relations. Society emphasizes the human component, the aggregate of people and the relations between them. Culture emphasizes the component of accumulated resources, immaterial as well as material, which the people inherit, employ, transmute, add to, and transmit.¹⁰

How shall we understand ‘hierarchy,’ the key concept in Dumont’s study of caste? We define hierarchy as a ranking (of persons) in society such that some are considered superior and others inferior. Without such ranking we would not be able to give any sense to ‘hierarchy.’ However, such ranking requires a principle, a value -such as purity, wealth or power- upon which some are judged superior or inferior (in relation to others).¹¹ If there is one such principle involved in ranking we can call that a pure hierarchy. Ordinarily, a

characteristic mark of pure hierarchy is that one’s ranking could change. For example, one who is superior in terms of wealth could lose the wealth and then be classed in the lower level of the hierarchy.

Armed with these definitions let us have a look at some of Dumont’s views on caste which are as well known as they are controversial. I shall focus upon just three points which I consider important for understanding our culture. They are: the guiding principle (essence) of caste system, its implications for equality and social change, and the role (or the lack of it) of the renouncer in the Indian social organisation.

1.2 Hierarchy and Difference

Hierarchy and division have always been recognized as the two basic principles of caste.¹² Dumont, however, takes hierarchy as the primary principle, encompassing the principle of division. How far is he justified in doing this? In this section we shall focus on this question.

The distinction between culture and society enables us draw a distinction between cultural hierarchy and social hierarchy. When the most basic principle of a meaning-system is that of superiority/inferiority, we can call that culture hierarchical. A hierarchical culture does not necessarily mean a hierarchical society. A society becomes hierarchical only when one single value or principle is found to be operative in its social ranking, i.e., when one value or principle is universally operative in a society to rank all its members. This enables us to raise the question whether

the ranking involved in caste is social or cultural or both. Do Indians use a single value such as purity to rank themselves as well as others?

This is a major point of difference between Dumont and Gupta. According to Dumont there is a single principle operative in caste-system; the ideological and the social systems coincide. And the principle is “the opposition of pure and impure.”¹³ Brahmins, the most pure, are at the top of the hierarchy, and the Untouchables, the most impure or the polluted are at the bottom. It is such a comprehensive, universal principle that even such important factors as power and authority have to bow before the awesome dignity of ritual purity. These only enter surreptitiously at the interstitial levels.

Gupta disagrees. He points out a number of facts which militate against this view. I shall only point out one.¹⁴ The opposition between purity and pollution, which Dumont finds as the one principle operative in caste ranking, is a Brahminical view, says Gupta. Others in the social hierarchy do not see themselves this way. For example, there is a vast difference between the Brahminical view of the Chamars and their own view of themselves. According to the orthodox view Chamars originate from a boatman and a Chandal woman. However, the Chamars see themselves as descendants of the youngest of four Brahmin brothers, who was sent by the others to rescue a drowning cow. But before he could reach the spot the cow dies and the elder brothers force him to remove the carcass. Once that was done

the hapless youngster is turned out of the caste and given the name Chamar. Upon this view it is the Chamars who come off as superior to the Brahmins: they are of better character (compassionate to the cow, obedient to elders, ready to work), whereas the Brahmins come across as cheats who take advantage of their seniority to deprive the younger one of his due. Gupta also gives other examples and concludes: “Caste legends of Doms, Chamars, Chasa, Dhoba, Kahars, [and others] all proclaim exalted origins which of course the Brahminical texts vehemently deny.”¹⁵ In other words, ideologically, there is not one but many hierarchies. Therefore, Dumont’s claim to have found the one overarching principle of caste system in the opposition between purity and pollution does not hold.

According to Gupta, difference - and not hierarchy- is the clue to understanding caste and the Indian society. It must be noted that while making this contrast between difference and hierarchy, Gupta is referring to social or Brahminic hierarchy and not to cultural hierarchy. This becomes clear when he talks about multiple hierarchies at the ideological level.¹⁶ While hierarchy is quantitative or quantifiable, difference is qualitative.¹⁷ Wealth, the basis of class hierarchy, for example, can be quantified and people ranked as upper class, middle class and so on. Not so with difference. The diverse religious and linguistic groupings are Gupta’s examples. They are just differentiated, not ranked. This qualitative feel of difference is best shown in Bougle’s description of “repulsion,” which he

considers to be the spirit of caste. By repulsion he means that the different groups of which a caste society is composed,

repel each other rather than attract, that each retires within itself, isolates itself, makes every effort to prevent its members from contracting alliances or even from entering into relations with neighbouring groups. A man refuses to seek a wife outside his traditional circle, ... and regard the mere contact of 'strangers' as impure and degrading. Such is the man who obeys the 'spirit of caste.' Horror of misalliance, fear of impure contacts and repulsion for all those who are unrelated, such are the characteristic signs of this spirit.¹⁸

Repulsion, according to Gupta, emphasises the differences between castes. The characteristic mark of caste system, therefore, is not hierarchy but difference, he argues. Unlike hierarchy, where we can classify people on the basis of a single variable, there is no such single variable in the caste system. "The need to separate is accompanied by a certain reverence and pride in one's own customs and traditions which is not easily jettisoned just to fall in line with orthodoxy."¹⁹ He gives abundant evidence to show this. Along the same lines A.M. Shah, based on his study of castes in Gujarat, shows that the principle of difference (division) has priority over hierarchy in the Indian social organisation.²⁰ Further, unlike ordinary hierarchies like class where 'they' can become a 'we' and vice versa, one cannot change one's caste.

In as much as the discrete caste ideologies involve a ranking where each caste comes out on top, we may call

the whole culture hierarchical. But it will not be a pure hierarchy since there is no one principle in terms of which this ranking is done. Different castes can use different principles for the purpose. Therefore, we conclude that caste is first and foremost a cultural system and only secondarily a system of social stratification. Caste as culture involves multiple hierarchies, but there is only one hierarchy at the social level, the Brahminical one.

1.3 From Caste Culture to Caste Society

How does caste as culture involving multiple ideological systems get transformed into a single social system? This is a matter of complex history – involving racial, cultural, economic, geographical and political factors – to which I cannot do justice here. But this much can be definitely said: the existence of multiple cultural hierarchies is a clear indication that the hierarchy based on the Brahminical ideology that came to dominate the larger society was not willingly accepted by the members at the lower rungs of the social hierarchy. In other words, the early rivalries that arose when the different groups came into contact with one another was settled not so much through negotiations as through force and superior fighting power.²¹ Thus, some were subjugated, others were co-opted and so on, to form one social hierarchy. According to Gupta, if the lower castes, in spite of the multiple cultural hierarchies, "do abide on the ground by the ranking of purity inflicted upon them by the ideology of some other castes, then it is because of the conjoint working

of the principles of economics and/or politics..."²² This seems to be borne out by facts.²³ He sees social hierarchy to be not the essence but a property of caste, a historical accretion, which can be dispensed with as the ground situation changes.

Once such a social hierarchy is established, the ideology of the dominant groups gains prominence and it is given legal sanction. The different groups are given autonomy in dealing with members of their own group, but in relation to other groups, the social hierarchy is supreme. In short, it would seem that our traditional ethico-legal structure is nothing more than a legitimisation of the power structure that already existed in society.

1.4 Caste and Social Change: An Initial Assessment

The difference between Dumont and Gupta has important implications for social change. A society in which the cultural and social systems merge will be resistant to change. This is one of the implications of *Homo Hierarchicus*.²⁴ When one's meanings, values and aspirations are already in force in a society, how could there be change? The divergence between cultural system and social system, on the other hand, is conducive to changes involving caste mobility. When the ground conditions are favourable an alternative hierarchy in the culture asserts itself. As Gupta says, "the other hierarchy is always there waiting for a propitious moment to extravert itself generally over the entire society."²⁵ Although Indian society is often described as unchanging, this is not

borne out by facts. Changes, especially in terms of caste mobility, is not an uncommon feature of our society.

On the other hand, it is also true that any revolutionary change like the French revolution or the Russian revolution is alien to India. If deprivation of the masses, combined with the amassing of wealth by few, were to lead to revolution, the absence of revolutionary changes in India needs some explaining. It cannot merely be a case of absence of leadership. Dedicated and charismatic revolutionaries have not been wanting in independent India. Yet their impact has been very limited. How can one explain this? How does caste become a barrier to the forming of social classes, as observed by Mencher? Is there some truth in Dumont's thesis after all? I suggest that there is. While Dumont is wrong in thinking that there is a convergence of cultural and social hierarchies, he is right in his basic intuition about the opposition between caste culture and egalitarianism.

2. Caste Culture and Equality

In order to see this we need to realize that the basic opposition is not so much between hierarchy and equality as Dumont proposed, but between caste culture – including its multiple hierarchies and difference – and equality. When the opposition is seen in this manner, our finding that difference is the primary principle of caste strengthens rather than weakens Dumont's point. This is what I propose to show in this section. Let us begin with a critique of Dumont's view.

2.1 Dumont and His Critics

Dumont undertakes his study with a view to showing the readers that caste teaches a most fundamental principle of social organization, namely, hierarchy, as opposed to the principle of equality. The former is said to be the characteristic of traditional societies and the latter, of modern societies; the former is based on the collective nature of man, the latter on the individual nature. About the former, Dumont goes so far as to say that “on the level of life in the world the individual is not.”²⁶ Traditional societies, based on hierarchy, are not egalitarian whereas modern societies, based on equality and liberty, are egalitarian. Needless to say that he places Indian society in the former category.

This has been severely criticized, not only by those Indians brought up on a daily diet of the glories of India’s golden past, but also by reputed social scientists. André Béteille takes him to task for drawing such black and white distinctions between two types of society and identifying the one with Indian and the other with Western society. He considers both *homo hierarchicus* and *homo equalis* as paste-board characters.

Perhaps such characters have a certain pedagogical function in so far as they make quick and sharp contrasts possible between societies widely separated in space and time. But a major civilization, such as the Indian or the Western, is too rich and too complex to be adequately portrayed by the one to the exclusion of the other.²⁷

This, I think, is a valid point. Neither hierarchy nor equality can be

taken as empirical statements characteristic of a society to the exclusion of the other. Even at the time of slavery there would have been slave masters who treated their slaves with a degree of dignity and compassion.²⁸ Similarly, discrimination or inequality is also a universal feature of societies in as much as human dealings with one another require some evaluation in terms of merit, quality or worth.²⁹ Therefore, hierarchy and equality must not be taken as empirical judgements on society such that one excludes the other. A close knit family is a good example of the empirical mix of the two values. Equality and hierarchy, then, must be taken as “ideal types”³⁰; conceptually they exclude one another, not empirically. They help us make useful judgements on the empirical reality.

Having recognized this, the basic question still remains. Is caste culture basically opposed to egalitarianism? Dumont contrasted hierarchy with equality in the mistaken belief that our society is a pure hierarchy built on the opposition between the pure and the impure. Does the finding that difference, not hierarchy, is the basic principle of caste also show that caste culture is compatible with equality?

From the finding that difference and not hierarchy is the essence of caste, Gupta draws the conclusion that they are “logically of equal status.”³¹ I am not sure what conclusion to draw from this. Does it mean that logical equality is adequate for ethical action and social liberation? That there is no basic opposition between caste and equality? While I do not know of any

scholar who has explicitly stated so, in one place Gupta does say, “with differences comes the notion of equality,” without qualifying the notion of equality.³² Similarly, the basic thrust of Béteille’s argument in “*Homo Hierarchicus, Homo Equalis*” also seems to be that there is no incompatibility between caste and social equality. He writes: “I find it difficult to believe that the idea of human beings as equal claimants to justice in this broad sense [i.e., human beings as human beings] can be the monopoly of any society or culture to the exclusion of all others.”³³ If it merely means that equality and inequality are to be taken as ideal types rather than as exclusive characterizations of any society, nothing more needs to be said about it. But if it means that caste culture makes no difference to ethical conduct and social liberation then it is based on a confusion. Let us analyse the concept of equality so as to see the different senses in which it is used and identify the one that is appropriate to ethical action.

2.2 Types of Equality

i) *Logical Equality*: Equality is logical if it is necessary for certain concepts and principles to be operative. An excellent example is provided by Béteille. He argues: “...the ends of justice are defeated when equals are treated unequally, but also when unequals are treated equally.... [It is impossible to] formulate the principle of justice without some consideration of equality, however residual.” This is a conceptual requirement: the concept of justice necessarily requires the concept of equality; one cannot be conceived

without the other. Similarly the concept of difference and repulsion logically requires the existence of another from which the one is differentiated or repulsed. Therefore, if difference is the basic principle of caste, then it is a logical requirement that there be other groups in society for there to be any difference or repulsion. In this sense Gupta is right in claiming that the concept of difference implies that they are of *logically equal* status, i.e., they are equal as existents in society.

ii) *Empirical equality*: At the other extreme of logical equality is empirical equality. Whereas logical equality is a conceptual matter, empirical equality is a matter of experience and observation. Thus two people could be equal in height, weight, function in society, and so on. In the social realm, inequality is as much - if not more- a matter of experience as equality. Thus people can be unequal in merit, quality, worth, etc. and these are not specific to any society as Béteille reminds us.

iii) *Metaphysical equality*: Let me first explain the concept of metaphysics. The concept of metaphysics is a sort of hybrid between the logical and the empirical. A metaphysical principle is not empirical: it cannot be observed, and in this sense, it is like the logical. On the other hand, it is said to have an extra-mental or extra-conceptual or extra-linguistic existence in reality. In this it is unlike the logical which is purely a conceptual matter. For this type of knowledge which is distinct from both the logical and the empirical, but has the characteristics of both, Kant used the technical term “synthetic *a priori*.”

The most discussed example of a metaphysical principle is perhaps the principle of causality. This concept entails the idea of necessity, which Hume showed, cannot be observed. One can observe a metal being heated and also that it has expanded, but one cannot observe any necessary connection between the two. Kant agreed with Hume that the causal principle is not observational but made the distinction between the causal principle ("Every event has a cause") and a causal law ("Metal expands when heated"). He argued that the former is synthetic *a priori* and hence not based on experience; rather it is the very condition of experience: without it we will not be able to explain or predict anything and science itself would be impossible. Here, then, is a principle that is like the logical, but is not about concepts but about reality. A causal law, in contrast is based on experience: relying on the truth of the causal principle we inquire into the cause of an event and come to a conclusion based on our experience.

Metaphysical equality is similar to the causal principle. It is not based on experience and hence not an empirical concept. Nor is it simply a conceptual matter like logical equality. Without the principle of metaphysical equality we would not be able to explain certain of our ordinary human experiences. How are we to explain, for example, a boy and a girl judged to be a complete mismatch by others falling in love leading to a happy married life? Or, how do we explain the fact that a complete stranger in need (hence, empirically speaking, having nothing in common with me) can

evoke my compassion? The most frequent use of the principle of metaphysical equality, however, is in the realm of spirituality and mysticism. Thus, in Christianity every human is a child of God; in Islam a servant of God; in Advaita Atman is not different from the Brahman, and so on, each of which implies equality of humans *as humans*, even when there may be no observable respect in which they are equal.

iv) *Ethical Equality or equality of persons:* This is related to metaphysical equality, but different. It is an application of the metaphysical principle to the empirical realm in the form of an ethical norm. The best formulation of such a norm is found in Kant when he says, "I am never to act otherwise than so that *I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.*"³⁴ Here, then, is a basic criterion of a moral norm: can the principle on which I act be applied to anyone in my situation? Such universalizability implies an equality of persons that is not based on one's birth, socio-economic status, etc. In other words, it affirms that metaphysical equality is applicable to human beings in concrete situations.

With these distinctions in mind let us look at the implications of caste culture for ethical behaviour. First let us make a general point about caste culture. A multiplicity of cultural hierarchies where each caste is superior to the other implies that the basic pattern of thinking is in terms of 'we' and 'they,' in-group and out-group. In the case of each, 'we' are superior and the others inferior. Gupta seems to acknowledge

this exaltation of the ‘we’ over ‘they.’³⁵ Moreover, unlike in class, the ‘they’ of caste can never become a ‘we’ or vice versa. This is the significance of the finding that difference or repulsion is the spirit of caste. This is an important feature of caste culture, which has implications for ethics.

This point about caste culture needs some clarification. The distinction between in-group and out-group is a universal phenomenon and is not specific to India. Ordinarily one belongs to more than one in-group at the same time, such as family, nation, linguistic group, and so on. What is specific to caste culture is the absence of a very important in-group, i.e., the ‘human’ group, as I hope to show. Among all the in-groups this one has very special significance for ethics.

2.3 Ethical Relativism

What does it mean to belong to an in-group called the humans? It means that in spite of the other in-groups such as family, caste or nation to which I belong, there are contexts in which when even a total stranger is made a part of the ‘we’ in as much as the other is a human person. There is hardly any empirical basis for such a grouping and it is based on the metaphysical concept of person. And this is what seems to be missing in our culture. It is not that we lack the concept of metaphysical equality, as applied to the religious context. We have already noted its existence. Therefore, Béteille is right in saying that equality of humans as humans is not the monopoly of any one “society or culture.”

What is missing in this account of Béteille is the distinction between nature and culture. Metaphysical equality of human beings is a fact about human nature, and not an item of any culture.³⁶ In as much as it is a fact about human nature, it would be surprising if we are totally unable to feel with members of an out-group merely as human beings. This fact about human nature becomes an item of culture only when it is apprehended as a fact and given its due place in one’s world-view or meaning system in terms of which one can interpret experience and guide one’s conduct. When metaphysical equality becomes an item of culture it takes the form of ethical equality or equality of persons, implying the universalisability of one’s moral norm.

Upon this point, the relativism of traditional Indian ethics is well known. “The question ‘what would happen if everyone did this’ has never cut ice in India.”³⁷ According to Dandekar, “In spite of the comprehensive character of dharma, in its most common connotation it was limited to two principal ideals, namely... [varna and ashrama]. Thus, in popular parlance, dharma almost came to mean just varna-ashrama-dharma, that is the dharmas (ordained duties) of the four classes [sic!] and the four stages of life.”³⁸ In other words, although we have the concept of *samanyaadharma*, in practice what counts is varna-ashrama-dharma. The implication is this: “In our society there is caste ethics and there are group norms, but there is no such thing as Indian social norms. Thus there is hardly any criteria of right and wrong, honest and dishonest, permissible and

impermissible applicable across the board.”³⁹ In other words, ethical equality does not find a place in our culture. Even in such most fundamental issue as one’s right to life, the Brahmin and the Sudra do not stand on equal grounds.

2.4 The Missing ‘Person’

This is not surprising because the notion of person -someone who is always treated as an end and never as a means- is crucial to ethical universalism. The concept of a person is quite different from that of a soul or *atman*. A person is a concrete observable entity, an *atman-in-the-world*, very different from other observable beings. A person is one to whom we can attribute both mental and physical properties,⁴⁰ a moral agent to whom moral praise and blame can be attached;⁴¹ which is not the case with a soul or *atman*. It is on account of such differences from other beings that person is considered a category by itself and differentiated from other beings. Seen thus, it is not hard to see that the concept of person is very underdeveloped, if not totally missing in our culture. The culture of our subcontinent is perhaps unique in this matter. The Japanese scholar, Hajime Nakamura, making a comparative study of the Indian, Chinese and Japanese ways of thinking comes to the conclusion that “the traditional Indian concept of man is vague; man is not seen as an individual, but only as an instance of the species of ‘living beings’...”⁴² Clearly Nakamura is using the word ‘individual’ in the sense of ‘person’ as a separate category among living beings and not in the sense of

‘individual’ as opposed to ‘social.’ In the latter sense, our culture did develop a strong sense of individualism,⁴³ where each one is concerned with his own salvation. Here again, Dumont is mistaken in contrasting the individual nature of man with his collective nature and applying it to Indian society.

What is missing is ‘individual’ in the sense of ‘person’ as an independent category, as belonging to that special and unique in-group called the human species on account of which they have a special relation to one another. Although there are some variations in the ontologies (theories of beings) of different philosophical systems, roughly they all comprise of material beings, living beings, *atman*, and the ultimate being (Brahman, Purusha etc.) Here is an example from the Bhagavadgita: “The wise look with the same eye on a Brahmin endowed with learning and culture, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a pariah” (5/18). This could be considered typical of Indian ontology except that material beings are not mentioned here. What is noteworthy is that human person is not a category at all, whereas the Brahmin and the Pariah are placed in different categories along with cow, elephant and dog! At the human level the most -if not the only- operative concept (after *atman*) in our culture is caste. The result is that “the social nature of man did not receive the thought it deserved...”⁴⁴ This is so because the very logic of in-group out-group distinction is that the members of the in-group receive a special treatment that is denied to the out-group. Ethical universalism is the cultural expression of this special relation.

How do castes come to have the dominance it has in our ethical thinking? This becomes amenable to explanation when it is seen that “Hindu law was first formulated in a tribal society, and it was based primarily on the customary practices and relationships ... The central problem at this stage was to maintain peace between the tribes.”⁴⁵ This would seem to indicate that *varna dharma* is more concerned about maintaining peace between different groups than with any moral norms concerning all. The norms (the customary practices and relationships) prevalent within a group were not disturbed as long as they did not touch the already established hierarchical relationship between social groups. Since the basic unit here is the caste group, there is no place for an ethical norm that cuts across the different groups. This explains the divergence in the different dharmas for the different groups. Thus, the absence of the concept of person together with the existent concept of caste explains the absence of ethical universalism in our culture.

3. Social Hierarchy and Religion

Another important feature of our culture that remains to be discussed is its relation to religion. How is it that the Indian seers who saw the metaphysical equality of the humans were not able to give the concept of person to our culture, which could pose a challenge to the social system? It is here that Dumont’s observation about the institution of the renouncer becomes important. Anyone could opt out of the hierarchical social

order by becoming a *sannyasi* and be accepted by members of different castes. Dumont does not mention that someone who is not satisfied with the social order could also become a *baghi*, ordinarily termed “dacoit,” but more often than not, these are individuals who revolt against the system and are forced out of the system. *Baghis* are not a rare phenomenon in India, especially in the north. Obviously they do not enjoy a status similar to the *sannyasi* but they hold a special place – often bordering on reverence – in the imagination of the lower strata of society. Both the *baghi* (of this type) and *sannyasi* are manifestations of the intuitive grasp of metaphysical equality operative in human nature. But being outside the social order their intuition has no chance to develop into a culture. Both are outside the society, the former because he is not acceptable to the social order and the latter because he has renounced it. The *sannyasi* with his renunciation of the social order and still being acceptable to it, becomes “the safety valve for the Brahmanic order which can give a permanent place to the transcendent [i.e., metaphysical equality in the religious realm] while remaining outside the range of its attacks”⁴⁶ i.e., without metaphysical equality becoming an empirically applicable (hence, socially challenging) concept of personal equality. Therefore, the *sannyasi* ideal was not merely accepted, but encouraged. This makes it possible for the renouncer’s ideas to enter into the culture, but only after being filtered through the medium of the Brahmin who is very much a part of the established social order.⁴⁷

This bifurcation of religion and society results in the social structures getting unduly enervated at the expense of religion which gets emasculated. Religion is emasculated by stripping it of its prophetic dimension that is bound to arise when the mystical intuition of metaphysical equality is allowed to develop into personal equality. S.S. Gill draws attention to this emasculation of religion when he says that “the *Dharmashastras* treated divinity rather lightly, and even gods were not overly burdened by their holiness,”⁴⁸ i.e., not burdened by the ethical aspect of their behaviour. With this bifurcation, religion of the man-in-the-world is reduced to the externals such as the rituals, choice of one’s favourite deity, etc. There can be great freedom in one’s choice of such emasculated religion that has been reduced to being a handmaid of the existing power structure. Most discussions about our great religious tolerance neglect the fact that the religion so tolerant is an emasculated one that has no say in our social organisation, that it goes hand in hand with the great rigidity of the social structure. The two would seem to be two sides of the same coin.

One of the most important implications of understanding this relationship between caste society and religion is that it puts a question mark on our present understanding of caste as a Hindu religious phenomenon. If the given analysis of the relationship between social hierarchy and religion is correct, it would mean that caste has no intrinsic link to genuine religion; just the opposite is the case in as much as it

is the result of the bifurcation of religion and society. Rather than considering it a religious phenomenon it should be understood as a social and cultural phenomena, a legitimisation of a dominant economic and political power structure. Only such an understanding will be in keeping with the empirical findings which show that all the religions and ideological groups of the subcontinent are permeated by caste culture. Different writers have commented on the caste base of our communist groups. The same is true of religions in India. Although Gandhiji was very much under the spell of the myth that caste is a Hindu phenomenon, he also recognized that all religions – even those which did not originate India – were affected by it the moment they entered the country.⁴⁹ A good example is the Kerala Christians who came to be looked upon as three different castes within the larger hierarchical society.⁵⁰ As in the larger society, religion for the Syrian Christians – who have existed in India from the beginning of Christianity – became a matter of choosing one’s favourite deity (in this case Jesus Christ), and zealously preserving one’s ritual practices (which lies at the centre of the present day rites controversy). While the egalitarian ideology of their religion may not have been totally lost, it was not given any major say in their social attitudes. Even if the Christians were to escape being three different groups, the larger society would still have assigned them a specific place within the hierarchy, thus making them effectively one caste among the many. That is the logic of the principle of difference which we have found to be basic to caste culture. Only those

tribals who have remained away from the main stream have escaped this culture.

Caste can be considered a Hindu phenomenon only in so far as the dominant culture of the subcontinent is Hindu. On this basis to label it a feature of Hinduism is like labelling Western capitalism as a feature of Christianity. Both are cultural sedimentations of their complex histories. While the historical factors are different in both, they have these in common: (1) both are legitimations of certain power structures in society, (2) the appearance of both is closely linked to an emasculation of religion. The emasculation itself takes place through different historical processes which cannot be treated here.

To sum up: so far we have found the following as the main features of caste as culture: difference, which implies a 'we-they' pattern of thinking; non-existence of the concept of person, which leads to ethical relativism; emasculation of religion, with its corollary of great freedom in the choice of one's preferred deity, rituals etc. as long as it does not challenge the established social order. Now let us examine the explanatory power of this understanding of caste as culture.

4. Some Implications

I have focused on the ethical dimension of our culture throughout the article. As such it also explains most of the paradoxical features our culture with which we began. One last point on it will be seen in the next section. Here in this section, I shall focus only on some other issues that have been raised.

i) *Social Change*: Our understanding of caste as culture places us in a position to have a more comprehensive understanding of social change in Indian society than is available today. We noted earlier that upon Dumont's view where cultural hierarchy and social hierarchy converge there is hardly any room for social change, except within a caste. Thus there could be rivalries within the group and change in caste leadership is possible. This is noted by Dumont. But the position of the caste group within the larger society does not change. With the finding that there are different cultural hierarchies, with their implied logical equality, inter-caste rivalries and changes at the caste level also becomes possible. Thus a given caste need not always remain at the same level of the social hierarchy: caste mobility is not only possible, it is also a fact. Gupta's contribution helps to explain this. Now with the finding that the basic unit of value in our culture is the caste and not the person, we are also able to explain why there have been no revolutionary changes in Indian society. Lacking the concept of person at the cultural level means that while caste as a social unit can change its position in the social hierarchy, there is no way in which members of all castes can come together against unjust rulers (persons) in a revolutionary uprising, as in the case of the French, Russian or the Chinese. In other words, it explains Mencher's finding that caste prevents the formation of social classes.

ii) *Divisiveness of Indian Society*: The eternal divisiveness of Indian society is well known. Although this has not been one of our concerns, our

understanding of caste throws light on this feature as well. It becomes amenable to explanation when we realize that the spirit of caste culture is division or repulsion, that its basic mode of thinking is in terms of “we” and “they.” Tara Ali Baig once observed that our unity in diversity, which we constantly mention with pride, becomes evident only under severe external threat as in 1962, 1965, and 1971.⁵¹ The prevalence of this pattern of thinking is borne out by Indian history including the independence struggle.⁵² The ideology of the RSS and its affiliates and the present day attempts to unify “Hindu society” by inventing a “they” in the Muslims and presently in the Christians would seem to be a continuation of the same pattern of thinking.

Understanding caste as culture also explains why the Syrian Christians who were in the country for centuries were not considered a threat by the rest of society: they were very much a part of the caste culture, as explained above. If the minuscule percentage of Christians in India is seen today as a threat by fundamentalist Hindus, it has less to do with any conversions or demographic factors than with the fact that Christians have come to lay more emphasis on the egalitarian nature of their religious ideology and have become more outward looking. This change in their attitude itself has a great deal to do with the legitimacy gained by egalitarian values in independent India.

5. The Present and the Future

Caste culture underwent a process of ferment and deep churning during the

Indian Renaissance and the Independence movement. The leaders of the movement were sharply divided on whether freedom from the British or the reform of society should get priority. Even when independence was given priority, the need for socio-cultural reform was never in doubt. This finds expression in the writings of people like Gandhi and Vivekananda with their emphasis on *antyodaya* and *daridranarayana*. Our Renaissance thinkers seem to be the first to bring out the ethical implications of our ancient intuition about metaphysical equality. This is a break with tradition.⁵³ Gandhi, aware of the unorthodox nature of this interpretation of *Vedanta*, tries to give a traditional backing to his humanism in a very unusual way. He makes cow-protection (not any scriptures or any particular way of looking at the deity, etc.) the “central fact of Hinduism” and then argues that a religion that worships the cow cannot be cruel to humans!⁵⁴ The most emphatic expression of this new found humanism is in the Constitution of independent India, with its egalitarian values. The single most achievement of this development was the legitimisation of egalitarianism. This official acceptance of egalitarianism has had two impacts: one negative and the other positive.

On the negative side, it has led to the double-think and double-speak mentioned in the beginning. Since the makers of the Constitution as well as most of the first generation leaders of independent India were committed to egalitarian values, that set the standard of political discourse which reaches its culmination in the *garibi hatao* slogan

of Indira Gandhi. At the same time, power remained in the hands of the traditional power groups and the official legitimacy given to egalitarianism hardly found concrete expression in crucial issues like land reforms. This is especially the case in the Hindi heartland which hardly experienced the cultural Renaissance, but had the dominant say in the power structure. Lacking in the cultural concept of person, even those who sought genuine reform like Swami Sahajanand and the socialists were handicapped. There was no cultural basis on which people could be mobilized to pressurise the leadership to carry out reforms. Its execution was solely dependent on the good will of the political leadership which increasingly passed into the hands of the agents of traditional power structure. Thus political mobilisation continues to be along caste lines even today. But for the sake of legitimacy from the educated middle class and from the West they continue to talk the language of equality.

On the other hand, the very fact of having to function -at least outwardly- within the bounds of an egalitarian Constitution had also a positive impact. First, national rituals such as Independence and Republic day celebrations gave occasions for people to come together irrespective of caste loyalties which give some boost to an egalitarian culture. Second, the very exercise of universal franchise, in spite of its gross misuse by traditional power holders in many parts of the country, has had a similar impact. It is precisely such exercises that enable the concept of person to grow in our consciousness. To some extent it is also true of education,

although due to the neglect of primary education (where the traditionally underprivileged would be the beneficiaries) its impact is not as much as it could have been.

What are the future prospects? If the cultural dynamo of liberation is the concept of person, then the prospects for liberation would depend upon making it an integral part of our culture. This requires both intellectual and field work. Our Renaissance thinkers, preoccupied as they were with building up the self-confidence of our people against the colonial powers, mostly adopted the strategy of affirming the greatness of our past. While they were critical of caste discriminations, most of them, including Gandhiji, saw it as a historical accretion that has nothing to do with the spirit of Indian culture. (Ambedkar is an exception). Our culture, no doubt, has many excellent qualities to recommend itself and they were perhaps right in taking that approach at that time. Now half a century after the independence, the same strategy would be self-defeating. If we are to adequately respond to the quest of our people for liberation, it is time that we boldly looked at and saw the gaping holes in our cultural firmament. Only with the realization that the concept of person - the foundation of personal equality and ethical universalism- is missing, will we be able to take steps that are adequate to correcting the situation. Together with such efforts, there is also the need for serious work to unearth and create a positive identity of being an Indian, an identity that is not dependent on an “other” as done by the ideologues of caste culture. On the ground, the

process set in motion by the working of our egalitarian Constitution must be continued and vigorously pursued in collaboration with all who share these values.

Indian Christians, I believe, can play a major role in promoting a culture of person. Not only do they have a developed concept of person but they have also become aware of the egalitarian nature of their religion. Obviously promoting such a culture is not an easy task and it may not have immediate tangible results. But once the need is realized we could engage in a realistic evaluation of the various services we offer to the nation from this perspective. In this respect, I believe, our less glamorous undertakings like the rural schools (which are often located in the midst of the neglected ones of society but where other castes are welcomed), the lowly work of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity

etc., will have a greater impact in the longer run than most of our elite institutions. Since such works involve neither power nor prestige, the value attached to persons as persons become more transparent in such situations.⁵⁵ Presently even such works have come to face opposition, even to the extent of accusing Amartya Sen's advocacy of primary education as a foreign conspiracy! But there are sufficient indications to show that the process set in motion by our Renaissance thinkers cannot be rolled back. Seen from this perspective, opposition to such works would seem to be the parting shot of the caste culture that has begun to feel the impact of the working out of our Constitution and its values and, hence, could even be a positive sign. The contemporary stress on human rights at the global level is also a positive sign since it provides a conducive atmosphere for promoting the culture of person.⁵⁶

Notes

1. M. Chatterjee, *The Concept of Spirituality*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1989, p.21,27.
2. Quoted in M. Chatterjee, p.36.
3. Quoted in *India Today* August 31, 1983, p.7
4. *Ibid.*
5. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchichus: The Caste System and its Implications*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970; Delhi: Vias Publications, 1971, p.36.
6. *Ibid.*, p.37.
7. J.P. Mencher, "The Caste System Upside Down," in D.Gupta, (ed.), *Social Stratification* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.93.
8. Besides Gupta, I am indebted to Clifford Geertz for this distinction. See, Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change," in W.A.Lessa and E.Z.Vogt (eds.), *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, New York: Harper and Row, 1958, P.533.
9. Geertz, p.533.
10. R. Firth, *Elements of Social Organization*, London: Watts, 1951, p.27. Quoted in M. Singer, "The Concept of Culture," in D. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, The MacMillan Company & The Free Press, 1968, vol.3, p.533.

11. This general definition of hierarchy is based on the common element present in the differing definitions of Dumont and Dipankar Gupta. See, D. Gupta, "Continous Hierarchies and Discrete Castes," in Gupta, pp.116-19.
12. A.M. Shah and I.P. Desai, *Division and Hierarchy: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat*, Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1988, p.2. A note about terminology: In the place of 'division' other authors use terms such as 'difference'(Pocock, Gupta), and 'repulsion'(Bougle). I use these terms inter-changeably. Similarly, following Gupta, I shall not make a distinction between *varna* and *jati* while talking about caste.
13. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchichus*, p. 59.
14. Gupta, "Continuous...", p.122.
15. D.Gupta, "Hierarchy and Difference: An Introduction," in Gupta, p.12
16. Gupta, p.13-14.
17. Gupta, p.8
18. Bougle, "The Essence and Reality of the Caste System," in Gupta, ed., p.65.
19. Gupta, p.128
20. Shah and Desai, p.3.
21. This contention, I think, will be borne out by a close reading of ancient Indian history. See, R.Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990. A.L. Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989. It is also not hard to see that crude force and masculine power continues to enjoy a very special place in our culture. "Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated... [because] Gandhi, it was believed, had betrayed nationalist Hinduism both because of his rejection of Brahmanical values, particularly its *esteem of masculine powers*, and his perfidious partition of India." See, Ashish Nandy, *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980, p.78. cited in Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht, "The Bodies of Nations: A comparative Study of Violence in Jerusalem and Ayodhya," in *History of Religions*, vol.38/2, pp.144-5). *italics added*. See also, p.145
22. Gupta, p.118.
23. See, Gupta, p.132, Shah and Desai, p.xiii.
24. A.Béteille, *The Idea of Natural Inequality and Other Essays*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, p.35.
25. Gupta, p.14.
26. L. Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India*, The Hague: Mouten, 1970, p.42.
27. Béteille, p.35.
28. A. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1933, repr. 1948, p.23
29. Béteille, p.36
30. My use of this term is influenced by Eric Fromm and Vincent Bruemmer. Fromm acknowledges his indebtedness to Weber and to Jung. See, E.Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, New York: Harper and Row, 1956, p.35.; V.Bruemmer, *The Model of Love*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.157
31. Gupta, p.13
32. Gupta, P.17.
33. Béteille, p.36
34. I. Kant, "The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals," in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, tr. by T.Kingsmill Ab-

- bot, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 6th ed., p.18. italics original. A positive account of the norm is “*Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*” Ibid. p.38. italics original.
35. Gupta, p.12.
 36. I am aware that some philosophers consider human nature itself a cultural construct. But it makes no difference to the point being made here as long as the distinction between nature and culture is maintained. Just as the principle of causality can be considered as fact of nature distinct from a causal law which is cultural product, so too metaphysical equality of humans can be considered a fact, whereas the particular ways of conceiving persons are cultural products. My contention is precisely that our cultural construction of person is inadequate.
 37. M. Chatterjee, p.45. She makes this observation in the context of the *sannyasi* ideal. But it seems equally applicable to our ethics.
 38. R.N. Dandekar, “Dharma, the First End of Man,” in W.T. de Bary, S. Hay, et al. (eds.), *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, reprint, 1988, p.218.
 39. S.S. Gill, *The Pathology of Corruption*, New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1998, p.253.
 40. P.F. Strawson, *Individuals*, New York: Anchor Books, 1963. First pub. in 1959.
 41. R.C. Pradhan, “Persons as Minded Beings: Towards a Metaphysics of Persons,” in *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research XV/3* (May-August 1998), p.23.
 42. See, *India Today*, p.7.
 43. S. Radhakrishnan and P.T.Raju, *The Concept of Man: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1960, 1966, p. 336.
 44. Ibid.
 45. R. Thapar, cited in G.S. Bhargava, “Hindu Texts Not to Blame for Injustice,” *Times of India*, Mumbai, March 1, 1999, p.10.
 46. L.Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India*, p.51.
 47. L. Dumont, *Religion*..., pp.36-46
 48. S.S. Gill, p.9.
 49. See, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* vol.58, p.177.
 50. C.J. Fuller, “Kerala Christians and the Caste System,” in Gupta, p.197.
 51. T. A. Baig, “Can Indians Only Protest?,” *Sunday*, 9 August, 1981.
 52. Gandhiji recognised it explicitly when he launched the Civil Disobedience to “take the attention of the nation off the communal problem [which is another manifestation of the spirit of caste] and to rivet it on the things that are common to all Indians...” *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, xlii, pp.383-4. The process is at work when he placed the exclusive blame for the communal problem on the British in 1941.
 53. See, B.D. Bedekar, *Towards Understanding Gandhi*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975, p.110.
 54. *Young India*, Oct. 6, 1921. S. Radhakrishnan, ed., *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on his Life and Work*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1939, p.472-74.
 55. This is quite contrary to the view of Marxian social analysts like Stan Lourdusamy whose analysis, it seems to me, is devoid of any cultural content.
 56. I am grateful to Mathew Jayanth, SJ, and Subhash Anand for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

The Quest in Zen Buddhism

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It was my summer vacation. As usual I was on my way to Perumalmalai in the Kodaikanal hills of Tamil Nadu to practise Zen meditation at "Bodhi-Zendo" under the guidance of Fr. Ama Samy SJ, the only qualified Zen meditation teacher in India. Coming to know of my plan, some theology students who met me on the way put this question to me, "Can we afford to spend time in meditation facing the wall when millions of our countrymen are suffering?". Yes, this is the question which I grapple with in this paper. What is Zen and what is the quest in Zen Buddhism?

1. What is Zen?

When we arrive at "Bodhi-Zendo" for Zen meditation the administrator gives us a pamphlet which contains an introduction to Zen. The first point states that "the word "Zen" is a Japanese modification of the Sanskrit word 'dhyana' (Pali, 'Jhana'). 'Dhyana' became in China 'Ch'an or "Ch'an-na" and in Japan, 'Zen' or Zenna. "Zen" is originally Zen Buddhism, which is a sect of Mahayana Buddhism. According to legends, a certain Bodhisattva from South India – from Kanjeevaram, according to one legend – went to China in the 5th-6th century and taught this form of meditation. From China Zen Buddhism spread to Korea and to Japan. An ancient verse describes the Zen

methods, realisation and transmission, thus:

A special transmission outside the scriptures;
No dependence on words and letters.
Directly pointing to the heart-mind.
Seeing into one's Nature and attaining Buddhahood.'

2. The Quest in Zen Buddhism

The quest here is for liberation, freedom.² This liberation is not merely individual and otherworldly, but it is also communitarian and this-worldly. "It must be remembered that Buddhism originated as a liberation movement. The Buddhist meditation and philosophy are primarily soteriologies or ways of liberation. There can be no true Liberation Theology for the East without such in-depth encounter and experience".³ But, when we talk about liberation as the quest in Zen Buddhism, what kind of liberation are we talking about? "The Zen quest is, first and foremost, a religious quest".⁴ By religious quest what I mean is a spiritual quest as opposed to a material one.⁵ In a material quest one looks for fulfilment in power, prestige, wealth and health, but in a spiritual quest one searches for meaning in life in the face of human frailty, limitation, suffering and death. When one begins to search for

meaning one begins the Zen quest. When one finds it, one becomes enlightened. This enlightenment or *satori* is the primary goal of Zen. Now, what is the way in which Zen achieves its goal?

3. The Ox-herding Pictures of Zen⁶

As we climb up the steps to enter into the meditation hall at “Bodhi-Zendo” in Perumalmalai, we see on the wall the ten pictures of the so-called “The Ox and His Herdsman”. The ten pictures are these which illustrate the way of Zen:

1. The Search for the Bull;
2. Discovering the Footprints;
3. Perceiving the Bull;
4. Catching the Bull;
5. Taming the Bull;
6. Riding the Bull home;
7. The Bull forgotten;
8. Both Bull and Self forgotten;
9. Return to the Source and Origin;
10. Entering the Market Place with Open Hands.

The Bull here represents the ultimate reality, the True Self. In the first, one searches for it. In the second, one discerns a suitable way, perhaps under a guru, to realise it. In the third, one experiences the true reality. In the fourth one gets hold of the bull which struggles to get away. In the fifth, the bull is tamed. In the sixth, not only is there an absence of struggle but also there is peace and joy. In the seventh, man is alone and lonely. This is the anthropocentric world. In the eighth, even the man has vanished and there is only nothingness and emptiness. Here one lets go of everything. In the ninth, man is

absent but there is a tree, a brook, birds and fish. When one dies completely, he wakes up to the reality of everything. Here the world is no more anthropocentric but reality as such. Here one is enlightened about his true self and this is what is shown by the presence of Nature in this picture. Dogen (1200-1253) says in his *Shobogenzo*, “To study the Way (*satori*) is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things. To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barriers between one’s self and others. At that time, there is no trace of enlightenment, though enlightenment itself continues [into one’s daily life] endlessly”.⁷ In the tenth, man is back in the world with wisdom and compassion. It is an *advaitic* reality.

The starting point in the first picture is seeking and looking for liberation. One can talk about liberation only when there is a situation of oppression, suffering and alienation. In the religious context we call this alienation “sin”. Gautama went out of his palace looking for liberation, after having experienced this *dukkha*, suffering. This looking for also implies a tremendous faith, hope and love. If the starting point is one of sin, alienation, then the final picture is one of reconciliation, relationship with oneself, with others and with the whole reality. This is what in Christian terminology is called “salvation”. The pictures in between are the liberative processes for the Zen students from the dualistic realm to the non-dualistic realm. The process in-between is the paschal mystery where one passes over from falsity to truth, from darkness to light and from death to life. The goal of Zen is

achieved with a well defined method which is called *Zazen*.

4. The Method of *Zazen*⁸

There is a simple and reasonable way to do it. Let me give this method from my own experience, so that it will be easy for anyone to practise. First of all, as to "where and when", find a tidy place without much noise. Any place could be suitably calm early in the morning. At Bodhi-Zendo we usually start at six in the morning except on some days when we start at five. We, as has been said in Zen circle, "sit an incense stick's burning" since it gives a comfortable odour of peaceful atmosphere and a help in some other places in measuring time. For a comfortable sitting it is important to put on loose-fitting clothes and avoid sitting when very tired, very sleepy, very hungry or just after a meal.

After finding an adequate place and time, you need two ordinary flat and thick cushions, one over the other, then seat yourself on the thick cushion. The cushion lying under the buttocks will shift the weight of the upper half of your body to the front and you can stabilise your whole body. Then swing the upper half of your body slowly, back and forth, right and left, for more stability.

There are two methods of cross-legged sitting; one is full-lotus and the other half-lotus. The former is the method in which you draw your right foot on to the left thigh, and then draw up your left foot on to the right thigh. I took this regular posture, but it sometimes gives pain to one who has a fat body or short legs. In such cases, half-lotus is permitted where you draw up

either foot up on the opposite thigh. Such a posture gives a balanced state of muscle while sitting and helps to sit a long time without fatigue.

After the foundation is thus set, you deal with your hands. You put one hand upon the other, palms up, and let the tips of both thumbs touch each other. The hands are then placed on the lap with both elbows kept slightly away from the body and with the shoulders kept free from tension. Then you straighten your spine and pull in your chin a little, when you feel that the end of your nose and your navel are lying on the same line perpendicular to the floor.

Then keep your eyelids half shut or cast down the line of your vision naturally so as to see the area about one metre before you. When we gaze at anything for a long time, we are apt to get dull in mind, therefore "half opened eyes" indicate that we should not be excessively watchful. By shutting the eyes one may fall into blunt stillness and may not be able to exercise the vivid and effective *Susokukan* (Breath-Counting Meditation). You keep your mouth closed and breathe naturally through your nostrils, preferably deep or abdominal breathing. So much about your posture in *Zazen* and now you are counting your own breaths.

4.1. How to practise *Susokukan*

Start counting your natural breaths in your mind. You put an inhalation together with the following exhalation and count "(wa...n)" etc. Though experientially it is found effective, those who are already happy with another mode of counting can continue it. If you want

to know why this method is called the Pleasant Path to Truth, you will have to train yourself until you can “count breaths without counting”. The whole course can be divided into three courses: the first course (counting one to hundred), the second course (counting one to ten) and the final course (virtually no counting). This division is based upon the degree of one’s fulfilment of three requisites. Were it not for the three requisites which make *Susokukan* an outstanding act of self-training, the whole thing seems to be so easy that you may say you can have it done straight away. The three requisites are:

1. Do not miscount your breaths.
2. Do not let anything else into you.
3. As soon as you fail in step two, restart from step one.

When put in writing, they are as simple as that. When you really want to perform in line with them, you will immediately find it strenuous. Let me illustrate this in the following way. While at meditation if a mosquito were to pass before your eyes keep on counting your breath. Were you to entertain a thought about the passing mosquito it would lead to a second, a third and a fourth thought until you are drifting far away from your focus and entering into a world of memory and imagination.

Among the three requisites, the second one is the hardest, while the third one should be observed with honesty and decisiveness. Now facing an undeniable fact that a beginner can hardly do the first course of *Susokukan* perfectly, allowances are made to such an extent that you can continue breath-counting in such cases as you wrongly count fifty

in the place of seventy or you bear a thought in mind, owing to pains in legs etc. Do it slowly and steadily in view of the fact that scarcely any one succeeded in doing it to perfection in six months or one year.

I cannot forget the advice Fr. Amasamy gave me in 1979 when I began to practise Zen under his guidance. I did exactly as he said. I am ever thankful to him because it is due to his guidance that I could continue my practice till today and go beyond the first stage. Hence, it is very important to do it “slowly and steadily”. Once a person is accustomed to it, then he will not be happy without meditation.

The second course wherein one counts only one to ten could be much simpler, if the same allowances as with those in the first course were made. But it is essential to know that in the second course the three requisites work in their fullness. As a matter of fact, under the guidance of Fr. Neudecker, my Zen teacher in Rome, I entered this stage. I could feel my strenuous effort there bearing fruits now.

Finally, as to the third course, it must be said that the course will not be mastered by simply practising *Susokukan*, even by doing it as long as twenty years or a generation. Time to be spent does not count here; only the depth of devotion counts. The words “slowly and steadily” are for those in the first and second courses, but for those in the third course the guiding words are: “Do it with zeal and urge”. There is a famous Zen saying, “To the brave, Truth comes in an eyes’ twinkling; for the timid, trillions of years pass

before awakening". Attentive *Zazen* will minimise the time to be spent in passing through the path.

In the third course, one is not cognisant of breath, not, therefore, counting breaths but just leaves all this with oblivion. Simultaneously, one is in *Susokukan* state and not in any way in a trance. I can say with confidence that I can enter into the arena of this initial accomplishment more often now if not for the whole hour of meditation. This can be called the growth in "Dharma Power" needed to enter into the training with a Zen-master as Zen student.

With this I believe that I can enter into the more complete koan course (i.e., Zen subject given by one's Zen master). The koan training will open and strengthen the "Dharma sight". I am yet to step into this field in full swing. The Zen system works with the aim of formation of a man who will live his life with such confidence that he can tell others, "I am here in the right way of Being", and in training there of a follower in a Zen School will turn each and every idea occurring to him right into Truth and will walk through the Path with the steady and vigorous steps of the real Being.

4.2. *Kinhin* or Meditative walking

Susokukan in *Zazen* posture is not the only way to grow Sammal (meditative) power. The same effect can be expected from meditative action. An old saying has it: "Zen exercise in action by far exceeds that in stillness". For the exceeding effect *kinhin* is devised. *Kinhin* has its origin in group walking in the Zen hall with recitation of Sutra.

What we practise at Fr. Amasamy's Bodhi Zendo is *Susokukan* or *Gyonen* (concentration of mind on one thought) while walking. *Kinhin* is done by standing erect, with both hands crossed before the breast, palms toward you, with the chin pulled in a little so that you cast your eye on the part of the floor two metres before you when doing a round quietly in the Zen hall, clockwise in the regular way. When you practise *Susokukan* in *kinhin*, you will so arrange your breath that the first left foot step forward will come with the inhalation, the next right foot step with the exhalation and so on. The general principle of *Susokukan* ("thir" when left foot moves forward and "teen" with the same movement of the right foot) applies here, except that in a group we must walk with an equal pace and space.

4.3. *Samu* and Mess

Samu (work training) may be farming, house cleaning, weeding and floor scrubbing etc. Before setting out to work the leader gives instruction, and ten minutes before winding up the work she gives a winding-up signal by knocking on a wood block. After putting back the instruments she asks for the report of the work and before concluding *Samu* she speaks a few words for betterment, if any. *Samu* is for further power to integrate myself. It has a deeper meaning than the usual enthusiasm in doing things. Here one's "whole self" is so directed within the "work itself" as the two selves are merged into one self. Supposing that garden cleaning is the work for me to do in *Samu*, I should not be like a paid gardener whose duty is just to clean the garden. If I attend well

to the work, I will clean the garden, the environment, together with my mind, the appreciative one. Weed and dust in a garden are as good as stain and blur in the mind. Unless I clean the two selves in one and the same moment, real cleanliness will not be there. There is a quatrain of an ancient Zen monk which is as follows:

Body bears Truth like the fruits lime-trees bear;
State of mind is like a mirror plain.
Incessantly cleaning with great care,
Let it not have one single stain.

Thus the cleaning should be done thoroughly regardless of the time to be spent on it. Once Rev. Tel of Tsoton was picking up pin needles one by one in the gateway of the temple. A monk attending upon him said, "Would you not refrain from all that? Later on, the gateway will be swept clean anyway". Rev. Tel stared at his face and said, 'A Zen monk should not say that. If you leave things behind by saying "always" and "laters," you will not be able to clean anything. Pick up a needle and you are cleaning that much'.

Mess is another activity to be explained. I must describe the way we must eat in Zendo's mess hall. We do not eat with the feeling that we have the right to eat after paying a mess charge. We are grateful even to the food itself and the gratefulness is expressed by pressing both palms before eating. We are grateful to the provisions not merely because of the energy given for the maintenance of our bodies, but also because of the Truth embodied in food. We act at signals in the mess hall, which is one of the Two Silence Halls of the

Zen School, the other being the *Zazen* hall.

4.4. The Effects of *Susokukan*

In this method of exercising *Zazen* one refines oneself. This is "not to avoid problems or run away from difficulties. We do not practise to escape. We practise to have enough strength to confront problems effectively. To do this, we must be calm, fresh and solid".⁹ That is why we need to practise the art of *Zazen*. This method of Self Observation has been employed in our country from time immemorial as the "Pleasant Path to Truth". It was handed down to China with Buddhism and to Japan later on. So the method of physical as well as mental training has a long tradition behind it. Obviously it is not Buddhism itself, but it worked so effectively that Buddhist leaders used it in their activities together with other ways of training in Buddhism. We would hear people say that, when angry, first count your breath three times in silence before you open your mouth or raise your fist to others. I see much reason in this saying, since, as one is aware, most furies can hardly survive the dose to diminish self-agitation. "Zen Master Dogen has pointed out that anxiety, when accepted, is the driving force to enlightenment in that it lays bare the human dilemma at the same time that it ignites our desire to break out of it".¹⁰ Be that as it may, in the system of *Susokukan*, breath counting is arranged in such a way that one will be able to free oneself from unredeemed conditionings and to keep one's mind and body in right state, through its practice. Whenever one practises it, one will be able to be in

sound state of calmness, to make little fuss over trivials, to make natural decision on sudden happenings, and, accordingly, to protect oneself in an emergency. In short, the proper practice of it in one's daily life will make one take most suitable actions in the stream of varying scenes. Finally, it is needless to affirm how this art can make us better "prayers", and its medical application can achieve even psychosomatic fitness.

5. The Four Great Vows

After finishing the above form of meditation and before coming out of the meditation hall, all Zen students recite daily the "Four Great Vows":

Though the many beings are numberless,
I vow to save them all;
Though delusive passion-and-thoughts
rise endlessly,
I vow to renounce them all;
Though the Dharma is vast and fathomless,
I vow to realize it fully;
Though the Way of the Awakened is
unparalleled,
I vow to walk along all the Way.¹¹

Here one should not understand the word "vow" in the way it is understood in Christianity. In the latter it is made before the personal God while in the former it is a universal demand that every person by the very fact of being human cannot but adhere to. The outcome and the quest of Zen is compassion as it is crystallized in the "Four Great Vows". According to this the compassion found in the first two lines – to save all and to renounce passions – is possible only when we master the Dharma

with determination to self-awakening as is portrayed in the next two lines. Therefore, this is the compassion reached through the experience of the emptiness of the formless self. Here the enlightened become compassionate, transcending all codes and commandments! Let me illustrate this with a story found in the Mumonkan (The Gateless Gate), a collection of the twelfth century.

Once the monks of the eastern hall [of the monastery] were quarrelling with those of the western hall about a cat. To end the quarrel, Master Nan-ch'uan held up the cat and said: "All you monks assembled here! If any one of you can say it [the right Zen word], I will spare this cat. If you cannot, I will kill it". The monks stood silent and did not answer. Nan-ch'uan killed the cat.¹²

Where do we find compassion here which is beyond all ethical laws? In Buddhism it is not permitted to kill any living being. Yet, the master kills a cat. Why? It is to make the monks realize their true selves. This is the most compassionate act! Let me explain. First of all, the monks did not utter the right Zen word because of their lack of self awakening. This lack leads to the killing of the cat. Now at the moment of its killing they realize that so long as they lack this self awakening they lead innumerable living beings to death. This killing of the cat shocks them and they realize the oneness of their self with the cat and thus awaken to the self. Thus it was for the goal of leading them to the self awakening that the master did this killing and therefore this is a compassionate act. Secondly, by killing a living

being he is bound to go to hell. Yet, he is ready even to go to hell provided this makes the monks awaken to their true selves. Thus his primary concern is not his own self but compassion. "Of course, those who are aware of the true self know that one must not commit any breaches of the law of this world. But they also have the option to neglect the ethical in favour of the religious".¹³ We find this synthesis of compassion with the suspension of the ethical in the act of Abraham in the Hebrew Bible (Gen.22). Soren Kierkegaard when speaking of this act of Abraham says that it created "a teleological suspension of the ethical".¹⁴ In the Hebrew Bible it is not permitted to kill one's own son even to the extent of concealing it from his wife and kin. Thus, while being faithful to his God, Abraham committed a great crime. Yet, what Kierkegaard means here is that in this case God's command invalidated all ethical concerns and rules for a time. Here I see the importance of Zen. Unless a person

is steeped in compassion, no religious suspension of the ethical can be justified. It can cause great harm to the wider society. The demolition of the masjid and the churches, the violence let loose against the Christian missionaries and the Dalits in our country are a few examples for this. However, "it is a matter of course that anyone breaking the law of this world, even for a religious goal, must yield to the judgement of this very law".¹⁵ The point of emphasis here is this that one who lives in the ethical dimension alone will not be able to understand what compassion is. As is given in the "Four Great Vows", when one masters the dharma one lives in a balanced way both in ethical as well as in religious dimensions. It is for this that one strives to become aware of the true, formless self. The compassion which is born out of it can become a great force in alleviating the sufferings of the world. Thus, this quest in Zen Buddhism can become relevant to all persons at all times.

Notes

1. This is found at the beginning of the introductory pamphlet given at Bodhi-Zendo.
2. Cf. Ueda, Shizuteru, "Thoughts in Zen", found in the collection of articles preserved at Bodhi-Zendo.
3. S. Ama, "The Way Of Zen", in *VJTR*, 54 (1990) 2, p.73.
4. *Ibid.*, p.82.
5. See Adolf Guggenbuhl-Craig, *Marriage, Dead or Alive*, Dallas, Texas: Spring Publication, 1977, who lists human desires into two categories: well-being and salvation. Ama Samy groups the Zen quest with the second in "The Way Of Zen" p. 77.
6. See Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972, pp. 135-147. Cf. Ama Samy, "The Way of Zen".
7. *Shobogenzo*, translated by Yuho Yokoi, Tokyo: Sankibo, 1986, vol. 1, p. 2.
8. Much of this method in this paper is taken from the talk, "A guide to Susokukan Breath-Counting Meditation in Zen," given by Eizan Tatsuta in Japan in 1974. This is found in the collection of articles preserved at Bodhi-Zendo. Since the same method is followed at Bodhi-Zendo in Perumalmalai, I present it here adapting it to my personal experience.

9. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Touching Peace*, Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992. P. 17.
10. P. Kapleau, *Zen Bow Newsletter*, NY: Rochester Zen Centre Publication, 1969, p. 3.
11. This is found at the end of the introductory pamphlet given at "Bodhi-Zendo". This is a slightly adapted translation. Cf. D. T. Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, London, Rider, 1950.
12. See Seiko, Hirata, ed., *Mumonkan*, in *Zen no goroku*, Tokyo: Chikuma, 1981, vol. 18, p. 62.
13. Eiko Kawamura-Hanaoka, "Compassion in Zen", found in the collection of 'Zen articles' preserved at Bodhi-Zendo at Perumalmalai, p. 11.
14. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 106.
15. Eiko Kawamura-Hanaoka, *Op.cit.*, "Compassion in Zen, p. 12.

The Tribal People of the Northeast A Liberating Quest for Identity, Equality and Respect

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S. K. Ghosh's book: *India's North-East Frontier: Fifty turbulent years*¹ sums up how the region appears to academics and government officials, and indeed, to the majority of people in mainland India. A "Boiling Cauldron of Insurgency and Terrorism"² is also another way in which the author describes the region. The same sentiments are expressed when a Northeasterner meets others of the mainland in his or her travels. Why are your people so violent? Why do they continue killing each other? Hence, in the minds of many the Northeast is a bundle of problems like insurgency, militancy, ethnic conflicts and unreasonable demands like secession, etc. According to B. K. Roy Burman, a noted anthropologist, "in their heydays the insurgents are not anti-social. In their subjective-objective concourse they are pilgrims in the turbulent journey towards, what they think to be just society, good society, liberated humanity."³ This article is an attempt to look at the turbulent Northeast from the perspective of a pilgrimage of peoples in search of a better future. Legitimate and genuine aspirations and hopes may lie below the turbulent surface.

Quest for Preservation of Identity: A Question of Survival

A look at the names of the various militant organizations of the region could

be the key to deciphering their aspirations and hopes. The leading militant organizations of the tribals of the Northeast are the following: NSCN (*National Socialist Council of Nagaland*), HNLC (*Hyniewtrep National Liberation Council*) of the Khasis and ANVC (*Achik National Volunteers Council*) of the Garos of Meghalaya, NLFT (*National Liberation Front of Tripura*), NDFB (*National Democratic Front of Bodoland*) of Assam and KNF (*Kuki National Front*) of Manipur⁴

Significantly, the common denominator in all these movements is the term 'national'. Hence, it seems to be clear that these tribals, whether big or small in number, consider themselves to be separate 'nationalities' with their own unique culture and customs. What is needed here is not to enter into a discussion about what a nation means or whether these tribes can claim themselves to be separate nationalities. What is important is to find the meaning of this claim? This, it seems to me, is a quest for recognition, acceptance and the preservation of identity. If xenophobic voices are heard among the tribals of the region, it is a corollary to the above quest. It is because of the "fear of being swamped by 'outsiders', of lifestyles and histories being destroyed..."⁵ The example of Tripura where the "indig-

enous people became a minority in their home-land and the real threat and possibility of this being repeated in other parts of the region is what makes the locals jittery and often resort to violent ways to drive away the outsiders.”⁶ There are xenophobic elements in many parts of the country, even where there is no danger of the outsiders becoming the majority. If that is the case, how much more will it be in parts of the Northeast where the locals can easily become a minority. The introduction of *Innerline Permit*⁷ to enter Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal are means of protecting the locals from being swamped by the outsiders. Hence, it is done for the preservation of the distinctive identity of the people and the protection of their land. Thus, B. G. Verghese is right when he states: “The various movements in the Northeast have all to do with identity.”⁸ It is for the preservation and in fact for the *survival* of the various ethnic groups. The survival instinct being the strongest and most basic, any perception of its being threatened can result in violent responses. This is not an attempt to explain away the violence but to attempt to have a better understanding of the violent nature of these movements. Often the authorities demand the shunning of violence as a pre-condition for talks with these movements or they are just banned as enemies of the society. However, more often than not, the authorities in the Government are responsible for making these movements take to violence and terrorism in the first place. These movements are “essentially manifestations of extreme frustration...”⁹ The origin of Naga secessionist movement can be traced to the experience of extreme frustration felt by

Phizo and his colleagues. The Naga leaders met Nehru three times between 1952 and 1953,¹⁰ but Nehru refused to listen to them and is reported to have said that “even if the heavens fell or India went to pieces, Nagaland will not become independent.”¹¹ In the last public meeting of the Nagas with Nehru on 30 March, 1953, at Kohima, the Nagas made their demand for Independence again. When he did not listen to them, many left half way through the meeting. Nehru got offended and never came back to Nagaland again.¹² Even if he was not willing to accede to the full demand of the Nagas, “a sincere show of willingness to dialogue with them might have changed the course of history in Nagaland. A man who had fought so long for independence from a foreign rule was expected to have a more sympathetic ear for the Naga cause.”¹³ But for him, the tribals seemed not worth listening to seriously. On the other hand Mahatma Gandhi was ready to listen to the Nagas. In fact the Nagas had high hopes of him. Phizo, the late Naga leader, is quoted to have said that Gandhiji “assured him that the Naga demand would be considered sympathetically and also advised the Nagas to shun the path of violence. This chapter, however, ended with the death of Gandhi.”¹⁴ Had he lived longer, probably there might not have been 50 years Naga insurgency. The violent rise of Mizo nationalism, spearheaded by the late Laldenga too was an expression of extreme frustration at the failure of the Government to help the people in their dire need during a devastating famine.¹⁵ In fact, Laldenga was completely opposed to violence initially. He even sacked the secretary of his organization

for advocating violence. Sanjoy Hazarika, the author of *Strangers of the Mist*, a connoisseur of the North-eastern realities and a Northeasterner himself sums up the reasons for the situation in the region when he says: “But Delhi’s ‘we know best’ attitude, the superciliousness of its bureaucracy and the overwhelming ignorance of its politicians from the cow-chapatti-dust belt to understand the compulsions and beliefs of proud but small nationalities, sees it blundering into one insurgency after another.”¹⁶

One thing the tribals of the North-east want to assert is: though historical events of the more recent past(British India) have brought them together with the rest of India, they are of a different race or nation with their own history, culture and customs. This is admitted by authors and observers of the North-eastern tribal scenario like B. G. Verghese when he says “differences there are in the history, ethnic make up and linguistic roots of the region. Being of Mongoloid stock (as others along the Himalayan rim) makes the Northeasterner ethnically distinctive, but not for that reason necessarily politically separate.”¹⁷ What the tribals resent is the conclusion of the statement. The logic is typical of ‘we know best policy’ mentioned above. The argument of the tribals is: if you recognize our distinctive identity, you must allow us to have a say in our own affairs, shape our own destiny. The tribals perceive that this can happen only when they are treated as a separate and distinct nation. If the authorities in New Delhi have the wisdom and the courage to proclaim and manifest in action that the tribals can be fully

themselves and totally Indian as well, the tribals will be more than ready to be integrated into India. To claim a separate identity as a nation does not necessarily mean to seek secession from India. In fact, of the organizations mentioned above, only the Nagas have consistently demanded secession from India. If others also demand secession, often it is the expression of extreme frustration as mentioned earlier as well as a yearning for autonomy and a greater say in their own affairs.

The tribals on the whole are pragmatic people. For whatever historical reasons, they have been brought within India. According B. G. Verghese, “the Northeastern tribal leadership almost to a man repudiated the idea of a markedly Christian tribal Crown colony covering the Northeast, Burma (Myanmar) and the Chittagong Hills Tracts with Chittagong as an outlet to the sea, that was advocated by an influential lobby of British bureaucrats. The variants proposed by Reginald Coupland, adviser to the Cabinet Mission, and the notion of a Northeast Frontier Province taking in Sikkim, Bhutan and the Northeast (leading to a possibly different future dispensation) were also rejected outright.”¹⁸ The tribals threw their lot with the emerging young India full of expectations. The past fifty years have been by and large disappointing to them. They have not been treated equally with the rest of India.

Quest for Equality

Closely connected with the quest for identity is the quest for being treated equally. In fact, this accrues from the quest for identity. If the tribals claim to

be a separate race/nation with their unique history, culture and customs, it is for the sake of claiming equal status and treatment like any other race in the country. How has the Northeast been treated by the rest?

First of all, to the majority of people in India what B. G. Verghese says is perfectly true. "Read Indian history as it is taught and you will scarcely know the Northeast exists," or it "remains in the periphery of the periphery," "it remains somewhere there."¹⁹ In a similar vein Vir Sanghvi points out: "the sad truth is that the Northeast is at the periphery of our consciousness."²⁰ He goes on to say, "compare the time and effort devoted to the Kashmir problem with the total lack of attention paid to the Northeastern insurgencies."²¹ Further more, "even well-meaning human rights organizations get more agitated about Kashmir than they do about Manipur though both are integral parts of India."²² The typical example of this unequal treatment is how the Kuki-Naga conflict has been allowed to drag on for the past eight or so years without any serious concern on the part of the Central Government towards solving it. In fact, "allegations are made that the ethnic strife between the Nagas and the Kuki tribe has been purposely fanned by the authorities. The clash, which has been going on since mid 1992, has caused both sides dearly. Many have been killed and thousands of Nagas and Kukis have lost their houses, villages and vocations. The Government has used the opportunity to induct more forces and sustain such Draconian laws as the *Armed Forces Special Powers and the Disturbed Areas Acts*. But there is

hardly any conciliation move."²³ This is what Kuldip Nayar said in 1995 but the situation has not changed for the better. The attitude seems to be: what does it matter if two insignificant groups of tribals in some remote corner of the country are at each other's throat? Or this is the classical example of 'divide and rule' policy. If this is the indifferent attitude of those who govern, they should not be agitated when these neglected people attempt to secede from a country whose authorities show no concern for them. Such a government is one "that bothers little about small communities but pays more attention to strategic considerations such as the natural resources of the area, their exploitation for the national good and the region's proximity to a friendly or inimical neighbour. Decisions for the little peoples of such regions – the historian Amalendu Guha describes as 'sub-nationalities' – are made by bureaucratic and political *mandarins* in national and state capitals, far removed from the realities of the customs and beliefs that govern the thoughts and lives of the indigenous peoples."²⁴ This is very true of how the Central Government looks at the Northeast in general and Manipur and Nagaland in particular. The BRTF (Border Road Task Force) has constructed a road starting from the Northeastern corner of Nagaland stretching all along the Myanmar border till the south west corner of Manipur bordering Myanmar. This, coupled with the prompt dispatch of the security forces for the slightest possible reason, seems to indicate that these border states and its peoples are only strategically important. One feels sad to

say that on many an occasion the security forces were passive spectators the ethnic conflicts that were raging. This was true in the Naga-Kuki conflict and also in the Kuki-Paite conflict in Churachandpur (Manipur). At times they were also accused of siding with one conflicting party or another. It is alleged that many militant outfits get their supply of ammunition from the security forces. Often it appears that the Central Government wants the insurgencies and ethnic conflicts in the Northeast to go on as a training field for its army. There may not be documented reports or findings but these are the feelings of many thinking people of the region in the light of the happenings during the past years in Manipur and Nagaland. A study prepared by the 1993 batch of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officials titled *Understanding Ethnic Unrest in Indian Periphery-1994*, which was released on 2 May of the same year, also asserts that political parties are responsible for fuelling ethnic unrest in the Northeast.²⁵ A people treated this way finds it difficult to have a sense of belonging to the country. Hence, it is no wonder they want to secede from India. If these Northeastern states are considered to be strategically important for the security and integrity of the country, the people of the region should be taken into confidence. They will be the best defenders of the country.

Quest for Respect and Dignity

A corollary to the quest for identity and equality is the quest for respect and dignity. Fundamental to the tribal ethos is the sense of self-respect and

dignity. However, today, even after fifty years of Independence, the tribals are like second class citizens of the country. In our caste-ridden society, the term tribal is used in a very pejorative sense of being inferior, primitive, etc. The system of reservation for tribals has become a tool for looking down on the tribals. As K. Kumar points out: "Weaker sections of Indian society were given a special place in the Constitution, but the apparatus of the state continues to treat them as faceless millions."²⁶ Are the tribals forever condemned to be tribals, that is, backward, primitive and the like? "How can the educated tribals, so constantly described in these unpleasant terms, be free from an acute inferiority complex with all its unhappy consequences? In any case, words like 'backward' and 'uplift' imply subjective judgments which are often based on a wrong sense of values. Who is backward - the creative artist at her tribal loom, the gentle mother with her child among the hills, or the inventor of the atom-bomb which may destroy her and all her world? Are these self-reliant, cooperative tribes the really backward as against the self-seeking, individualistic, crafty products of our industrial civilization?"²⁷ But these words are too good to be true for the tribals. In the real world of their contacts with the rest of India, they are still considered second class citizens. The quest of the tribals is, then, to be rid of these alienations.

The current debate on the suitability of Sonia Gandhi to be a prime ministerial candidate because of her Italian origin has significance for the tribals of Northeast India. The argument is that in a nation of over 950 million people,

can we not find a Prime Minister who is an Indian by birth and origin (racial). By implication, there seems to be a feeling that there is a citizenship within citizenship. It is a non-legal definition of who is an Indian. And as Vir Sanghvi rightly points out, "each time we try and move away from a legal definition of Indian nationality, we run into problems. Many in the *Sangh Parivar* argue that Muslims are not truly Indian; they have extra-national loyalties. Sections of the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* argued last year that Christians were certainly not Indian, they owed allegiance to the Vatican."²⁸ To carry the argument further, if a tribal from the Northeast were to aspire to become the prime minister or president of India, it would be said: Is there nobody else than this tribal, who any way looks like a Chinese? In fact, Sonia Gandhi may appear more Indian than the people of the Northeast. As Vir Sanghvi says: "If you were to show a villager in Bihar a photograph of Sonia Gandhi wearing a *sari* and one of Sangma wearing a suit, the chances are that he would pick Sonia as the Indian and Sangma as the Chinaman."²⁹ The feeling of estrangement and unequal treatment felt by the Northeasterners is summed up in what one of them has to say in his recent travel to mainland India when he said: "History and geography of the Northeast appears to have been blanked out like the computer's virus wiping out all info-data stored in the computer."³⁰ However, he goes on to say: "Yet when we make a noise, military, para military forces are brought at once to silence the cries for equal treatment and justice. We wonder, are we a part of India or only a colonial out-

post?"³¹ It is quite natural for a people so insignificant in the eyes of the rest of India to want to be independent from that country. It is nothing but a quest for dignity and self-respect.

The future is not very bright for the tribals of the Northeast, even on the eve of the new millennium and after the celebrations of 50 years of India's Independence. The recent statements and plans of the BJP and its allied organizations like the VHP and Sangh Parivar are ominous for the tribals of the Northeast. The unfounded and ridiculous accusations against the missionaries by the VHP leader Ashok Singhal for "instigating the common people, seeking to create a sovereign state," his assertion that by propagating Christianity "the missionaries' sole ambition and objective was to back the insurgents to make unrest in the country," and his announcement that "about 10,000 Hindu missionaries were being trained by the VHP to work in all parts of the country," do not augur well for the tribals of the region. The *BJP* and the *VHP* and others who advocate *Hindutva* claim that the tribals who are following their traditional religion were once Hindus. However inclusive a religion Hinduism might be, to say that the tribals were Hindus before they became Christians is only with the sinister aim of discrediting Christians and the missionaries. If they were Hindus, let the tribals be the ones to say so, not the *VHP* or anybody else. Some pseudo-scholars who think they are experts on the tribes of the Northeast too think that the tribals were originally Hindus. For instance, K. Singh, asserts that "the scheduled tribes are mainly followers of Hinduism, 87.05 per

cent of their population..."³² He also maintains that the non-Christian tribals are Hindus. For example, according to him 79.94 per cent of 'any Kuki Tribes' are followers of Hinduism and 20.06 percent are Christians, according to the records of 1971 census.³³ This is far from the truth. By 1971, the vast majority of the Kuki tribes had embraced Christianity. There were hardly any left who were following the traditional religion, not to speak of Hinduism. S. K. Tiwari is another author who claims that "all the Indian tribals followed the primitive form of Hinduism."³⁴ If the VHP and others think that the tribals were Hindus originally, why have they kept themselves away from the tribals so long? Hence, it is relevant to ask: "where was the VHP one hundred years ago when the region was a jungle? Why did it not provide educational and health care facilities for the people here? Why the sudden interest in the region?"³⁵ The fact of the matter is that the Hindus who came in contact with the tribals did not consider the tribals worthy of being converted to Hinduism.

The hill tribes of Manipur (till recently or still today in some places and by some) were called *hao*(a derogatory designation) and were not allowed to enter the houses of Manipur Hindus. It was considered to be a defilement. If a tribal wanted to meet a Manipuri Hindu, he could only shout from a distance in front of the court yard of the house. The tribals were thus treated like dirt by the Hindus. How can the VHP and similar organizations claim that the tribals were Hindus before and make attempts to reconvert them. Even if the tribals were Hindus and were converted to Chris-

tianity, for whatever reason, it was their own decision, in their best interest. Hence, they should be respected for having made that decision. The frequent accusation that the tribals were converted to Christianity by force or inducements is an insult to the tribals as if they are incapable making decisions on their own. The tribals have made many decisions on their own in the past and the decision to become Christians also was entirely their own. Others should respect that. No missionary ever forced a tribal to become a Christian. On the contrary many tribals embraced Christianity inspite of initial opposition from their families, clans and village and many suffered persecution for it. The tribals embraced Christianity because it gave them a sense of identity, equality and respect. The Christian missionaries gave them these feelings and made them feel that they are inferior to none given the chance to prove themselves. Thus, a whole range of new possibilities were open to the tribals with the introduction and encouragement of education. The reason why tribals did not embrace Hinduism was the fact that there never was a serious attempt to convert them to Hinduism. It might have been due to the fact, as mentioned earlier, that the tribals were not considered worth converting. It is providential that they did not because, if they had, they (tribals) would have been "placed at the bottom of a caste hierarchy..."³⁶

The people who practised coercion in Manipur were the Hindu missionaries. Vaishnavism became the official religion in Manipur with accession to the throne of Garib Niwaz (1709- 1748 A.D.) and "a serious attempt was made

to impose it upon the people as a whole and punishments were prescribed for those indulging in blatant non-Hindu activities.”³⁷ In 1717, the king with some of his followers received the sacred thread from Guru Govind Das and “this marked the beginning of the period of forcible Hinduization in which not only were the Hindu gods afforded royal support but those who offended against Hindu ritual were also punished.”³⁸ About “123 Meitei manuscripts, or *Puyas*” were also burnt which is commemorated in the practice of *Puya Mei-Thaba* (setting the manuscripts on fire) and an “unaccounted number of temples of the nine *Umangglais* (sylvan gods presiding over villages and lineages) were also destructed.”³⁹ The name Manipur itself was given by them and they were responsible for destroying *Sanamahiim*, the original/traditional religion of Manipur and imposing Vaishnavite Hinduism.⁴⁰

Conclusion

We have taken the militant movements or the insurgencies in the Northeast as the point of departure because they are the ones which make newspaper headlines and the region is known through them. Like many other organizations and movements, the militant organizations of the region too have lost quite a bit of their original ideology and goals. However, these movements in so far as they represent a cry for identity, acceptance, equality, etc., still have mass support because they express the deep yearning of peoples. While persevering in their demand for the fulfilment of their rights and legitimate aspirations, the tribals need to realize that they must first

and foremost inculcate these values among themselves. The claim for a distinct identity will be meaningless, if the tribals themselves lose their cultural roots.

The contribution of Christianity and Christian missionaries to the well-being of the tribals so far is beyond dispute. They have “opened the floodgates of education for the tribals of the Northeast. Consequently they are open to see the injustices done to them, the neglect and domination they have suffered for centuries.... The task of the Christian missions will remain incomplete if it remains at the level of opening the eyes of the tribals without actively promoting and enabling them towards the achievement of their longings and desires.”⁴¹ Education in culture should also be part and parcel of the educational system. The tribal youth must be taught how to sing their cultural songs; how to dance their cultural dances and preserve other cultural values. In olden days, there were certain in-built structures like celebrations of certain festivals, morungs (bachelor’s dormitory), whereby the youth could get instruction in their cultural heritage. Those structures have been replaced by the school, the parish, etc. Hence, these must take on the task of educating the youth in their culture. Even if a political identity and autonomy is obtained, without a cultural identity, it will be hollow and meaningless.

According to Kuldip Nayar, “while New Delhi’s earlier policy was purely oppression, imposition of laws violating human rights, now it is sheer money, which is spreading like water.”⁴² The solution lies in giving more autonomy to

the tribals, to have a say in the ordinary affairs of their life. "While complete political independence may realistically not be expedient, the Government in the

centre must give a special status, more autonomy to this region instead of making them beg for every thing and dictating every move of the region from Delhi."⁴³

Notes

1. S. K. Ghosh, *India's North-East: Fifty Turbulent Years*, Titagarh, Linkman Publication, 1997.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
3. B. K. Rpy Burman, "Insurgency: Its Dynamics and Vision for the Northeast India," in B. Pakem, *Insurgency in North-East India*, New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1997, p. 21.
4. Other organizations like ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) and PLA (People's Liberation Army) of the Meiteis of Manipur Valley are not considered because they are non-tribal and hence beyond the scope of this article.
5. S. Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1994, p.xviii.
6. P. Haokip, "The Challenges to the Church in Northeast India", *The Diocesan Priest*, 8 (1996) 2, p. 6.
7. The Innerline Permit is a regulation that requires even citizens of India, who are not of the region, to acquire permission from the state authority to enter that state.
8. B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development*, Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996, p. 285
9. *Ibid.*
10. K. Maitra, *The Nagas Rebel and Insurgency in the Northeast*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1998, p. 21.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
13. A. Mao, *The Nagas: A Missionary Challenge* (Doct.dissertation), Bangalore, St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, 1998, p.192.
14. K. Maitra, p. 19.
15. R. N. Prasad, *Government and Politics in Mizoram 1947-1986*, New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1987, pp. 161-242.
16. Hazarika, p,249.
17. Verghese, p. 285.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
20. V. Sanghvi, "Can the Twain Meet?", *Sunday*, (7-13) April, 1996, p. 8.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
22. *Ibid.*
23. K. Nayar, "Between the Lines: Defiance by the Nagas", *The Sentinel*, 8 March,1995, p. 4.
24. Hazarika, p. xviii.

25. Quoted by Hazarika, "Insurgency in Northeast India," in B. Pakem, ed., *Insurgency in the Northeast*, p. 120.
26. K. Kumar, "Civic Fatalism: Citizens' Loss of Sensitivity and Grace", *The Times of India*, 13 March, 1999, p.10.
27. Editorial, "Who is Backward", *Wisdom*, 25(1997)11, p. 42.
28. V. Sanghvi, "Indian, by Choice", *The Telegraph*, 23 May, 1999, p. 10.
29. *Ibid.*
30. P. B. M. Basaiawmoit, "A Pre-New Millennium Travelogue," *The Meghalaya Guardian*, 3 June (1999), p. 4.
31. *Ibid.*
32. K. S. Singh, *People of India: The Scheduled Tribes, National Series Volume III*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 12.
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Women and Power

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“Do not shun power nor despise it, but use it correctly.”

- St. Mechthildt of Magdeburg, 13th Century

All of us need personal power to survive and grow. For women, however, the need is more acute.

Why Women Need Power

“One of the things I decided on a personal level,” says Aruna Alexander, an Indian-born ordained minister of the United Church of Canada and chairperson of a number of international bodies, “was that I was not going to allow someone else to define me; or if they did define me, that I was not going to internalise that definition”.¹ For women living in a social and religious culture that deems them second class, it requires power to articulate and implement such a decision. “A woman’s place is in the home” successfully domesticates them, cuts off their options and removes them from the spheres of development and power. It denies them the freedom to be and to name and own choices. Powerless, they are unable to determine or influence the behaviour and decision-making² of the people who shape their lives.

It is not easy for women to get out of this downward spin. Pejorative labels, attacks on their character, psychologi-

cal intimidation, physical assault, banishment from the home and even death, this is the price women pay when they step out of their “place”. But unless women dare to take this risk they will be giving away their power, which will be used by others against them.³ Their silence will become, by default, an act of collusion with the oppressors to maintain the status quo.

“Submission, whether overt or covert, is also unworthy,” points out Reverend Elaine Farmer of the Anglican Church. “It is about giving away power, usually for the sake of peace and often in the face of fear. Submission is about meaningless suffering and it too deals in guilt and blame. It is about refusing to recognise one’s own worth and power. At best it is misguided service. At worst it is masochism. Either way it is a refusal to take responsibility for one’s own life. It has often been the only tool of women and it is unworthy of creatures made in the image of God.”⁴

Why Women Fear Power

Unfortunately, women are not comfortable with power. Conditioned for centuries to be subservient to male heads in every sphere of their lives, most

women have never enjoyed positions of power. As a result, they are unable to recognise the way power works and do not know how to use power. Worse, they are afraid of power. It opens up roles which threaten the traditional feminine identity which sees woman as a helper to man and subject to him. Alternatively, because women have been socialised for centuries to believe that they are "weak", "emotional", "irrational", they have come to believe that they are not fit or have no right to own power. Further, in our male-dominated world too often women have been victims of oppressive power. For such women power is synonymous with oppression, and they will have no part of it. For other women the struggle to own power may be so difficult that they may prefer to stay with the familiar, but questionable, gains of powerlessness – shelter, a provider, a mate, a job. Even feminists are wary of power, rejecting it as one of the mainstays of patriarchy. They prefer to hide behind words like authority and influence.⁵

Power and Authority

According to Ranjini Rebera, a Sri Lankan-born Australian feminist theologian and Consultant in communication and gender who has done considerable work on the nature of power and its impact on Asian women, authority is different from power. She defines authority as the right of a person "to be heard and taken seriously based on certain external circumstances, such as skill, knowledge, position or relationship."⁶

Authority is a socially given power.⁷ It is usually invested by the community and is not limited by a social class,

caste or race. In Asian cultures for instance, the authority of "grey hair" is usually respected. So also the authority of people with educational qualifications. The authority of a parent over a child, or a teacher over a student are other examples.

Included in this understanding is the authority that is ours when we tell our own stories. For women this is particularly important since it involves speaking a truth drawn from exclusively "woman" experiences based on their biology and child-rearing capacities that fall outside the reality of the generally accepted androcentric norm. Unfortunately, while women may speak their truth with authority too often they do not have the power to bring about the transformation they seek.

Power and Influence

Women's "use of dependency to claim power is sometimes referred to as influence".⁸ Many women create dependency within their families, place of work and even their church communities. They make themselves indispensable to the functioning of these entities, and use the power this gives them to influence and control the proceedings from behind the scenes – a gentle "suggestion" here, a little emotional blackmail there. The man makes the decisions without losing face and the woman is able to exercise power without disturbing the status quo. This, however, has negative connotations as it works outside the democratic process that is established for the good of all.⁹ Since women refuse to openly own power, they cannot be questioned or be held

accountable. Even at committee meetings where women are content to have their ideas appropriated by men in the mistaken belief that the end is more important than the means, it is a no-win situation. As Rebera argues,

We (women) abdicate our right to celebrate our identity by owning our contribution. Men abdicate their right to mutuality by permitting women to exercise subtle control over them and by refusing to affirm women's contribution as being valid and equal.¹⁰

Power

Thus, for most women, the power issue is a vicious cycle. Because they are uneasy about power they refuse to even talk about it; and because they shy away from power, they cannot seize it and so facilitate their own empowerment. If we are to break this cycle women must bring the power issue out into the open. "What they need to do," concluded women at a Seminar of Third World women, "is talk about what power is, what they want or need it for, and how they would use it in their private as well as their public lives."¹¹ Women also need to understand how power can be abused. "Knowing something about the ways in which power is used against us gives us a choice," says Aileen Maguire.¹² A choice to reject or accept patriarchal structures; a choice to use the system to bring about change or to create "new forms of collective consciousness"¹³; a choice to speak and challenge, or a choice to remain silent.

It must be said at the start that power is a dynamic of every human relationship. All of us use power, and all of us are objects of its use. Power in

itself is not oppressive. It is neutral. What colours it is the way we use it. As Rebera points out,

As human beings we are born with power. Through our socialisation, our ability to relate to the world around us and in our search for an identity, we mold and shape the exercise of power.¹⁴

Unfortunately, says Regina Coll C.S.J., Professor of Theology at Catholic University, U.S.A.,

because we have witnessed so many abuses of power we have begun to confuse power with its abuse. Power has become a dirty word. We must reinstate it among the virtues. Power is the ability to do something. It can be, ought to be, a force for good.¹⁵

For this to happen however, it is necessary to distinguish between the use and abuse of power.

Psychiatrist Rollo May in his book *Power and Innocence*¹⁶ identifies five types of power based on the way power operates:

Exploitative Power or Power over Another: It seeks to control another, to advance an agenda that has been drawn up exclusively by it. It assumes superior rights and authority and directs people but is not accountable to them and does not respond to them. There is no transparency in the exercise of this power.

Politically, we experience this power in the domination of the South by the developed world; religiously we are witnesses to the unquestionable power of religious heads who often claim divine status; socially, we are a party to the marginalisation of people because

of their “difference”— a majority community dominating the minorities, rich controlling the poor, white looking down on coloured peoples. Many hierarchies function this way, including those in which women claim their own rungs based on their social status, economic resources, educational qualifications, caste or race.

Competitive power or power against another: One upmanship. It builds up the user by putting the other down. It pits people against each other and assumes that in order to win some one must lose. It is an exclusive form of power that gives the right to rule to the “best”, those with the most talent and opportunities. It keeps people out rather than inviting them in. It seeks the benefit of the individual not the development of all.

This is a kind of power we are all familiar with. It is part of our school systems, our job markets, our corporate world, our race to do one better than the Jones.

Manipulative power or power that manages another: It works subtly and can at times be invisible. It withholds or distorts information so that the other cannot make a truly informed decision. It retains power in the hands of a privileged few by persuading others that they are receiving what is best for them and that their interests are being addressed, till they come to believe that their oppression no longer exists. It hides the truth, keeps people down (“in their place”) and destroys the will.

This is a kind of power that affects women particularly. “I only eat food

cooked by my wife” is one way of keeping her in the kitchen. “She asked for it!” conveniently returns power back to the rapist. “Self-giving and self-sacrifice are the marks of a woman” works towards making doormats of women. The power of the media to strengthen sexual stereotypes, interpreting scriptures to reinforce patriarchy, trivialising or co-opting feminism and women’s issues and using canon/civil law to further the agenda of those in power are other examples of this kind of power.

In Andhra Pradesh for instance, tens of thousands of poor and Dalit women fought a prolonged battle against the arrack trade.¹⁷ It all began when one woman was inspired by a lesson on alcoholism in a literacy programme. She started a campaign against liquor shops in her village which soon developed into a state wide agitation.¹⁸ Government profits of Rs. 8.9 billion were involved, while unofficial profits were to the tune of a staggering 20 billion. The issue was a socio-economic and political one, and the women had to take on politicians, government officials, the police, and the money power of the ruling class. They had to contend with armed gangs and police attacks, and resorted to dharnas, roadblocks, destruction of arrack depots and vans, gheraoing of officials and propaganda campaigns. Unfortunately, the politicians co-opted the movement and introduced statewide prohibition. This turned out to be an impossible policy to implement and the movement ultimately collapsed. The politicians, however, got what they wanted: the women’s votes, and the liquor trade flourished as before.¹⁹

Nutritive power or power for another: This is a positive form of power. It aims to develop others so as to make them competent enough to take charge of their own lives. It assumes that if all people are enabled to develop, all will benefit. In this understanding individual gifts are not for the exclusive use of the individual but for the good of all. A typical example is the use of nutritive power by parents for their children. Unfortunately, this is the “only power that has been willingly allowed to women,” says Reverend Farmer. “But this is not for their sake, but for the sake of others (usually men and children) for whom they (women) become footstools. It is given to them because of their assigned roles, not because of their gifts and abilities,”²⁰ and ends up making them victims of manipulative power.

Integrative Power or power with another: This power works for the development of both. It allows no hierarchies and works on the premise that there is mutual gain in the interaction. One person having power is not seen as taking away power from another. Everyone’s rights are acknowledged and respected, not treated as threats to be suppressed, defeated or ignored. It is inclusive, participative, respectful of the other and open to change. Farmer suggests that with integrative power we have arrived at the Christian way.²¹

In this form of power, women, indigenous peoples, the poor and other marginalised groups create a space for their voices to be heard. They become part of the decision-making process that controls their lives. More important, they are treated with respect, and there is

recognition of their wisdom and wealth of experience.

Power with another is not to be confused with power-sharing which has elements of arrogance and dominance. As Rebera points out, “Who is it that decides how the cake of power is to be cut and how it is to be shared? Or when it is to be cut or not cut? Inequalities can be incorporated into power-sharing.”²² She identifies instead yet another form of power:

Transforming Power or power-within. This power has the potential to transform both the individual and the community.²³ It is a “sacred power” that brings healing to victims of dominant power and “allows the touching of heart to heart”.²⁴

I do believe that such power often has a spiritual (not necessarily religious) root that transcends the dictates of the world. It translates itself into a solidarity that recognises our shared humanity: if one suffers we all suffer, if one hurts we all hurt. In effect it calls us to move beyond reaching out to reaching within. As Lilla Watson, an aboriginal Australian, remarks, “If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together.”

Two women of our times who have realised the potential of their transforming power are Mother Teresa and Medha Patkar. The former saw Christ in discarded humanity. This not only empowered her to care for the poor and the neglected, but also awakened the global consciousness, putting its power

at their service. Similarly Medha Patkar driven by a powerful love for the tribals and their land sparked off the Narmada Bachao Andolan that brought together not just the affected tribals, but caught the attention of environmentalists worldwide.

Given its understanding of interconnectedness, power-within also has the potential to transform our understanding and experience of God from the Absolute Power of domination to the Compassionate Power that intertwines us with each other and with the Divine.²⁵ By centring us within God, the Source of life-giving power, it provides an avenue for identifying power as the foundation for God's presence in the world.²⁶ It redeems power, making it a holy tool for the liberation of all.

Some feminists have identified two other types of power based on the sources of power:

Personal power as defined by Rita Nakashima Brock, Director of the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College, Harvard University, is the power that comes from "knowing yourself well enough to be in control of your own behaviour".²⁷ It has its basis in a core inner sense of well-being that needs to be continually nurtured and strengthened if it is not to be lost. According to her women give away their personal power when they allow their personal histories of pain and struggle to make them react with destructive anger. It makes them vulnerable and easy to manipulate. What women need to do instead is to choose their response, whether it is confrontation, dialogue or silence.

Structural or positional power comes from the positions we hold or roles we play in social and religious systems. James Poling, a counsellor and Professor of Pastoral Theology, maintains that while all of us have personal power,

society dictates how power is distributed. Institutions and ideologies determine who has the privilege to be dominant and who must defer...power is actually organised by the relational webs of which we are a part. Our ability to act in effective ways depends on our connections with other persons and with institutions and ideas that form the basis of our experience. Power is gauged by the complexity of the relationships that can be contained in an interaction.²⁸

While some of these power relationships are obvious, others are subtle. Sexism, racism, casteism and classism, for instance, while not overtly stated, often dictate the way people are hierarchically arranged.²⁹ "It does not matter how old I am," complains Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, an Asian Canadian, Professor in the Toronto School of Theology and ordained minister of the United Church of Canada, "the male minister comes in, and people turn to him – not me, even though we are both ordained."³⁰ As Brock points out,

"Understanding these structural arrangements is really important for knowing how to operate inside institutional structures and being wise to what's happening to you in them."³¹

Such an understanding is not easy, however, for personal and structural power usually do not function in watertight compartments. The CBCI

Commission for women, for instance, began with the exercise of a woman's personal power to speak at a CBCI meeting. It triggered off the Bishops' structural power which resulted in a structural change, the institution of a Women's Commission with the first woman secretary of a CBCI Commission. On the one hand this gave women positional power, but on the other it curbed their personal power. As women (personal power) how could they question the bishops (structural power) even as they fulfilled their obligations (positional power) to the Commission? It is a dilemma faced by all those who work for institutions. As Brock observes astutely,

...we have to think about whether we really want them (institutions) to die and whether we really want to be unemployed. So you have obligations to the institutions you work for, be it the church, the academy, the professoriate. Some positions come with power, while others come with having to call power into question. The work of discernment is always to pay attention to what is going on and to respond appropriately. You can't do any of that without an inner sense of personal power.³²

How women can acquire power

Disbelieving

Perhaps the first step towards empowerment for women, suggests Elizabeth Janeway, author of *Powers of the Weak*, is disbelief.³³ "Disbelieving the definitions imposed by a dominant culture, disbelieving the accuracy of dualistic thinking...disbelieving the God-givenness of the status quo"³⁴ and dis-

believing laws, religious and social, that are based on a male perspective. God did not ordain that women should be subordinate to man; a woman's place is not only in the home; reason is not the monopoly of men nor emotion that of women; men are not the norm.... With this disbelief comes discontent and a search for alternatives. It is a long and slow process, for women are hampered by a lack of confidence and feelings of powerlessness and insecurity, but once women get together the process is hastened.

Uniting

The power that comes from women's solidarity is in fact women's greatest strength. It stems from women's longing for relationship. Witness them at the marketplace, or the village well, or as they drop their children at school. They share information that helps them to better the lives of their families, they make plans together and network, they express joy and sorrow and create opportunities for sharing and caring, they exchange community news. Every time I leave my children at school, for instance, a few of us mothers stand around to chat for a while. We check out what is happening in school, share information about job opportunities, discuss the politics of our workplaces, extracurricular classes for our children and where to pick up a good haircut or clothes at bargain prices. We give each other travel tips, discuss recipes, health issues, the law and order situation and how to augment our incomes. Any difficulty, and there is always a mother with a useful suggestion or an offer of help. With variations, this kind of networking, which

is often discounted as “gossiping”, is common to all strata of women and is essential to women’s functioning in their multiple roles. It is a coming together that can be effectively used to build women’s power base.

In these women-centred networks, women can gain strength from sharing their experiences knowing that they will be heard and understood. With the support of their peers they are often enabled to say “No” to oppressive situations - No, I will not be treated as an object of sex. No, I will not shut up. No, I will not be treated as a doormat. No, I will not accept less wages.³⁵ Within a group women are also better able to explore alternatives to situations which they may otherwise feel helpless to change, like domestic violence or sexual harassment in the workplace.

Most important, as a group women can often achieve what they cannot do alone. Examples abound. Like the women of a village who decided to literally blow the whistle on wife beating. Each woman was given a whistle to call for help the moment her husband started beating her. On hearing the whistle the other women would gather around and shame the man. Domestic violence soon stopped in the village. At a wider level there are the women in Bankura, West Bengal, who started off with involvement in an income generation scheme and ended up with a place for themselves in decision making at the local and regional levels. Through an aided project these women acquired wasteland, refertilised the soil and grew a plantation of mulberry trees for cocoon breeding. They sold the cocoons to a

government marketing agency. In time the project grew to include 1,700 women. They make their own decisions, manage production activities, link with government services, mobilise new women members and deal with local panchayats. It has earned them inclusion by the West Bengal Forest Department on the village level forest protection committees as foresters.³⁶

According to Dr. Mary Grey, Professor of Contemporary Theology at the University of Southampton, England, Jesus is the embodiment of such relational power.³⁷ I perceive this both in Jesus’ mission and his method: to be in right relationship with God through our relationships with our neighbours. He neither creates a power structure nor connects with the existing one. Instead, his power comes from his union with God. It is a transforming power that he asks all, especially the outcasts of society, to plug into.

Sharing knowledge

Another tool for acquiring power is the sharing of knowledge, says Greer Anne.³⁸ Power has always followed knowledge, whether it is knowledge of the three ‘R’s, the self, the law, the land, the economy. While these areas are at least named, the importance of understanding power, especially for women, is not recognised and there is danger that the analysis of the current realities of power will remain words on paper. As Rebera points out, if the victims of abusive power are to benefit from these theories we have to establish “closer partnerships between those who know and those who need to know... (and)

bridge the gap between theorising and the daily experiences of powerlessness".³⁹ Women who understand power must first translate their knowledge into action in their own interactions with other women, especially those of another age group, class, caste or race, and then share their knowledge with the powerless. Thus, women in positions of authority can be taught to opt out of dominating styles of exercising power. Senior women can be encouraged to empower girls and younger women (sisters, daughters, daughters-in-law, colleagues) to have more choice. Women in the home can be made aware of non-verbal strategies of expressing power, like the refusal to give or take dowry, or the bringing up of sons and daughters without discrimination. As educator Christine Cargill observes, "...in a small way if I change my behaviour as part of the structure, then in time maybe the structure will change".⁴⁰

Becoming financially independent

For women, the "poorest of the poor", the issue of power is also linked to their poverty, whether in the workplace or at home. Concentrated in poorly paid clerical jobs or in the unorganised sector where they have no access to unions and labour laws, they are without the power to make wage decisions, define their working conditions and fight sexual harassment. Victims of the globalisation that benefits the powerful, they lack the power that will get their voices heard in the international forums that decide global policies. In the family, too, they do not have the bargaining power that money brings. Dependent and discounted because they do not vis-

ibly contribute to the economic welfare of the family, women are excluded from decision-making, prevented from defining their own lives and often subjected to violent abuse which they feel powerless to address. Even for women who have joined the paid workforce the struggle to claim the power that enables them to change social structures to accommodate their multiple responsibilities and to negotiate the sharing of household duties still remains.

Thus, for many women access to power begins with access to money. Financial stability not only makes women self-sufficient but also builds self-esteem. This allows women to make choices with regard to their persons, their jobs, their particular situation.

Victims of domestic violence who are financially independent, for example, are better able to consider alternatives. Similarly, a woman with a bank balance or earning capacity has a better position in the power equation in the home. Even in society and the church money raises the status of women and consequently their power.

Learning skills

For women who seek public power whether in the villages or at the national level, the task is more difficult. According to a report of a workshop on Women, Power and Empowerment, "...too many (women) want to get into positions of leadership but do not want to undertake the work that it takes to get there, or to take the responsibility that comes with it or to develop the skills that are needed".⁴¹

Thus, although many women may be good tacticians, they often fall short when it comes to strategy and planning, and are ill equipped to speak in public. Public power for women therefore starts with the empowerment of women. Basic education, so that women can at least read and write, is essential. Interpersonal skills like communication, group dynamics and conflict resolution must be developed. “Where to intervene, where to stay quiet, how to get the group involved if, for example, there’s a major decision to be made” are important in the use of power, says Aruna Alexander.⁴² Further, women must be exposed to programmes that help them in public speaking, systematic analysis and decision-making.

Due to their specific responsibilities women in power also need support structures like someone to look after their young while they are away from home. Timings that are suitable, transport facilities, financial independence and access to funds are also a necessity. Given women’s second class status, women in public power also need the freedom to move about in society, the encouragement of family members, particularly husbands, parents and in-laws, supportive laws and law-enforcing agencies and public recognition and acceptance of their capabilities.

How women can use power

The struggle to acquire power is so intense and time consuming for most women, that having “got there” they often feel the battle is won. In actual fact the biggest challenge has just be-

gun. “Why should women be politicians? To have as much power as men, or to change political decisions?” asks Dr. Janne Matlery, a political scientist.⁴³ These are crucial questions that can be applied to different fields, including the Church. Does the presence of women judges make a difference to the way laws are formulated and interpreted? Do women managers change the work ethic of their institutions? Will the understanding of priesthood be transformed if women are ordained?

Unfortunately, all too often women easily get co-opted into the very system that works against them. They accept as normal and unquestionable the existing power structures and patterns of functioning that exclude them and keep them in their “place”. In a bid to be one with their male colleagues they tend to downplay their femininity and support male agendas at the expense of other women. Afraid of losing their hard won power they are inclined to resist participative power systems and perceive the emergence of other women leaders as threats. Alternatively, in an unconscious attempt to prove their superiority, they block the rise of other women with the excuse that they are incompetent precisely because they are women.

Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher who were often acclaimed as the only “men” in their cabinets are two examples; oppressive mothers-in-law and authoritarian superiors are others. Ivana Dolejova, a Czechoslovakian woman priest, observes that in the mid-eighties though more than one-third of their clergy were women, “Many of the women priests were just as authoritar-

ian as men, equally distant, equally striving for power... the feminine gentleness and compassion, the openness to people and willingness to listen were rare".⁴⁴

The Power of Vulnerability/ Compassion

Perhaps the key to understanding how women can use power lies in realising that power must be had as a means, not an end. "Power-over" that seeks to control others must give way to "power-for", "power-with" and "power-within" that challenge the status quo, take responsibility for the powerless, protect rights and foster growth and transformation. As Rebera points out, "For women to 'reclaim the *ekklesia* as community' we have to permit the right to own and claim power for ourselves and to use it for wholeness, for empowerment and for building community".⁴⁵

Paradoxically, such power can be strengthened by women's weakness. By getting in touch with their own vulnerability women can empathise with others who are vulnerable – the young, the old, the disabled, the poor, the abused, the marginalised. Through remembering their own experiences of exclusion women can develop a perspective that values inclusive, participatory styles of management. Their pain can lead them to listen intently to the stories of others in pain and their capacity for relationships can provide a basis for putting persons before the status of institutions.

The Power of Marginalisation

Ironically, women's marginalisation in society and the Church also gives

them an advantage. According to Amanda Clarke, an economic statistician and member of an eclectic group called *Making Women Visible*, it "puts us in a place to challenge the mainstream and conservative ... Our difference gives us power".⁴⁶ Women speak with a different voice because they listen and speak from the margins. "To be in the margin", writes Bell Hooke "is to be part of the whole but outside the main body".⁴⁷ It makes for a world-view that is out of step with the rules, terms and practices of the centre. Consequently, when women speak they raise unsettling questions and disturb the status quo, for the transformation they seek of the margins cannot take place without the transformation of the whole design.⁴⁸

It is a power women have used effectively as seen in the Bodhgaya movement (1978) in Gaya district, Bihar. It started as a class struggle by landless labourers (mostly Dalits) and share croppers for control over their production base which was in the hands of a Hindu Math. As the movement progressed, women slowly came into their own. Led by women activists with a feminist perspective, they organised public meetings on the gender inequities within the hill society. They questioned hierarchical relations within marriage and domestic violence. They insisted that men share in housework and childcare and fought for an increase in the number of women in the decision making process within the movement. Not only did they succeed in their demands but they also managed to get independent land rights at the time of redistribution.⁴⁹ With their insights from the

margins, they had succeeded in changing the centre.

The Power of Mutuality/Inclusivity

Another ‘womanly’ attribute that can be used as an effective stepping stone for integrative power is women’s concern for the human person. Thus, Aruna Alexander, for instance, admits: “My own leadership style in terms of power is not so much one of command and control. Mine is much more interactive and involves having a sense, particularly in my congregation, of what kind of different personalities am I dealing with: what are the different personalities, what are the different gifts, what are the different talents?”⁵⁰ Such an inclusive style allows people to own choices, set achievable goals and take responsibilities.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, women’s empowerment involves both a struggle *for* power and a struggle *with* power. Once freed from their shackles, their very positions of disadvantage equip them to challenge the relationships and structures that imprison their power. In a special way they are called to re-define the parameters of power, re-negotiate the terms on which women work with men and re-design the systems within which they work. It is not an easy task, but it is a choice truer to their selves as women and closer to the gospel ideal. It is part of sharing in what Dr. Mary Grey calls “God’s power of com-passion” – a passion for justice and wisdom and truth.⁵¹

Notes

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3. *Ibid.* p. 18
4. *Ibid.*
5. Ranjini Rebera, “Power and Equality,” *In God’s Image*, 16 (1997) 4, p. 44.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, “Power in Two Cultures,” *In God’s Image*, 16 (1997) 4, p.42.
8. Ranjini Rebera, *Op. Cit.*, p. 45.
9. *Ibid.* p. 49.
10. *Ibid.* p. 45.
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The Quest of Women Religious

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The Second Vatican Council speaks of religious as "men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty" (*Perfectae Caritatis* 1). Religious life, then, is meant to foster greater freedom in their life and mission. However, it has been observed by some that the life and mission of women religious is being hampered by an out-dated spirituality, unnecessary rules and inappropriate structures. It is against this background that I chose to conduct a small study. My plan was to investigate the quest and experiences of women religious in the areas of freedom, community living, spirituality etc. The survey was conducted during the first four months of 1999.*

I. Profile of the Sample

The sample consists of all the Sisters, either working or studying, in the diocese of Pune. Of the total of 309 questionnaires sent out, 227 responses were returned, which makes the response rate 73.5%. The respondents belong to more than 50 congregations of women religious. Of the total respondents, 46.6% were from Kerala, 25.1% from Maharashtra, 13.2% from Karnataka, 3.7% Goa, 2.7% from Tamil Nadu, 2.3% from Gujarat, and the rest, 6.5%, were from other states.

The respondents included both Junior (temporarily professed) and Senior

(finally professed) Sisters. From the point of view of age, nearly 32.6% were 30 or below 30 years old, 36.6% were between 31-49, and 30.8% were 50 or above. The educational level of the respondents was high. In fact, the majority of them (62.2%) were graduates or post-graduates. Of the total respondents, 53.2% had some sort of formal training in theology.

Almost all of them (97.6%) were engaged in some apostolic activity. One-third of the respondents were teachers. Nearly 17% of the respondents were students. Others were engaged in social work (9%), formation (8.1%), administration (6.2%) and nursing (5.2%) etc.

II. Findings

In the questionnaire, that was used for this study, different areas or dimensions of religious life were grouped together under four headings: 1) Priorities in Religious Life, 2) Perception of Self: Experiences and Attitudes, 3) Perception of Other Sisters, and 4) Perception of the Superiors. We shall now look at the findings of each section separately.

1. Priorities in Religious Life

To assess the priorities of women religious, the respondents were asked

* I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my grateful thanks to all those who helped me in this study.

to rate the following possible priorities on a four-point scale of importance, ranging from “very important” to “not at all important”.

Table: 1

Very important = 4; Important = 3; Not so important = 2; Not at all important = 1

Priorities in Religious Life	4	3	2	1
1. Attending community spiritual exercises regularly.	40.7	51.8	6.6	0.9
2. Being informed of events in the country/world.	58.0	36.2	4.9	0.9
3. Imitating the life of the Founder or the Foundress.	31.1	47.6	18.7	2.7
4. Being innovative in interpreting the Charism of the Congregation.	57.1	36.5	4.1	2.3
5. Speaking one's mind frankly even if it leads to conflict in the community.	48.0	37.2	12.1	2.7
6. Being involved in the lives of the people in the neighbourhood.	46.6	46.2	6.3	0.9
7. Being first and foremost a woman of prayer.	82.3	14.6	2.7	0.4
8. Being faithful to the teaching of the Church.	46.0	40.7	13.3	0.0

A quick glance at Table 1 reveals that the respondents have given the top priority to being a woman of prayer. In fact, an overwhelming majority, 82.3% of the respondents, consider ‘being first and foremost a woman of prayer’ very important for their religious life. It is not very clear what they mean by being a woman of prayer. However, only 40.7% of the respondents hold the view that ‘attending community spiritual exercises regularly’ is very important. It would seem that for some Sisters being a woman of prayer means more than

regular participation in common spiritual exercises.

It is noteworthy that 57.1% think that ‘being innovative in interpreting the charism’ is very important. It is also significant that only less than 7% feel that this is not so important. In contrast, only 31.1% believe that ‘imitating the life of the Founder or the Foundress’ is very important. In fact, for more than 21% this is not so important. Almost 50% of the respondents consider ‘being involved in the lives of the people in the neighbourhood’ very important. It is also

remarkable that only about 7% think that this is not so important. Closely connected with this is the fact that 58% of the respondents regard it as very important to be 'informed of events in the country/world'. Here again only a small minority of less than 6% look upon this as not so important.

Traditionally, most religious congregations laid stress on *imitating* their Founder/Foundress. They also inculcated in the Sisters the value of *serving people through institutional apostolate*. In this context, it is interesting to note that the majority of the respondents give high priority to *innovativeness in interpreting* the charism and almost half of the respondents regard it as very important to be *involved in the lives of the people*.

It is rather surprising that for 48% of the respondents it is very important to 'speak one's mind frankly even if it

leads to conflict in the community'. Another 37% regard it as important. And only less than 15% think it is not so important. This is remarkable. One would have thought that many religious would subscribe to the principle of "peace at any price". But here Sisters are prepared to take the risk of causing a conflict in the community by being forthright in expressing their opinions.

2. Perception of Self: Experiences and Attitudes

The Table below reveals the self perception of women religious in terms of their experiences, attitudes and opinions regarding the various areas of their life: inner freedom, participation in the decision-making process, preferences in apostolate, community living and the demands of the apostolate, financial independence and their experience of working for the Church.

Table: 2

Perception of Self: Experiences and Attitudes	True	False	Not Sure
1. I am happy to accept whatever assignment is given to me irrespective of my likes and dislikes.	51.1	33.9	14.9
2. I prefer to work in a non-formal set-up.	53.2	34.5	12.3
3. I feel guilty when I cannot be regular for the community prayers.	48.9	43.6	7.6
4. I feel free to be myself in the community.	69.9	21.7	8.4
5. I experience a conflict between the demands of my apostolate and my community life.	41.4	45.9	12.7
6. I get enough money for my legitimate needs.	84.9	10.6	4.6
7. I feel that Church institutions which employ women religious often do not remunerate them justly.	60.5	10.9	28.6
8. I am not for the ordination of women in the Church.	35.4	54.0	10.6

Table 2 shows that 69.9% of the respondents feel free to be themselves in the community. However, 48.9% say that they feel guilty when they cannot be regular for the community prayers. Then the question arises: what does it mean to feel free to be oneself in the community? All the same, it is significant that 43.6% do not feel guilty, especially as there is a lot of insistence in many religious congregations on regular attendance at community prayers.

More than half of the respondents prefer to work in a non-formal set-up. This probably ties up with what they have said about the importance of being involved in the lives of the people. Could it also be connected with their emphasis on being innovative in interpreting the charism? One should not, however, overlook the fact that one-third of the respondents (34.5%) do not prefer to work in a non-formal set-up.

It is a curious phenomenon that 51.1% of the respondents say 'I am ready to accept whatever assignment is given to them irrespective of their likes and dislikes'. It is not clear as to what it points to. Does it reveal their understanding of the vow of obedience as unquestioning acceptance of the decisions of the superior? In this day and age, when there is so much talk about dialogue, personal responsibility etc., do they not expect that the superiors would dialogue with them before giving them an assignment.

45.9% of the respondents do not experience a conflict between the demands of their apostolate and their community life. This is certainly a positive development since a large number of Sisters are able to find a balance between their apostolic involvement and community life. But then 41.4% do experience a conflict. Is it perhaps due to a lack of clarity with regard to the relative importance of ministry and community in the life of a religious?

60.5% of the respondents state that Church institutions which employ women religious often do not remunerate them justly. We do not know how widespread this unjust practice is. All the same, the leaders of the Church have to look into this and take steps to ensure that women religious receive a just remuneration for their work.

3. Perceptions of Other Sisters

How do our respondents perceive other Sisters with whom they have lived or live in terms of their freedom and autonomy, responsibility, understanding of spirituality, training and competency? In an attempt to find out their perceptions the respondents were given the following impressions about women religious; and they were asked to indicate whether these apply to Most, Many, Some, or A Few/None of the Sisters with whom they have lived or live.

Table: 3

Sisters with whom I lived or live:	Most	Many	Some	A few None
1. Are too dependent on superiors.	16.4	34.5	39.8	9.3
2. Show signs of true inner freedom.	8.0	23.0	53.1	15.9
3. Take responsibility for their life.	18.3	35.8	39.0	6.9
4. Tend to equate the quality of spiritual life with the practice of external spiritual exercises.	15.3	43.7	32.0	9.0
5. Tend to interpret rules rigidly.	11.8	28.2	48.2	11.8
6. Do not have sufficient intellectual training.	14.3	37.5	31.3	17.0
7. Prefer to go along with others rather than assert their own convictions.	19.6	44.2	25.9	10.3
8. Are too depended on priests.	8.1	28.8	36.0	27.0
9. Are competent in what they do.	11.2	35.0	44.4	9.4

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (60%) say that only some or a few of the Sisters tend to interpret rules rigidly. However, the majority (69%) of the respondents are of the opinion that only some or a few Sisters with whom they have lived or live show signs of true inner freedom. And 63.8% state that the Sisters prefer to go along with others rather than assert their own convictions in the community. In addition, more than half of the respondents (50.9%) think that many of the Sisters are too dependent on superiors. 45.9% state that only some or a few of the Sisters take responsibility for their life. If this is true, then a large number of Sisters do not show that they have become adult women who experience genuine freedom, who have the courage to hold their own convictions and who take respon-

sibility for their life. Maybe, religious life has not been a liberating and growth-promoting experience for them.

59% of the respondents are of the opinion that many Sisters tend to equate the quality of spiritual life with the practice of external spiritual exercises. Is this perhaps the result of the prevalence of an out-dated spirituality among women religious? More than half of the respondents hold that Sisters do not have sufficient intellectual training. 53.8% are of the opinion that only some of the Sisters are competent in what they do. This may point to a lack of adequate formation, both religious and professional.

4. Perceptions of the Superiors

The superiors play an important role in the animation of the communities of women religious. Let us now examine

the way our respondents perceive their superiors. The respondents were provided with some statements about the superiors and were asked to indicate

whether they apply to Most, Many, Some, A few/None of the superiors they had/have.

Table: 4

The superiors I have known were/are	Most	many	Some	A few None
1. Impartial in their exercise of authority.	12.9	26.3	46.9	13.8
2. Supportive of the new initiatives taken by the members of the community.	16.8	42.0	34.5	6.6
3. Overly-strict with regard to the rules in the community.	12.4	27.9	49.1	10.6
4. Understanding even when Sisters made/make mistakes.	18.6	37.2	35.0	9.3
5. Promoting participation in the decision making process.	20.0	36.9	35.6	7.6
6. Broad-minded in their approach.	15.1	32.9	41.8	10.2

As Table 4 shows, the perceptions of the Sisters are both positive and negative. They believe that the majority of superiors are not overly strict with regard to the rules in the community. They also find that superiors are by and large supportive of the new initiatives taken by the members of the community. Almost 57% of the respondents think that many superiors promote participation of the members of the community in the decision-making process. More than half of the respondents feel that many of the superiors are ‘understanding even when Sisters make mistakes.’ However, more than 60% of the respondents are of the opinion that only some or a few of the superiors are “impartial.” And almost half of the respondents do not think that

many superiors are broad-minded in their approach. In this connection, it is probably significant that 43.2% of the respondents do not feel that many superiors promote participation in the decision making process.

The picture of the superior that emerges from these findings is not very flattering. In fact, it should be a matter of great concern for all women religious that the majority of the superiors do not appear to be “impartial”, to be women who exercise authority with justice and fairness. Many superiors are also seen to be lacking in understanding and broadmindedness. All this raises the question of the selection, appointment and training of the superiors.

III. Final Comments

There is something quite puzzling in these findings. While 69.9% of the respondents say that they feel free to be themselves in the community, 69% of the respondents are of the opinion that only some Sisters show signs of inner freedom. How do you explain this? Could it be that the majority of the respondents take the stance: "I am OK, You are not OK"? Or is it that the respondents would like to claim that they are really free while in actual fact the majority of the Sisters do not experience inner freedom? It may well be that religious life as it is understood and lived today is not a liberating experience for many women religious.

It is difficult to know how the respondents understand spirituality. It seems that the majority of the Sisters tend to equate spirituality with fidelity to common exercises of piety. One wonders if this is the way many of them would understand the expression, 'being a woman of prayer'. Is this perhaps a pointer to the absence among women

religious of a search for a new, life-giving spirituality which would impel them to a radical commitment to the service of our people.

It may well be that part of the problem in religious life today is the lack of careful selection and adequate formation of young people. Religious life cannot nurture adult women who are innerly free and responsible if those who are admitted to religious life are really unfit. Hence the need for a strict selection of the candidates. It is also necessary to design and implement an integrated and innovative programme of formation.

This is too small a study to tell us anything definitive about the quality of life among women religious in the whole of India. All the same, it is perhaps significant that in the opinion of the respondents of this survey religious life has not been life-giving and growth-promoting for many Sisters. A national survey of the life and ministry of women religious might give new insights into the situation of women religious in India today.

Human Freedom: The Finite Quest for the Infinite¹

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It is obvious that human nature comes "naturally" to us. In this paper I intend to show that freedom too comes "naturally" to us. The dream of a free world, of a liberated life, has always fascinated us. But this human quest has been both made possible and difficult by our own nature. So the tension between freedom and nature, similar to that between "nature and nurture," has remained a provocative and fascinating theme from the beginning of human inquiry.

In this paper a modest attempt is made to find answers to some of the fundamental questions regarding human freedom and its relation to human nature. We ask: What is there in human nature that makes freedom possible? How do we understand human freedom which is vulnerable, fragile and, at the same time, precious and unique? How do we cope with the fragile nature of freedom, where the infinite quest has been bound by the finite structure of our being? Or more philosophically: What are the transcendental conditions for the possibility of human freedom? So, in this paper, we deal basically with the anthropological presuppositions and implications of freedom.

In the first part, I situate freedom in our human nature, i.e., in our human will. Here freedom is seen in its dynamic and tensional relation to human nature,

i.e., the voluntary in the involuntary. Then in the second part, I go on to examine the types of consent or responses that can be given to our bound nature. The freedom that follows from these types of consent is also discussed. The issue to be tackled here is: How can we humans respond to the "givenness" (or facticity) in our human nature and how can freedom be actualised in this "givenness." Finally, in the third section, human freedom is related to fallibility. Here the vulnerability and fragility of human freedom comes to the fore. The frail, fallible and precious freedom that we humans possess is perceived in terms of a mediation. So in the disproportion or "in-betweeness" that exists in the human being freedom is actualised. This leads me to locate human freedom dynamically in our bound nature (i.e., in the human will) and to appreciate the unending quest that freedom is.

In this paper I draw abundantly on Paul Ricœur's philosophy of the human will. Basing myself on some key insights of Ricœur, I develop my own understanding of freedom. So the following reflections may not be seen as a summary of Ricœur's understanding of freedom, but rather as my understanding of freedom derived from and developed on the basis of Ricœurian phenomenology.²

1. Will to Freedom³

For a phenomenological perspective on human freedom I look into Ricœur's profound notion of human nature and human will. In *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary (Le volontaire et l'involontaire)* Ricœur deals with an eidetic of the will – a description of its basic structure. Influenced by Spinoza, Ricœur takes up the problem of necessity (nature) in connection with that of the will.

Ricœur examines the structure of the will at three levels: *Decision, Human Action and Consent to Necessity*. This is derived from his own introduction of a three-fold schema. A simple sentence "I will" can have different meanings depending on the context and intention. It can mean, for instance,

- "I decide" (implying a motive, and a choice to execute the motive).
- "I move my body" (implying a human action where the voluntary and involuntary nature of my body is involved).
- "I consent" (implying an agreement of the subject to an outside force)

By means of these diverse meanings Ricœur tries to explore the mutuality and interdependency of the polar concepts of willing and non-willing, freedom and necessity. He further tries to work out these paradoxes as clearly as possible preserving at the same time the bond between the voluntary and the non-voluntary in human nature. Wherever Ricœur begins his reflections, it becomes evident to him that in each of these three levels, *objective* and *subjective* ways of looking at the will is possible, both of

which refer to the same region. In the presence of this tension, when one asks about the unity of the human being, one is led to the inevitable conclusion that the human person is basically a mystery.

This process leads Ricœur to the following conclusions about freedom found in the human will:

- At the level of *decision*, the body appears to be the source of motive. The freedom experienced by us is therefore a *motivated freedom (motivierte Freiheit)*.
- At the level of *action*, the body appears to be the object or initiator of action, a positive factor. Thus freedom is an *indebted freedom (verdankte Freiheit)*, and is therefore further determined by the body. Hence the freedom here has a capacity for action.
- At the level of the *consent to necessity*, the body appears as an insurmountable limitation, a negative factor. Thus freedom is a *bound freedom (gebundene Freiheit)*, further limited by the body in particular and human nature in general.

To each of these levels, there corresponds a *dream of innocence*. By "dream of innocence" I mean the orientation to the unlimited freedom which humans long for. Though in itself unattainable, these dreams point to the unlimited aspect of human willing and longing.⁴ To motivated freedom corresponds the dream of a *transparent* freedom, in which the motive is clear: to indebted freedom, the dream of a *graceful* freedom, which leads a submissive body to an easy, flowing action; to bound freedom, the dream of a

boundless freedom, which is *limitlessly* tied up with the nature. The various aspects

of freedom and their corresponding polarities are illustrated below:

Structure of Will	Freedom Experienced	Dream of Innocence
Decision	Motivated Freedom	Transparent Freedom
Action	Indebted Freedom	Graceful Freedom
Consent to Necessity	Bound Freedom	Boundless Freedom

A lower limit corresponding to each of these three levels constitutes an existential limitation to the aim, capacity and nature of the will. These limits require the will to accept unwilled positions. This can happen in different ways, each of which corresponds to a mythological response:⁵

- a. Human being can rebel against his/her own basic limited constitution or deny his own finiteness. This corresponds to *Promethean Denial*.⁶
- b. He or she can identify himself/herself with his or her own limited constitution and attempt to accept the inevitable, which would be equated with *Orphic Identification*.⁷
- c. He or she can distance himself/herself from his or her own constitution and be an indifferent and passive observer and then he or she would be modelled on the *Stoic Duality*.
- d. Finally, he or she can, with reservation, consent to an Eschatology, to a future in hope, which would correspond to an *Eschatological Hope*.

So this phenomenological analysis of the *eidetic* of the human will, leads to a paradox of tension between willing and non-willing, to a *freedom* which is

bound through its very nature. This double character of the human will lets itself be shown at every level of our inquiry. This paradox, which crystallises itself in this way, cannot be totally eliminated.⁸ A freedom in which *creativity* and *necessity* are fully reconciled in itself would not any more be a *creative* freedom. Such a freedom, though imaginable, cannot in fact be realized. It is actually a *limit-idea*.⁹

2 Types of Freedom

The reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary is maintained throughout our description of the structure of the will. In relation to human freedom the will could be studied in its two basic aspects, which are ultimately seen as existence as *received* (i.e. a gift) and existence as *a task* (i.e. a challenge). This implies that the involuntary is *for* the voluntary just as the voluntary is *by reason of* the involuntary.¹⁰ This tension between the voluntary and the involuntary reaches its limit in relation to that which is absolutely involuntary. It is in this context that Ricœur develops and points to the “secret conciliation”,¹¹ attainable in a paradoxical philosophy. Thus, the study of the will could also be undertaken with reference to the

tension between *Decision*, *Consent* and *Necessity*.¹² Ricœur undertakes such a study using the following categories:

a. Refusal of Necessity: Consent is, after all, not the only possible movement of the will confronting necessity. Freedom can here appear as a negation or as a refusal to accept the necessity. Moreover, freedom has a privileged position, since it is through freedom that necessity is recognised.

So the desire, which is expressed in the refusal of necessity, is the desire for aseity. Such a desire is precisely closed to an unlimited freedom and bound to the necessity of a finite situation. Ultimately, the final act of refusal (like rebellion against the nature of finite being) might well be self-annihilation.

b. From Refusal to Consent:

After having arrived at the juncture of freedom and necessity, Ricœur maintains that it is at this juncture that the "secret conciliation" could occur. This "secret conciliation" and hidden relationship are to be uncovered by an understanding of the movement of consent.¹³ Thus, Ricœur hopes to transcend necessity, without negating it, through consent.

Again, it is precisely at this juncture of freedom and necessity that the limit of *descriptions* is arrived at.¹⁴ Here pure phenomenology may be transcended. In any case, it is clear that the unity of the human being with him/herself and with his world cannot be integrally included within the limits of a description of the *cogito*. For this to be the case phenomenology must go be-

yond itself into metaphysics. Thus, the world and the others become the horizon of the *cogito*. So one realises that philosophical anthropology without ontology is empty. According to Ricœur, this insight is also a central Cartesian insight, that the *cogito* has a necessary relationship to ontology and transcendence. But we must also be careful not to reify subjectivity¹⁵ into an ontology and refuse to return to the "reign of the object" which reduces the fullness of the subjective experience.

It is here that the movement from the 'refusal of nature' to 'consent to nature' takes on additional significance. At the same time, the way in which consent is made is extremely important. Ricœur indicates that there are three major alternatives in the movement from refusal to consent: The imperfect consent, the hyperbolic consent and the paradoxical consent.

In the *Imperfect Consent*, as in the case of the Stoics, the relationship of the subject to the whole (transcendence) is grasped as a relation of part to whole. This type of consent or affirmation is imperfect because this is actually a *detachment* rather than a reconciliation of freedom and necessity. In Stoicism, therefore, the body is reduced to the "already dead" and feeling to "opinion". Hence, subjectivity is reduced and the subjective recovery of incarnate existence is not made.¹⁶

In the *Hyperbolic Consent*¹⁷ found in Orphic tradition (e.g., Goethe and Rilke) the relation of the subject to transcendence is to be found in a poetic admiration of transcendence. The Orphic act of consent is not to choose,

not to move, not to act, but to contemplate. Here again consent in this sense fails to preserve the fullness of subjectivity. Here subjectivity is lost in a vague metaphor and nature is idolized. Subject and subjectivity are annihilated by losing oneself in the act of admiration. For, in the act of admiration identity is achieved!

Only in *Paradoxical Consent* can we preserve the necessary tension between the fullness of subjectivity and the sense of the transcendent as the source of subjectivity. Although both the above types of consent avoid the extreme of refusal of necessity, they do so at the cost of curtailing the fullness of subjectivity. This refusal of necessity is avoided in *paradoxical consent*. Here to refuse necessity is seen as the defiance of transcendence – the refusal is perceived to be at the heart of the rupture in human beings. At the same time, nature is also not totally surrendered to. Here the relationship between the subject and transcendence is a paradoxical one. In refusing total surrender to necessity the self reaches its limit, the absolute limit which breaks the possibility for the self to make a complete circle with itself.¹⁸ *Paradoxical consent* is the movement of the will which affirms necessity as the source of its being. It is the acceptance which affirms character, unconsciousness and vital organisation of human nature and in which their finitude or finiteness is affirmed.¹⁹ This affirmation implies also its transcendence. Thus, it is a consent of hope. Here the affirmation of hopeful consent makes possible an engagement in life which does not reduce subjectivity and which does not refuse transcendence.

c. Limits of Pure Human Freedom:

In the incarnate existence of human beings, the problem of freedom remains a structure of reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary. Since all willing is both *reception* and *initiative*, existence is also both received (as a gift) and is accomplished (as a task). Freedom in this context is a “dependent independence”,²⁰ a bound freedom. Such a freedom is limited. In its limitedness it is open beyond its limits. This constitutes the essence of purely human freedom and human will.

The above phenomenological description of the fundamental structures of the will has shown that the human being can neither dispose of him/herself at will, nor can he/she fully see through himself/herself. The body, with its freedom and necessity, presents itself as an insurmountable limit. In view of this, both an objective analysis of oneself, as in natural sciences, and a subjective examination of oneself, as in reflective philosophies, are possible and justified. Freedom and nature stand against each other and side by side with each other, independent of each other and limited by each other. This makes it possible to go back into the inner human nature from the external expressions of self. This return to human nature is done by a mediating factor (like intentionality in the case of Husserl) which is also open to an objective external observation.

As already noted, the paradox that human freedom is bound by nature is unavoidable. In the human person there exists a non-agreement within the self. The synthesis is in any case a “*limit-idea*,” which can only be dreamt of. This enables the emergence of a sym-

bolic speech in the anthropological frame. On the other hand, in the region of necessity (where one does not dream of possibility), the symbolic area suggests itself. What the human being actually is cannot be fully expressed in a uniform and univocal language. We are dependent on a language which is open to different types of interpretations or readings. The total reality is accessible to us only through such languages and interpretations. Therefore, it is not surprising that these various levels are correspondingly present, even in the mythic answers to the necessary conditions of human life. Language expresses the human condition in its limitations. When one confronts these limitations, a previously non-available region is opened to one. The human being can thus express his or her total reality (both the *free* and the *bound* nature of his or her being) not in a bound system, but only in and through an *open* symbol.

3. Fallible, Fragile Freedom²¹

Description of Human Fallibility

A human person can be observed from different perspectives; all of which may be justified but not always compatible with each other though they all refer to the same person. This fact presents a crisis to the self-understanding of the subject. The analysis of the fundamental possibility of human will in *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* shows that there is a break, a wound, a non-agreement within the human person. This non-agreement makes it impossible for one to see oneself transparently. Ricoeur is not satisfied with just this analysis. The fundamental structure of the will, which

he has traced out, is only a preliminary result in view of the fact of human failures and fallibility. Since it is an absurd fallibility, it cannot be captured though the description of its own nature. Furthermore, since fallibility is an alien object it can be philosophically approached only through concrete experiences rather than rational analysis.

As such, fallibility is a term not totally grasped by pure reflection. It can also be enriched by the concrete experiences of evil. This is human fallibility that provides us with an understanding of the possibility (not necessity) of evil in the context of human freedom. Fallibility, as the possibility for evil, is taken as a primary characteristic of human existence. With this understanding of fallibility, human existence becomes the place of or the possibility for the manifestation of evil.²²

In two different ways Ricoeur tries to capture and describe this *fallibility*. The transition from innocence to guilt can be understood only in concrete expressions of human experiences, i.e., through the act of confession (or avowal – *Bekenntnis*), which later leads a person to take responsibility for his or her actions. In *The Symbolism of Evil*,²³ Ricoeur examines the symbolic language of the experiences of guilt. But before that he studies the breaking point of evil. He continues his description of the fundamental human possibilities, which he had begun in a preliminary and abstract form in *Freedom and Nature* by interpreting the structures of the will as fallible. Because of the opaque and absurd characteristic of guilt, its description (which emerges mainly out of a convergence of concrete signs) could only

be an “*empiric*”²⁴ (a confession) and not an “*eidetic*” (a description) of it. The fallibility describes a weakness which makes evil possible. It is seen to lie in the “structure of mediation between the poles of finite and infinite nature of man”.²⁵ The necessity and structure of this mediation is shown by Ricœur in three ways: as transcendental synthesis, as practical synthesis and as an affective synthesis (or a theory of feeling).

a. The Transcendental Synthesis: The human situation of being in between the finite and the infinite has been expressed in the realms of philosophy in terms of rhetoric and myth, but in order to become fully philosophical this *in-betweenness* or *disproportion* must be brought into the area of pure reflection so that it can be further clarified.²⁶ This clarification, however, is gained at the cost of losing the irreducible *depth* of its existential significance. Hence, clarification by means of transcendental synthesis can only provide a *formal synthesis*.

Therefore, we examine first how the finite and the infinite in the human being could be mediated in the epistemological realm. He begins with a transcendental reflection – an examination of the possibility of knowledge. The mediation at this level is the “transcendental synthesis”. Its elements are the *finite perspective* and the *infinite verb*, both of which synthesise to give *the pure imagination*.

In considering the relation of the body to the world, it is seen that *openness* to the world is body’s first characteristic. For us the body basically mediates the world. Through it we feel our needs and suffer from them. More considerations show that the openness of

the body brings, at the same time, a *finite perspective* with it, since the body is itself the unsurpassable (nonreplaceable) starting point of mediation. For example, through the body we “feel” objects in a definite way, from a particular perspective. This mediation *through* the body is certainly of a finite perspective and therefore limited.

We have not just this finite perspective. For instance, we can overcome the finite perspective through the *infinite verb* in the process of speaking. By means of both noun and verb, we describe a thing. The noun, through which we denote a thing, indicates just an object, independent of its perspective. Through the verb we affirm or negate and thus judge and transcend the determined or the limited aspect of the noun or the state of affairs. By means of the verb, we produce a relation of statements to the being as well as to the self as determining, as judging.

There is also a relationship of *tension* or “*disproportion*” (or “*in-betweenness*”) between the *finite perception* through the body and the *infinite intention* of the words. This provokes the question of the third mediating element. This mediation is made possible through “*pure imagination*” and is given in an *object* through consciousness. Such a “consciousness disappears itself in establishing a unity between the being and the presence”.²⁷ The human person is the mediator between the finite and the infinite in the objects. This synthesis is for him or her the consciousness leading to freedom, but not yet the self-consciousness. This could be summed up as:

Finite Perception	Consciousness	Infinite Intention
Finite Perspective (Noun)	Pure Imagination (Object)	Infinite Orientation (Verb)

b. The Practical Synthesis: The next stage Ricœur examines is that of the practical synthesis, which is actually parallel to the transcendental synthesis. The finite perspective in perception and knowledge corresponds to the notion of *character* in the practical synthesis; the infinite in statements and judgements correspond to the notion of *well-being* or blissfulness. The mediation between them, i.e., the constitution of objects (through a projected destiny) corresponds to the constitution of a person, i.e. *respect (Achtung)*. Here we outline the steps which Ricœur takes in the level of practical synthesis.

Ricœur approaches the notion of *character* through an analysis of desire, the *affective perspective* of life. As in perception, so also in desire, an openness of the body to the world and at the same time a necessary limitation is evident. Desire means openness, in so far as we (in and through desire) seek its fulfilment and outline the possibility of its fulfilment. At the same time desire implies a limitedness in so far as one seeks the other only for one's own sake. The seeking subject limits the scope of fulfilment. Therefore, the body here has not just a mediative function, but also a limiting function, a limit to the openness. One more characteristic of finitude is to be paid attention to. In learning, for example, we try to acquire new possibilities and knowledge, and at the same time learning is also a fixing or a determining process. These points of view of the finitude (the perspective, the origi-

nal self-love, persistence, indolence) constitute the notion of character, not as a sum total of the individual characteristics, but as one totality or individuality.²⁸

This finite openness of the human being is opposed to an infinite orientation – the *well-being* as the explicit goal of all perfection, in which the human being surpasses himself or herself. Well-being is the horizon for all possible concerns. The terminus of this infinity of possibilities is the existential project or the totality of human destiny.²⁹ As the infinite goal, which desire yearns for, *happiness* is not given in any particular experience. There is only a consciousness of the direction in which we have to seek this happiness. There is also a feeling of our belonging to the being as a whole in this search for happiness. Because there is a longing for the whole in us, we can perceive this sign which indicates to us the totality. This is a happening where the horizon expands itself towards the immeasurable.

The synthesis of *well-being* and *character* is the *person*. Standing between finite character and infinite well-being, all that can be gasped is only a *direction*. But in giving form to direction (through reason)³⁰ in an existential project the idea of a person is formed. Person, in this sense, is a projected destiny, a representation of an idea of the self. There is no complete experience of the person in oneself and for oneself. So we can have only an outline of him

or her. The person constitutes itself in respect, which leads one to consider the other, not as a means to be made use of, but as an end in himself or herself. In the very process of doing this, he or she takes back his or her claim for his

or her own perspective and desire. Just as in the level of the transcendental synthesis, it is *pure imagination* that constitutes a thing, so too in the practical synthesis it is *respect* that constitutes a person. This could be summed up as:

Affective Perspective (Desire)	Projected Destiny	Infinite Orientation
Character	Person (Respect)	Well-being

c. Affective Synthesis: The examination of the fallibility of humans in the preceding section has enabled us to grasp the vulnerability of the unity of infinite orientation and finite fulfilment in objects and in the person.³¹ While the synthesis and the vulnerability of the objects are manifested there, the incongruity of the innermost aspect of the human person in the affective realm is ignored. Affectivity is one point where we are most vulnerable.

The feelings are the place of the most intimate appearance of *in-betweenness* and the place of its most fragile tension between finitude and infinitude. Here all disproportion is “interiorised”.³² At the same time feelings are intimately related to objects outside of us. Feeling indicates my response to the qualities and objects in the world and how “I” can be affected by them. As opposed to distanced thinking, one begins to realise that one is fully interwoven in the things of the world, in what is happening in the world through feelings. This feeling produces a belongingness, which is deeper than any opposition between the subject and object.

Feeling or affection displays two directions or dimensions. The finite pole is to be found in *pleasure* which termi-

nates in finite acts.³³ Pleasure is the movement of feeling towards the object fulfilled in an instant. As such it is precarious and perishable. Its focus is upon its boundness to bodily life. The fulfilment of pleasure is an existential condition for bodily life. In this pleasure stands at the level of the *condition for* all other good things for bodily beings.³⁴ In itself pleasure has its own type of totality and non-reducibility. It has an “innocence”, but it is a “menaced innocence” in that the potential for conflict is present with that for happiness.

The pole of infinitude in the feeling is *happiness (bonheur)*. Happiness or blissfulness is that dimension of feeling which revolves around the need for unity or wholeness in human life. It terminates in the existential project which is *destiny*. The feeling of happiness is intimately connected to the idea of well-being. It is more than an idea, since it is the “fulfilment of this direction in beatitude.”³⁵

These two tendencies appear side by side in affectivity also: the sensible desire for *pleasure (epithymia)* and the spiritual longing for *happiness (eros)*. The mediating factor is the *mind (Gemüt, thymos)*. The two tendencies allow themselves to be classified through

their orientations. The *pleasure* as the goal of sensible desire completes a limited act, while the *mind*, in contrast, aims at *blissfulness* or happiness as completion of the totality of the human being. The tension between the two tendencies (longings) results in a “dissatisfaction in mere pleasure, which would not be sign and promise and guarantee of happiness”.³⁶ Here pleasure may not be seen as the diametrically opposing pole of *blissfulness*. Both aim in the same direction, but pleasure brings with it the danger of shutting off the affective realm to *blissfulness*. So *blissfulness* as completion or perfection of pleasure has a regulative function in the fulfilment of pleasure through finite goals.

In the mind, which is the mediating agent in affectivity, we can see (following Kant) three basic longings at work: *Having (avoir)*, *Ruling (pouvoir)* and *Valuation or Esteem (valoir)*. These three drives (or passions) determine the relation of things to person. In the desire of *having*, the relationship of things determines the relationship to persons. In the desire for power (*ruling*) the relationship to things recedes back to the relationship to person. In the desire for *valuation* there is the need to be recognised by the others. Each of these drives has its own vulnerability. The most vulnerable among them is the drive for valuation (or validation) by others. An existence which is dependent on others for recognition is easily susceptible to hurt.

The affective vulnerability has its location in the mind, which has to mediate between the finitude of pleasure and the infinitude of happiness. In each of these passions, we strive after the infinite,

without being able to reach it. This produces an enduring conflict. These drives have an undetermined goal: *a limited goal is unlimitedly desired*. Herein lies the danger: “Only a being, which desires the whole and which can be schematised in the objects of human desires can mistake itself, i.e., forget its goal for the absolute, the symbol character of happiness with a goal of desires: this forgetting makes an *idol* out of a symbol...”³⁷

It is the function of the *mind* to establish a relationship between the human being and the world, to open up an enduring connection between them. The relationship of “I” to the world is internalised through the mind. This, in turn, brings about a division in us. The human duality goes intentionally over itself into an object of synthesis and spiritualises the conflicts of the subjectivity in the affective realm.³⁸ If the division between the infinite orientation and the finite fulfilment in things (or in persons) finds a mediation through an *object*, then the innermost core of the person would experience this conflict within himself/herself. Herein we see the vulnerability of human nature as well as human freedom.

Interpretation of Fallibility³⁹

We seek to show the situation of the human being as being in between the finite and the infinite, as having a certain *in-betweenness* or *disproportion*, which is constitutive of his/her fallibility (or the possibility of the rupture). Thus, in relation to knowledge, there is a disproportion of *finite perspective* and *infinite word*; in the relation to willing there is a disproportion between finite

character and infinite *well-being* and in the relation to feeling there is a disproportion between *pleasure* and *hap-*

piness. This could be illustrated as follows:

	Infinite Orientation	Finite Fulfilment	Mediation
Knowing	Infinite Word (Verb)	Finite Perspective (Noun)	Pure Imagination (Object)
Willing	Well-being	Character	Respect
Feeling	Happiness	Pleasure	Mind
	Original Affirmation	Existential Difference	Human Mediation

For the human being to be fallible means that the possibility of the moral evil is present in our constitution. This fallibility emerges from the tension between the finite and the infinite in him/her. Analogous to Kant's categories of qualities (Reality-Negation-Limitation), we can differentiate three categories in the human constitution, which are characterised through tension: *the original affirmation*, *the existential difference* and *the human mediation*. The moments of the infinite, which we have seen in three levels, (namely the Verb, the idea of Blissfulness and the Mind seeking happiness) are the very moments through which the original affirmation is enriched, perfected and spiritualised. The original affirmation may be trampled upon by the existential negation, which presents to us as a perspective, as character and as feeling. "Human being is the joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite".⁴⁰ Thus there is the second aspect of the existential difference. In spite of it humans are capable of joy, joy through fear and in overcoming fear,

which is the basic reason for all disproportion in the affective region and the source of affective vulnerability. So the notion of human mediation is evident here.

Fallibility is exposed through evil. Human fallibility does not remain merely as the potential for evil. Fallibility has a double sense. It is the breaking-point of evil, so to say, the weakest point in the chain. In this sense fallibility is the original situation, from which evil emerges. Evil in fact points to an original situation of innocence. The *depravity* of human beings indicates a longing for a non-guaranteed perfection. The original situation of innocence is nowhere present. It can be imagined through the existing situation determined by evil and set apart from it. So one can imagine this original situation of innocence, as it happens in myths. Thus the myths of fall (original sin) are always connected with myths of creation (original blessing) and those of innocence.

Over and above, fallibility means not just the breaking-point of the evil,

but also the capability to sin and to commit evil. It requires only one step to move from the vulnerability to the *actuality* of evil. "To say that man is fallible is to affirm at once that the limitation of being, that does not fall with itself, is the original weakness out of which evil emerges. Further, evil can emerge out of this weakness only because it dares."⁴¹ This daring, this mediation makes human freedom possible.

4. Conclusion

So far we have seen the human will and its two dynamic polarities: the urge to the infinite which is bound by the finiteness of the very urge and of the very self. We remain always open to the horizon of the infinite. At the same time we are rooted in the finite. The swing between the two makes us the unique creatures that we are. This swing calls for a mediation. The swing makes human freedom possible. This disproportionality is the possibility for the precious and perilous human freedom. It is in this unique "in-betweenness" that we can situate and understand our own freedom: a fragile, precious freedom!

As one seeking to be an infinite "god" and at the same time bound to finite matter, human situation is paradoxical. As finite beings who reach out to the unlimited we lead a "tensional existence." It is in this "tensional existence" that our precious freedom emerges and can flourish. This makes our freedom vulnerable and fragile! It is precisely in its fragility that the beauty and uniqueness of the human shines forth!

Given such a human situation, where the voluntary is in the involun-

tary, the quest for freedom and liberation will always remain with us. The urge to reach out to the infinite will enable us to remain human. If this quest is stifled we cease to be human. So by our very nature, we will always retain this quest for the infinite in and through the finite. Thus, freedom is the most "natural" thing for humans. For us our human nature becomes the mediating factor of the infinite longing and the finite fulfilment leading to the uniqueness of human freedom.

If this approach to freedom is true, it has profound implications. Freedom comes "naturally" to us and can never be completely curtailed. Freedom becomes constitutive of the human. Understood thus, humans cannot be but free. Freedom becomes more than a "birth-right": it is seen as the very being of the humans. No ideology, no dogma, no system, no religion can ever contain this endless quest. No one can demand absolute submission and conformity from humans. They always remain open to the infinite!

Such a vision of freedom as a quest makes us ever open to the more and sensitive to our tensional existence. This view of human freedom enables us to live in the horizon of the infinity bound by the limits of the finite! It does justice both to our bound and free human nature! Such a way of living out human freedom is well expressed in the ancient prayer:

God,
Grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change,
The courage to change the things
I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Notes

1. The title is ambiguous! And we intend to show that only in such an ambiguity can human freedom flourish! Further, we want to imply that human freedom remains always a quest for the infinite and thus human freedom always goes ahead of itself!
2. For Ricœur's own excellent summary of his understanding of freedom see P. Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. E. V. Kohák (tr.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966. (From now on abridged as PV), 482-486 which is entitled "An Only Human Freedom!," i.e., "une liberté seulement humaine."
3. The title is purposely kept ambiguous! For the purpose of elaborating on Ricœurian will, I base myself on Ricœur's *Philosophie de la volonté: Le volontaire et l'involontaire* (*Philosophie de l'esprit*) published in 1950 which together with *Philosophie de la volonté: Finitude et culpabilité*, Livre I: *L'homme faillible*. Livre II: *La symbolique du mal* (*Philosophie de l'esprit*, 1960) form his total philosophy of the will. Then we go on to extend his ideas for our purpose of understanding human freedom! See also K. Pandikattu, *Idols must Die so that Symbols might Live*, Innsbruck: University of Innsbruck, 1996.
4. Details about the dreams of innocence are beyond the scope of this article. Suffice is to say that they are approximately the polar opposite of experienced freedom, their fulfilment.
5. See. J.Thorer, *Die Liturgische Symbolik im Lichte der Symboltheorie Paul Ricœurs: Ein interdisziplinäres Gespräch zum Verständnis der Symbole im Blick auf die christliche Initiation* (Ph. D. Dissert.). Innsbruck: University of Innsbruck, 1984, 28. We understand "mythology" here in a broad sense.
6. Nothing is of greater importance or more mysterious to nature than fire. The emblem of life, extinction and vigor, fire was in the close keeping of the gods. Zeus refused to transmit any portion of it to the humans fearing the arrogance that the fire would make in the humans. Prometheus, the son of Tital Japetos, who had always stood for humans, snatched some fire from the hearth of Zeus and handed it to the humans. As a punishment, he was condemned to be chained alive to a rock in the remove caucasus mountains, and to submit while every day a vulture came to graw away his liver, which daily grew afresh. He would never have been released but for the secret which he possessed concerning the ultimate fate of the dominion of Zeus. To obtain this secret Zeus allowed Herakles to shoot the vulture, to free Prometheus and bring him back to Olympos.
7. Orpheus, the son of the muse Kallipo and god Appolo had the fascinating power to play lyre that the birds of the air and the fish of streams and all animals would gather around him to lisem. He loved the beautiful Eurydike and she was the subject of his song. Eurydike died of snake bite when she tried to escape from her another lover Aristaeos. Orpheus, along with Eurydike's sister nymphs, wandered over the hills and valleys trying to call her back. He even went to the lower world where his sweet music soothened the monsters and wicked spirits. Even the hardened hearts of Persephone and merciless Eriny's were touched by his passionate grief. So it was permitted that Eurydike should be returned to earth on condition that he could not look on her face on the way back. But Orpheus' patience failed him and so Eurydike must instantly retrace her steps and be lost forever. Because of this Orpheus sat for seven months in dolefu mood by the baks of the river Strymon refusing food or drink. Then we withdrew into the mountains to nurse his sorrow. There he was discovered and he was torn into pieces limb by limb. Pieces of his body were even carried to the sea and there the lyre sounde sweetly with the swell and fall of the waves!

8. See. K. E. Reagan and Stewart D. *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur: An Anthology of His Works*, Boston: 1978, 17.
9. A limit-idea is a possibility for thought which cannot be fully actualised and which surpasses the human condition. See Pandikattu, 45.
10. See. D. Ihde, *Paul Ricœur's Phenomenological Methodology and Philosophical Anthropology* (Ph. D. Dissertation). Boston: Boston University Graduate School, 1964. 102ff. (Hereafter referred to as Ihde).
11. Ihde, 102. This notion is similar to the paradoxical consent we shall be discussing later on.
12. See the third part of PV, 339ff.
13. Ihde, 104.
14. This would be the ideal starting point for a philosophy of symbol and understanding freedom as a “symbolic” human phenomenon.
15. Subjectivity has a long philosophical (phenomenological) tradition. We simplify this profound notion here to mean the “subject” not merely of our thinking (*cogito*) but also our actions, feelings and being. It implies a more dynamic and non-objective understanding than “subject”.
16. See PV, 469-472. Also see Ihde, 107.
17. The poem quoted by Ricœur is insightful. PV, 473. “Tell it to no other wise man /For the crowd is quick to rail; /I sing the praise of the living / who aspires to death in flame.”
18. See PV, 479-480.
19. See PV, 480. See also Ihde, 108.
20. PV, 482-486. It is in here that the limit ideas could be traced. As a motivated freedom, the limit idea is that of a perfectly rational and transparent motivation. A second limit idea would be that of a perfectly docile body capable of totally gracious movements. The third idea related to the absolutely involuntary would be of a human freedom in which resistance of the involuntary is absent and pure initiatives are possible. None of these limit ideas are actually realized in fullness. See also Ihde, 110-111.
21. Again an ambiguous title! What is meant is not primarily that freedom is fallible and fragile, but that freedom emerges from the same human structure as that of fallibility. Only in this secondary sense does freedom and fallibility go together. In this section we shall be dealing elaborately with fallibility and later briefly with its implication for freedom.
22. See also, Ihde, 113. See also Ricœur, P., *Philosophie de la volonté*. Vol. 2. *Finitude et culpabilité*. Livre 1: *L'homme faillible*. Paris: Aubier, 1960 Reprint 1988, 14. (Abridged as FC: my own translation).
23. P. Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Emerson Buchanan (tr.). Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
24. By “empiric” we mean an intuitive, sudden encounter with the empirical in contrast to the reflective, thinking of “eidetic”. So the “empiric” would be the result of a first encounter with the concrete and often takes the spontaneous form of exclamations or confessions.
25. P. Ricœur, *Die Fehlbarkeit des Menschen. Phänomenologie der Schuld* II. M. Otto (tr.). Freiburg/Br: 1971, 9. (Abridged as FM; my own translation into English.)
26. See Thorer, 35. Ihde, 118.
27. FM, 68. Note the relationship and distinction between finite perception and finite perspective.
28. See Pandikattu, 56.

29. FC, 82. See Ihde, 127.
30. See FC, 84-85.
31. For this section, please see Ihde, 129f.
32. FC, 93.
33. See FC, 109. See Ihde, 132.
34. FC, 110.
35. See FC, 109.
36. FM, 125, Pandikattu, 67.
37. FC, 147. See also, Thorer, 36.
38. FM, 172.
39. For this section see the concluding part of FM and Thorer, 36-37.
40. FM, 140.
41. FM, 189, See K. Pandikattu, *When Idols Die*, New Delhi, Intercultural Pub., 1999, 56ff.

Jesus, the Mystery of Freedom in History

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Freedom as a concept defies all definitions. Like life and love it is experienced and lived rather than defined. It is obvious that it transcends all forms of articulation, be it philosophical, poetic, legal or social. This fact alone reaffirms the poverty of human language and the limitations of the human mind to give full expression to as fundamental an experience as freedom. It eludes human attempts to capture and analyse it. Freedom is a mystery in which human beings are involved, a mystery like life itself. It cannot be objectified. Rahner points out this mysterious dimension of freedom when he speaks about grace in freedom. He says, "Freedom is first of all 'freedom of being'. It is not merely a quality of an act such as it is sometimes performed, but a transcendental qualification of being human."¹ Indeed, to become human is to become free.

If freedom itself is recognised as a *sine qua non* for the authentic unfolding of a human person and if the concept of freedom itself is so free that it eludes human endeavours to define it (*definire* = to mark limits), are there other sources that reveal this mystery so that it can be lived to the maximum possibility of humans? If freedom makes humans truly humans it cannot be hidden, it needs to be revealed. It needs to be given. Christian faith affirms that it is a call to grow as humans in

relation to others and make the history of the world a history of God in the world.

The givenness of freedom belongs to the very nature of human beings as it is the dynamism that propels the unfolding of human persons. Therefore, no force can ever suppress the movement of freedom within humans although freedom movements can be ruthlessly crushed by the powers that be. The quest for freedom, indeed, is the quest for the unfolding of life. Its dynamism is its life. Life itself becomes what it is because of freedom.

The Christian understanding of life and freedom cannot be separated from the Christian experience of God in Jesus Christ. The following theological reflection is an attempt to understand the relationship between the quest for freedom and the Christian experience of freedom in and through the person of Jesus Christ. We would like to look into the meaning of the Christian faith affirmation that Jesus is liberator and the implications of this affirmation in our understanding of the person of Jesus himself. An attempt is also made to sketch a short history of Jesus' own freedom, its source and its stages of development and its consequences. Indeed, the experience of Jesus as freedom incarnate is the pre-understanding

of the affirmation that Jesus is liberator or saviour. The Christian confession that Jesus is fully human is the at same time an affirmation that he was the full actualization of freedom hitherto unknown in history.

1. Jesus Christ as Freedom Encountered

The early Christian community encountered the Risen Christ as freedom personified. Union with him was experienced as freedom from all enslavement, especially, the enslavement of sin. Sin is understood as alienation of humans from themselves, God , others and nature. According to biblical revelation it is sin that makes humans inauthentic and, therefore, unfree. If sin is alienation and consequent disintegration, in Jesus Christ the believer encountered full integration of his or her life. The Johannine and Pauline understanding of Christian Freedom, the *Libertas Christiana*, as the Fathers of the Church would call it, is the participation of the believer in the Freedom of the Son.

One of the early Christian communities' experience of Jesus as the Truth that sets every one free would give an insight into the understanding of Jesus as freedom. The community was the Johannine community. The community's unique insight into the mystery of freedom is expressed in Jesus' dialogue with the Jews. "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:31-32), and "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (Jn 8:36). Freedom is a gift. For

the believer Jesus is the source of true freedom which makes a person transparent before Truth and before all its manifestations whether in oneself, in others or in nature. It is spontaneously accepted and creatively expressed in his or her individual history which is made up of an integral relationship with all that is revealed to make humans authentically human.

For John the truth, *aletheia*, that sets humans free, is not the Aristotelian concept of intellectual truth, i.e., mind's conformity to reality, but the revelation of the Ultimate in Jesus Christ. John concludes his first letter with the affirmation that Jesus is the truth whom both the Father and the Spirit reveal and testify (1Jn 5:6-12). He says: " And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us the understanding, to know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is true God and eternal life" (1Jn 5:20). So the truth that makes humans free is the freedom of the Son of God. Piet Fransen says: "Our freedom never becomes ours alone, as grace never does. Our freedom, therefore, says St. John, is the freedom of the Son, the Son of God, because by grace we partake in the obedience and love of the Son for his Father through the inspiring action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is the Son 'who sets us free' according to His own truth."² The life-line of this freedom is love which 'casts out fear' (1Jn 4:18) because fear destroys freedom, incapacitates love, curtails creativity and prevents growth. Therefore, the exhortation of the Truth that sets humans free is, "Fear not!" For fear destroys not only freedom but the unfolding of the human

persons. Therefore, it prevents the glory of God from shining through humans.

The Pauline understanding of freedom is not essentially different from that of Johannine. Paul's own experience of liberation from the painful experience of the law of sin finds articulation in his theology of freedom and especially in the letters to the Romans and to the Galatians. The law of God in which he delights (Rom 7:22) and which he assiduously practised laid bare the inner contradictions he experienced in their practice (Rom 7:13-20, 23-24). Therefore, the experience of liberation is needed even from what is supposed to be good, i.e., the zealous practice of law. The fulfilling of law was enslaving as it led to self-righteousness and boasting. Recalling his life before his liberative encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus Paul acknowledges his inner struggle. There was a war going on within him between the law of God and the law of sin and he cried out "Who will set me free from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:24b). Paul encountered liberation in Jesus Christ. He confesses, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

From his own experience of unfreedom in spite of the strict observance of law (Phil 3:4-6) Paul concludes that the whole world is in need of liberation as "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). If the glory of God is human beings fully alive by the unfolding of themselves in freedom it is the experience of Paul and the early community that it is possible only

by one's surrender in faith to the person of Jesus, freedom incarnate.

The same theology of freedom is affirmed in the letter to the Galatians even more strongly in the confession that the Risen Lord, the source of their freedom, is the one who was crucified, the historical Jesus, God's freedom made visible in history. "But when time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, so that we receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer slave but a son, and if a son then an heir" (Gal 4:4-6). Paul's idea of freedom flows from his understanding of God's justice and love which make human beings just, lovable and free. "It is the saving activity of God in Christ that has set man free: any freedom before or apart from Christ is an illusion."³ So Paul affirms strongly "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1).

In the Pauline theology true freedom, God himself, becoming human is to set free humans in Christ that they may live in the glorious liberty of the children of God. Johannine and Pauline articulation of the early Church's experience of Jesus Christ as freedom has tremendous consequences for the Church's mission of liberation. Commenting on the NT witness of John and Paul on the Christian experience of liberation Ignacio Ellacuria says:

John and Paul amplify the concept of liberation greatly, stressing the goal

towards which it leads. That goal is the freedom of the Children of God in the fellowship of all human beings, who are brought together in and by one salvation process that is operative in history. They also stress the central place of the whole Christ, the creating Logos and Redeemer in the flesh, as the root source and principle of liberty; and the need for complete liberation from sin so that the glory of God may shine resplendently in those who have been justified by faith....Liberation is absolutely essential to the gospel message. Today, more than ever before, it is essential to the mission of the Church as well.⁴

The early communities experienced an existential transformation of their lives from unfreedom to freedom through their faith in Jesus Christ. If faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ is ‘existence *in* freedom’ as Schubert Ogden affirms,⁵ can we say that Jesus’ own faith in his Father is his existence in freedom? If Jesus is the truth that sets humans free can we rightly conclude that this truth is faith itself, i.e., being totally grounded in the ultimate Other? The NT presents Jesus as the one who was so totally free that he could make others free. His own way of life and ministry reveals that he experienced freedom to its fullest degree, in a way hitherto unparalleled in history. What is the source of such freedom? What are its consequences?

2. Jesus’ Freedom and Its Source

In the biblical understanding authentic freedom flows from one’s intimate relationship with God. It empowers humans to have right relationship with other humans and the world.

Hence, unfreedom is understood as a consequence of sin. Another term used to explain one’s intimate relationship with God is faith. The OT understood *emet* as ‘leaning on’ Yahweh as the support of one’s existence. Indeed, faith constitutes the total existence of a person before God. The NT testimony about Jesus’ own faith is his complete trust in the Father as the source of his existence and mission. If faith is understood as being rooted and grounded in God or ‘as an existence in utter trust in God’s love and utter loyalty to his cause’⁶ Jesus’ freedom was the expression of his faith. This faith historically lived by Jesus made the early Christian community proclaim that he is the truth that makes humans free. He is truth because it is in his faithfulness, in his *emet* that he reveals who God is and what humans can become. Therefore, freedom, faith and truth are not three abstract concepts in relation to Jesus but the concrete life and the historical actions of Jesus that liberate and empower humans to become what they are called to become in a God-given pattern of humanization. Therefore, rootedness in his Father and commitment to the cause of his Father defines Jesus’ faith and explains his freedom.

Jesus’ rootedness in the Father is so total that his whole existence can be defined only in his relationship to the Father. H. Urs von Balthasar commenting on Jesus’ faith says: “Son of Man offers total fidelity to the Father. It is given once and for all, yet fleshed out anew at every moment in time. He shows absolute preference for the Father - the Father’s nature, love, will and commands - over his own desires and

inclinations. He sticks to that will, come what may. Above all, he lets the Father arrange and direct everything.”⁷ This is, indeed, the total expression of Jesus’ faith as well as his freedom. Jesus’ faith and freedom can be understood, therefore, only in his intimate and unique relationship to his Father whom he addressed tenderly yet confidently as *abba*.

The classical NT text which expresses both Jesus’ faith and his freedom is Mark 14:36. “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.” His freedom wells up from an intimate relationship with his Father which is expressed in the way he addresses his Father as *abba*. The faith that everything is possible to the Father and the freedom to surrender to the same Father come what may, flow from Jesus’ experience of God as *Abba*. To address God as *abba* is disrespectful for the Jewish mind and therefore not used in Jewish prayers. Jesus did it with such spontaneity and freedom that the NT writers preserved this term without translating it to show the originality of this way of relating to God. J. Jeremias who made an important study on the use of the term *abba* by Jesus affirms: “For Jesus to venture to take this step was something new and unheard of. He spoke to God like a Child to its father, simply, inwardly, confidently. Jesus’ use of *abba* in addressing God reveals the heart of his relationship with God.”⁸ Jesus’ *abba*-consciousness revealed in his over familiar and scandalously intimate way of addressing God with the freedom of a child, gives an insight into his own self-aware-

ness. He was himself before his Father, in the total nakedness of his being, clothed only in the awareness that he was loved to the maximum of love and trusted to the fullness of trust.

J.D.G. Dunn, commenting on Jesus’ religious experience of God as Father, says, “The fact that Jesus used *abba* in addressing God enables us to say with some confidence that Jesus experienced God as Father in a very personal, intimate way:...”⁹ Implied in this way of addressing God in his habitual prayer with such spontaneity and openness is a special relationship with his Father. This intimate relationship was the source of his freedom. If freedom is the unlimited openness and transparency before God, the source and end of one’s being, and consequent unconditional surrender to God, Jesus was totally free. If freedom is the capacity of a human person to unfold himself or herself to the maximum possibility of being human, Jesus was fully human. The NT presents Jesus as the one who was so free and so human that those who believed in him experienced true freedom and wholeness, and they could be themselves in his presence. Jesus was not only freedom incarnate but as a human being, he experienced freedom to its fullness and lived a life of dangerous freedom.

3. The History of Jesus’ Freedom and His Historical Freedom

Jesus’ life was the continuous enfleshment of his faith in freedom. His faith and the exercise of his freedom cannot be limited to his intimate relationship with his Father alone. Equally

important is his relationship to the kingdom of his Father and his commitment to the realization of the kingdom in the concrete historical situation of his life. It means that his freedom grows in his dynamic relationship with his Father and in his liberating activity as the actualization of the kingdom he proclaimed. According to S.Kappen, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus announces that God will come to eradicate whatever prevents humans to become fully humans and affirm and fulfil whatever is truly human. "The Kingdom of God therefore is, on the one hand, the liberation of man from every alienation, i.e., from everything that renders him other than what he ought to be, and on the other, the full flowering of the human on our planet. In other words, it is not only freedom *from* but also freedom *for* – freedom for creativity, community and love."¹⁰ Jesus' mission of freeing people from all types of alienation and securing meaning for their lives by their free response to God in and through the human community and the world sprang from his *abba*-consciousness and his commitment to the kingdom.

If Jesus' faith and freedom are the two dimensions of his intimate relationship with his Father, what J.Sobrino considers important for the history of Jesus' faith can be applied also to his freedom. According to Sobrino every positive human action in history is guided by some values which need to be concretized in actual life situation which may lead to conflict. In the conflicting situation of the dialectic interplay between the values one believes in and the negative forces that oppose the values real-

ity is fashioned as well as the agent. At the final stage of this positive human action or in the final stage of faith in a conflicting situation one decides to give up values or give up life. The history of Jesus' faith culminated in his surrender in freedom to the will of the Father offering to give up life rather the values he believed in. This is also the history of Jesus' freedom.

Jesus' spontaneous relation with his Father, his consciousness of being rooted in the Ground of being, was the source of his knowledge and conviction that true freedom made humans truly humans. It means that humans have to experience the infinite love of God, actualize what one ought to do and search for what is good and true and beautiful. It is true freedom when humans recognize the sovereignty of God's love and actualize the values of justice, love, peace, forgiveness and fellowship. Jesus called this the 'Kingdom of God' or God's reign. In his freedom Jesus also recognized the source of unfreedom. Unfreedom begins with the vulnerability of freedom itself. Though called to become free by following what makes humans truly human, the tendency to become unfree by everything that makes them inhuman looms large on the horizon of the humans' pilgrimage to freedom. In spite of the desire to do good humans sometimes do evil and become unfree (Rom 7:15). They feel not only alienated from themselves and others but also from the very Ground of their being. This is sin that kills freedom. Compounded by the oppressive interpretation of social, cultural and religious laws and regulations the guilt of sin committed deepens and indeed leads to a

slow death of what makes humans authentically human, i.e., freedom. There is no self-emancipation. Humans need to be gifted with the forgiving and reconciling love of God. In the warmth of God's forgiving love humans become truly human and free. Therefore, 'the gospel within the gospel' which Jesus proclaims is the forgiving love of God the Father (Lk 15).

In the history of Jesus' own freedom one can detect the strength of conviction with which he pulls down the Jewish religion's concept of God that prevents humans from experiencing the forgiving love of God. The God of Jewish religion is only interested in law, temple and status quo. Therefore, the Sabbath is more important than the human being. For this God, ritual purity plays an important role in human relationship with him that one must guard against anything impure which is polluting, whether persons or things. Bound by the letter of the law religion interprets the will of God in terms of what is forbidden and what is permitted. Thus, the God of religion becomes a stern law-enforcing authority whom humans must fear. Where there is fear, there is no freedom. Thus he is not a liberating God but an enslaving God. E.Kaesemann has rightly pointed out, "There is no God who ceases to be a creator, and who can therefore be played off against what has been created; there is no such thing as God-pleasing religion that absolves us from everyday duties; and there is no Holy Scripture that allows man to sin and relieves us of our absolute responsibility towards our neighbour. For this reason, the commandments about Sabbath and purification are understood in

a foolish way if they may be broken only in case of danger to life, and allow love to be disregarded".¹¹

It was Jesus' 'royal freedom' that he rejected such an enslaving interpretation of the revelation of God because the creator who can be manipulated against the creature is a false god, a false god who would rob people of their freedom and humanity.¹² Already by the human acts that go against one's own growth one experiences the bondage of sin. This tragic bondage of sin is further worsened by the false interpretation of the laws whether social, moral or cultic. Jesus' insistence on the primacy of love both divine and human before all types of laws, no matter how cultically important and traditionally followed, and his authoritative proclamation of the forgiving love of God cut the roots of sin. With an authority unknown to his predecessors, with a freedom that scandalized even his disciples he revealed that his Father's love touches the hearts of humans and liberates them from the shackles of sin. Those who are open to the invitation of this forgiving love experience true freedom because love liberates. The sinners, real or so called because they are social outcasts, ritually impure, physically and psychologically afflicted and economically poor, could experience healing and reintegration into the society when they repented and encountered divine forgiveness through Jesus. It convinced Jesus that he was sent "to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Lk 4: 18) and that he "came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk 2: 17b).

At the first stage in the history of Jesus' freedom we can see how he shared the liberating love of God to an extent that was even found blasphemous by his contemporaries. In the light of the liberating love of God for whom humans were infinitely more important than the religious and social structures and systems which claimed to fulfil the will of God yet oppressed humans, Jesus stood for love, justice, peace, reconciliation and fellowship, come what may.

The freedom with which Jesus reached out to anyone who sought to experience God's forgiving love and be free brought Jesus to a situation of conflict with the powers that opposed the realization of God's liberating love in a situation of sin. Like his faith, the situation of conflict made Jesus' freedom a dangerous freedom because he was exercising it in the concrete situation which sought to destroy the liberal and the liberator in him. When the exercise of his freedom assumed meaning by the concretization of the values of the Kingdom which he proclaimed, the history of Jesus' freedom entered into its second stage.

Jesus' freedom finds dangerous expression in his denunciation of not only the religious structures but also the social power structure which oppressed humans in the name of God, social and economic order and national security. If love is the soul of freedom, justice and fellowship form its body. Love must be expressed in freedom to love all. However, this universal love must be translated into concrete forms. "In Jesus' case his universal love was translated into a decision to be 'with' the oppressed

and to be 'against' the oppressors, precisely so that his love could be 'for' all of them."¹³

Jesus associated freely with the poor and the outcasts. He so shocked the Scribes and the Pharisees when he broke social and religious barriers and had table-fellowship with the tax collectors and sinners that they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"(Mk 2:16), Kappen says, "No less revolutionary than Jesus' table-fellowship with publicans and sinners was his rejection of the social taboos surrounding relations between the sexes. Nothing, perhaps, was more shocking for his contemporaries than the freedom with which he associated himself with women, considering the inferior position of women in the Jewish society."¹⁴ Freedom cannot but break those artificially created barriers of social discrimination because they are structures of inhumanity and unfreedom.

The poor in Jesus' time were socially marginalized as well as economically oppressed. Jesus believed that the poor are poor because they happened to be the part of an unjust social structure where the power wielded by a few kept the poor in abject misery. He was also convinced that fight against injustice was the way to bring about the kingdom. "He condemns wealth that makes people poor and praises poverty that points an accusing finger at the malignant reality of wealth."¹⁵ He condemns wealth because it produces poverty and creates classes of the oppressors and the oppressed. Above all, it undermines the sovereignty of God when mammon

becomes the master of one's life ((Lk 16:13). "The Pharisees who loved money heard all this and scoffed at him" (Lk 16:14). Such outright condemnation of the values of society lands him in conflict with the powers that be.

With prophetic freedom and courage he denounces the religious and the social power structures because they deny the poor the possibility to lead a life worthy of their human vocation. The cleansing of the temple (Mk 11:28) is, perhaps, the best expression of Jesus' freedom as well as of everything he stood for and stood against. He stood for a cleansed temple where one can enter into communion with God in spirit and in truth, where God's forgiving love can be experienced not through elaborate rituals prescribed by man-made regulations but through loving table-fellowship. He stood against everything that is symbolized by the desecrated temple because it was the expression of the unholy alliance between the oppressive religious, social and economic power structures. Jesus turns the tables of economic exploitation over as they create, divide and separate human beings into classes and groups preventing genuine table-fellowship. "In all likelihood the cleansing of the temple was the immediate provocation that led to Jesus' arrest and trial before Sanhedrin".¹⁶

The situation in which Jesus' true freedom faced conflicts with those forces of unfreedom leads him to the third or final stage of the history of his freedom. At this stage of freedom Jesus had to make a choice between all that he stood for or his own life. The garden of Gethsemane provides the back-

drop of this struggle towards the final leap of his freedom. His glorious freedom faces its own vulnerability. He is so greatly distressed and troubled that he told his disciples that his soul was sorrowful even unto death (Mk 14:33-34; Matt 26: 37-38).

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus faces the greatest crisis of his life. He is tempted. The painful struggle is either to use power or to rely on authority. Power has no authority and authority is powerless. Power as received from external sources can make one inhuman and unfree. The use of power which could dominate and control others and manipulate situations for his own advantage might save his life but would kill his freedom and all that he stood for. But the temptation to preserve one's life before the impending threat to life is natural and strong. His authority which came from his intimate relation with his Father seemed to be powerless to stop the powers that were determined to destroy him. His freedom faces supreme trial. Luke presents the gravity of this situation and the excruciating pain he suffers in deciding whether to give up the values of the kingdom he embodied or to give up his life by narrating that "being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Lk 22:44). Finally, Jesus decides in freedom for freedom. He lets the source of his freedom, the Father himself, take control also of the rest of his history. His supreme freedom is expressed in his prayer, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14:36). Authority

triumphs over power. True freedom overcomes the temptations of false freedom and its various expressions which may appear to be normal and reasonable. Letting go when the future is bleak reveals the strength of faith and the depth of authentic freedom.

The cross of Jesus is the concretization of his specific surrender to his Father in freedom which he had already made in the Garden of Gethsamene. The cross of Jesus is a process which began at the incarnation when God's freedom was enfleshed in a situation of unfreedom which seeks to destroy that freedom. In this process of the cross Gethsamene symbolizes the highest peak of freedom as well as the lowest depth of frustration, confusion, fear and intolerable pain and agony. Therefore, the agony on the cross seems to lose its intensity in comparison with the agony in the garden where Jesus' freedom faced its ultimate trial.

If the cross is the consequence of Jesus' dangerous freedom, the resurrection reveals that God's freedom ultimately triumphs and can overcome whatever be the power of unfreedom. At his resurrection Jesus' freedom reaches its fullness, and thus he becomes the source of the Spirit of freedom to those who encounter him. Therefore, Paul affirms, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Cor 3:17). Indeed, the Jesus of history was encountered as freedom enfleshed by his disciples. Now as the risen Lord, he is encountered as the one who effects a radical transformation of their lives through his Spirit so that they realize

themselves as authentically human and free. This experience of freedom makes them agents of freedom for others because they recognized their freedom as a gift and a task. They realized that they become more and more liberated to the extent that they set others free by continuing the mission of the Truth that sets everyone free.

Conclusion

Freedom that defies all definitions found its historical expression and trans-historical realization in Jesus Christ. The early Christian community encountered him as the one who was alive and liberating even after his death. They knew that he was crucified for living out his freedom dangerously in a situation that opposed his freedom. The powers of unfreedom found him inconvenient and threatening as he stood against their religious, social and economic systems and structures that made them victims of unfreedom and condemned the majority to dehumanization. The source of Jesus' freedom was his intimate union with his Father whom he called *abba* with the spontaneity of a child. This intimate relationship was also the source of his mission of liberation. He proclaimed with such clarity and authority that humans could truly become humans if they would encounter the forgiving love of God and live by the values of the kingdom. With a freedom that was shocking to his hearers he interpreted religious laws, broke down social barriers and violated dehumanizing regulations and denounced oppression and the exploitation of the poor and the marginalized, Käsemann says: "Whatever else Jesus may have been, he was

a ‘liberal’. ...He was a liberal because in the name of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit he interpreted and appraised Moses, the Scriptures, and dogmatics from the point of view of love, and thereby allowed devout people to remain human and even reasonable”.¹⁷ But Jesus had to pay heavily for his life and expression of authentic freedom. Gethsemane symbolizes the ultimate trial of his freedom and there in the garden, true to his freedom, he decided to

give up life rather than the values he believed in and practised dangerously.

So irrepressible was the freedom that was made manifest in Jesus that the powers that were opposed to Jesus could only destroy his earthly life but not his freedom. The liberator continues to live challenging the structures of unfreedom as before through his Spirit who is present in all those who encounter him and commit themselves to his cause of liberation.

Notes

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11. Ernst Kaesemann, *Jesus Means Freedom: A polemical survey of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1969, p. 25.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
13. Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, p. 125.
14. Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom* , p. 103.
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17. E.Kaesemann, p. 27.

Freedom in the Church

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But with us all will be happy and will no more rebel nor destroy one another as under Thy freedom. Oh, we shall persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom to us and submit to us (The Grand Inquisitor¹).

It is an unpleasant task to write about freedom in the Church, particularly from the point of view of Church History. The chilling words of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, remind us of the Church's complicity with the forces of unfreedom. Much has been written about it, and it is not my intention to produce another criminal history of Christianity.² But at the same time, it is good to be reminded of it time and again because history is a good teacher. In the process, we will, perhaps, find the same forces at work in some way in the Church of today as well. Therefore, this article is a short reflection on freedom in the Church from the perspective of Church History.

What is freedom? Aristotle defined freedom as a human being's autonomous self-determination to do good or evil. According to Augustine, the word could only be used in the sense of freedom to do good, since freedom to act in an evil way is not freedom. Thomas Aquinas tried to synthesize both these views. These classical definitions are no longer adequate to explain the dynamics of freedom in contemporary society. Today freedom is understood

primarily as a dialectical relationship between inner liberation (conversion) and outer liberation (liberation from structures of enslavement). In other words, social processes of liberation and personal emancipation are intimately connected. No one understands freedom today as the complete annulment of norms and the constant extension of individual liberties to the point of complete emancipation from all order. Kant's call, *sapere aude*, and the grand promises of the Enlightenment with its radicalization of individualistic tendencies have not led to true freedom. "Freedom, if it is not to lead to deceit and self-destruction, must orient itself by the truth, that is, by what we really are, and must correspond to our being. Since man's essence consists in being-from, being-with and being-for, human freedom can exist only in the ordered communion of freedoms."³ In other words, freedom realizes itself in a network of relationships. This is the essence of Christian freedom, too. The sources of Christian freedom are Jesus Christ and his Gospel "which is a message of freedom and a force for liberation."⁴ Let us first of all see what these sources tell us about freedom.

The Roots of Christian Freedom

Although the words ‘free’ and ‘freedom’ do not occur frequently in his preaching, freedom and liberation are fundamental dimensions of the message of Jesus. The Kingdom of God offers to those who accept God as ruler liberation and freedom; freedom from enslavement to the rule of Satan, sin and death; freedom from social and religious pressures, and the enslaving needs of an imprisoned self; freedom from worry and fear; freedom to love God and one’s neighbour.⁵ Jesus attacked the vicious circle of unfreedom and put forward discipleship as the way to authentic freedom. Jesus’ message gave his listeners the courage to be free. His liberating activities like healings, exorcisms, association with sinners, freeing people from the pressures of rituals etc. were the accompanying signs of his message. He did all these because he himself was free and his freedom was founded on his faith in God and his openness to the needs of others. Because of this, he was free from many conventional restraints and from doubts about his fundamental mission.

The community engendered by Jesus should mediate the freedom brought forth by him. It should witness to the liberation and freedom which he proclaimed through word and deed and subject itself to his judgment so that he continues to liberate it from all unfreedoms. The freedom which Jesus brought forth must be realized in his community.⁶ Jesus said: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:31-32). Truth is discovered by hearing the word of

God. The Church is the community of those who hear the word of God and do it (Lk 8:21). Therefore, the Church is the community where truth is realized and freedom proclaimed. The Church has to be a community of freedom. This is fundamental to its nature. Has the Church always been a community of freedom? I will answer this question by studying three problematic areas in the Church: power in the Church, the right to dissent in the Church, and the Church as the custodian of truth and orthodoxy.

1. Power in the Church

The Church like any social system possesses a lot of power. But power in the Church is vicarious power, conferred by the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18-20). The confession of the Lord Jesus Christ and his sovereignty are, according to Paul, the fundamental features of Christianity. The failure to realize this has created many problems in the Church. The decisive factor in the New Testament understanding of the concepts of power, sovereignty etc. is that all exercise of power in Christ’s Church is understood as *diakonia* (service) and not as *arche* (power). This is too well known to be elaborated here.⁷ This has also been the norm in the early Church. Although power and authority in the Church became institutionalized very early (monepiscopacy is attested to as early as AD 110), the Church was still a communion of the people of Christ, and power and authority were exercised for and with them. With Constantine, the structures of Roman administration were carried over into the Church. The Church also had to develop organizational structures beyond the local level,

like the Ecumenical Councils, which represented the ‘universal Church’; thus the concept of universal ecclesiastical power began to develop. Gradually, the papacy became its sole custodian and accumulated a lot of power in its hands. The Gregorian Reforms of Gregory VII (pope from 1073) considerably strengthened the policy of Roman centralization which continues without much change till the present day. The pope became an absolute monarch in the Western Church, and the bishop something like an autocrat in his diocese. The emerging canon law supported this absolutism, making the pope and the bishops ‘governors’ and ‘judges’ of people, rather than pastors and servants.

The Reformation challenged some of these authoritarian structures and broke away from the Church in the name of the freedom of the Christian. Whether the quest for freedom was realized in the Reformation tradition is another question altogether. In the Catholic tradition, the Council of Trent enhanced papal and episcopal power further. The centralization and bureaucratization of the Church reached new heights with the Roman curia now taking up the governance of the Church in its hands. The dogmas of papal infallibility and primacy proclaimed by Vatican Council I in 1870 sealed the monarchical structure of the Church once and for all. Episcopal authority was effectively sidelined. Fortunately, the Second Vatican Council effected some changes in this regard. Although it emphasized the importance of hierarchical communion with the pope, it also spoke of episcopal collegiality.

History shows that the use of power in the Church has taken different historical forms, and, therefore, it is contingent. Ecclesiastical power is vicarious and every form it takes is not the ultimate will of God. If the exercise of power has assumed so many different forms in history and was influenced by diverse historical necessities, it must now respect contemporary needs, values and norms, like justice, equality, and the growing democratic ethos throughout the world. It is difficult to understand what role a hierarchical power structure as it exists in the Church today can play in the world of today.

The use or misuse of power in the Church today is the subject of heated discussion. Power in the Church can be justified only on two grounds: 1) the conservation and transmission of the deposit of faith and 2) the preservation of unity in the Church. When judged from these perspectives, we find that the exercise of power in the Church today has often nothing to do either with the conservation of the deposit of faith or the preservation of unity. Often other considerations are at play in the Church when it exercises its power. Besides the loss of individual freedom, reputation of persons, and the credibility of the Church, what is at stake in the wilful exercise of power in the Church is the cause of theological and liturgical pluralism which affects the very survival of the Church in the modern world. Even at the close of the twentieth century the Church has used its ‘power’ to excommunicate people in the name of doctrinal purity! Authority in the Church has often been a monolithic exercise of power, bypassing the

rights and responsibilities of the local Churches and of individual Christians.

2. The Right to Dissent

The Church would be happy to advocate for its members the kind of obedience and submissiveness which Ignatius of Loyola advocated for his followers. He compared his sons to 'the dead body which can be carried anywhere and treated in any fashion' or 'the stick in the hand of an old man which allows itself to be used wherever and for whatever purpose he wishes'. But even he set a limit to obedience and the rights of authority: '... at least where it is clear ... that no sin is involved.'⁸ It is very important to notice that the ultimate authority here is the one who is to obey. He decides whether there is sin. His conscience has the final say. This is true of submission to the Church as well. Vatican II clearly shows us the importance of conscience when it says:

It is through his conscience that man sees and recognizes the demands of the divine law. He is bound to follow his conscience faithfully in all his activity so that he may come to God who is the last end. Therefore, he must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience" (*Dignitatis Humanae* 3).⁹

From this freedom follows the right and duty of the members of the Church to protest against, and where necessary, oppose the misuse of power and the continuation of undesirable structures and norms in the Church. This has always been regarded as possible by the Church's tradition,¹⁰ although with certain limitations. But the Church has sup-

pressed this right in various ways, even in the name of being faithful to its mission. The concern and solicitude of the Church for its mission has become so institutionalized and bureaucratized, that the procedures adopted by the Church often lacks many safeguards which are granted normally in any legal procedure. If one believes in the presence and activity of the Spirit in the Church and the diversity of charisms in the community, one will surely encounter dissent; suppressing this dissent is tantamount to extinguishing the Spirit. Dissent in the present day Church is often not the result of a crisis in faith or discipline, but of imposing a Eurocentric Christianity on non-Europeans. It is the result of not reading the 'signs of the times'.

There is, without doubt, plenty of dissent in today's Church, often destructive dissent, and the time has come for a consensus regarding ways to deal with it in the correct way. Some examples of dissent from the history of the Church may be helpful in this regard. Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), a famous bishop of North Africa in the third century, was a man committed to the absolute unity of the Church which he portrayed in many vivid imageries; he nevertheless dissented with Stephen (d. 257), bishop of Rome, on the issue of heretical baptism¹¹ and was quite ready to defend his decision to dissent. The basis for unity in the Church, according to him, was the Spirit and not the bishop of Rome; he believed that the episcopal authority was supreme and that the bishop of Rome had no jurisdictional primacy over him. Diversity in practices was allowed but not schism. Both Cyprian and Stephen held on to their views, and, unfortunately,

we do not have any final ruling on this controversy.

In the Middle Ages, there arose many heresies in the Church, like the dissent of the Waldensians who began their activity between 1173 and 1175. It was a protest movement by a group of laity, both men and women, whose main objective was to obtain the freedom to preach. They did not want to be incorporated into the clerical and monastic structure of the Church, but at the same time, wanted to exercise their fundamental Christian right of proclamation of the good news. The movement was a Christocentric lay brotherhood with evangelical poverty and a missionary thrust centred on the Bible. They wanted to follow Christ in this way, but this frightened the hierarchy of the Church because it was feared that they would snatch power and authority from the hierarchy. The movement was suppressed and condemned as heresy, although there was nothing unorthodox in their teachings. Their fault seemed to be that they claimed a certain autonomy of vocation.

Martin Luther rebelled against the medieval Church because he felt in his conscience that many of the things that were happening in the Church of his time were theologically, pastorally and spiritually damaging. The preaching of indulgences made people flee the penalty of sin and not sin itself, he said. It gave them a false sense of security with regard to their salvation. He wrote these things to his bishop as a member of the Church and he detailed this with his 95 theses on indulgence and penance. In his exposure of the theological weak-

nesses of the theory of indulgence, Luther offered a sensitive criticism of a Church practice which was not entirely undisputed at that time. The Church saw it as an attack on the power of the Church. This was in fact not the case. It was a far more important theological question, namely, justification, but it was pictured as challenge to the authority of the Church by the curia. Here was dissent based on faith, theology and pastoral spirituality. The whole debate, unfortunately, took a different turn. Even a rather conservative Church historian like Hubert Jedin calls the attitude of Rome in this case as complete neglect of pastoral and apostolic responsibility. The whole question is whether the Church took Luther's right to dissent seriously, a dissent which was based on sound theological reasoning. Luther was a critic but did the Church deal with him suitably? Was there real dialogue about what he really wanted to say?

Coming to the modern period, we have the suppression of the right to dissent theologically unleashed in the wake of the so-called Modernist Controversy. It was the suppression of all liberal, anti-Scholastic and historical-critical forms of thought in the Roman Catholic Church from 1890 to 1910. The leaders of this movement dissented from certain cultural features of the Catholic theology prevailing at that time such as: (1) mandatory neo-Thomism imposed on the Church (*Aeterni patris*), very well articulated by Pius X's *Pascendi*, that Catholic orthodoxy is inseparable from its scholastic expression;¹² (2) Integralism, a view prevailed in the Church at that time which said that the Catholic doctrinal system was a system

of doctrines so rigorously connected and linked with each other (as is the system of Aristotle and St. Thomas) that no single point could be detached from the others, since the light of truth that illumined each individual part was the same that illuminated the whole.¹³ This sort of deductive method was being challenged by history, experience and human dynamics, and the Modernists were asking questions from this perspective; (3) fundamentalism, both biblical and dogmatic, and the rejection of human experience which was condemned by the Church as subjectivism. This was challenged by the Modernists as unhistorical; (4) Ultramontanism, which extended absolute support to papal centralism, now armed with the dogmas of papal primacy and infallibility, to proceed decisively against any liberal thought. Today most of the teachings of the Modernists are accepted as part of Catholic theology, but their dissent at that time was efficiently and ruthlessly put down.¹⁴ Throughout history the institutional Church has been distinguished by a large measure of authoritarianism, and it has been monolithic and intransigent in its internal relationships, in quelling dissent, and in suppressing legitimate criticism. It has also shown intolerance towards the outside, towards worldviews and ideologies different from its own; it has also legitimized its power structures by using religion in order to maintain its privileged position in society. Dissent in the Church is not merely voicing a different opinion, but has deeper implications. In the final analysis, it is the manifestation of the perpetual tension that exists between community and individualism, charism

and legalism, service and power, Utopia and system, horizontal communication and bureaucracy, participation and centralism, orthopraxis and orthodoxy, creativity and repetition, celebration and ritualism, poverty and ostentation.¹⁵ This tension will always exist in the Church and therefore, there will be and should be dissent in the Church and this need not always be destructive. In order that it may not be destructive, dissent in the Church has to have a spirituality, a spirituality of following Jesus which will provide the right context for legitimate dissent.¹⁶

3. The Quest for Truth in the Church

Although the Gospel says that the ‘truth will make you free’ (Jn 7:32), there have been many victims of truth in the history of the Church. The truth that makes us free is the truth about God’s universal love expressed in Jesus Christ. This truth is a liberative truth and not an ideology for domination. But in the history of the Church truth has often been used as an ideology for domination.

‘Avoid heresy’ (Tit 3:10), Paul admonishes Titus, and the Church has ever since tried to do this with whatever means it could. But the same Paul had also said: ‘There must be factions among you’ (1 Cor 11:19), for the purpose of discernment. Truth and heresy are not new concepts in the Church. The fundamental dogmas of Christianity emerged from a heap of heresies and even today no one can claim to have presented an adequate account of the heresies and schisms in the early

Church. Nor have early Fathers and Councils ever claimed to have exhaustively presented the truth about Jesus Christ. What they did was to present the truth about Jesus Christ in Hellenistic categories. Surely there were many other philosophies existing in the world at that time which could also have offered adequate categories for the expression of the Christian faith. That the early Church found its way to the Greco-Roman world and made itself at home in its philosophy is no reason to say that the final word about Christian doctrines has been spoken. The expressions of the truth about Jesus Christ as formulated by the early Fathers and Councils were not final. But they could prevent the destruction of the faith by heresies for a period.

In the Middle Ages there arose again ‘popular’ heresies which though not strictly theological, like the ones in the early Church, nevertheless had something to do with the nature of the Church and its mission. They wanted to go back to the Scriptures which seemed to be sidelined by the Church’s ‘traditions’; they demanded less ritualism; they preached and practised evangelical poverty and itinerant preaching; they emphasized equality in the Church. There surely were aberrations and elements contrary to the Gospel in the teachings of some of these heretics. But all of them called for a return of the Church to the truth of the Gospel. However, the Church, with the help of the secular arm, took up the task of suppressing these heresies. But they did not die down. When the Catharists and the Waldensians were suppressed there emerged the Spiritual Franciscans,

Béghards and Béguines, Fraticelli, Wycliff, Huss, Savonarola, and many others; and the Church reacted with more repression. Was this enterprise of suppression of heresies with torture and burning alive a Christian enterprise? Even today’s moderate historical judgment would say that it represents a very disturbing episode in the history of the Church and that it was totally unworthy of the Gospel.

The Protestants who affirmed the ‘freedom of the Christian’ were not far behind in this. We have for example the brutal persecution of the Anabaptists and other dissenters which arose alongside the Churches of the Reformation. The Anabaptists with their humanist, biblicist and mystical streams of doctrines challenged many ideas of the Reformers themselves, thus being called the Radical Reformers, the Left Wing of the Reformation, Non-Conformists etc. They challenged the key concept of the Reformers, justification, the doctrine of baptism, their social morality etc. Their introduction of rebaptism was condemned particularly severely and they were persecuted and executed *en masse*. The mainline Protestant Churches, too, like their Catholic counterparts, believed that their own doctrinal position are true and any deviation is always a falsehood.

The concept of holy war or just war was yet another repressive measure advocated by Christianity in defence of the truth. Augustine had claimed that the maintenance of the moral order and the punishment of evildoers comprise an acceptable war aim, that it was morally justifiable to put down heretics and over-

come pagan peoples by means of force provided that the intention was pure. In the Christendom of the medieval times, the enemies of God were the enemies of the empire. Christians had the duty to defend God's Kingdom and of enabling it to prevail. Thus, the identification of the state with the moral good and the marking of outsiders as enemies of God produced the moral justification for war. One of the results of this pernicious doctrine were the Crusades. Christendom ruled by the pope and the emperor identified itself with the Kingdom of God and defended its rights with the sword, in the name of God, and extirpated unbelievers. Only the one truth of Christendom had a right. Deviant individuals were not tolerated within it, and the government wielded the sword within and without with the Church's approval. In the name of the one truth, there was little or no respect for the just concern of an opponent to defend his individual belief, conviction, culture, and territory. It took centuries for the second Vatican Council to rectify this and say: "This Vatican Synod declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power" (*Dignitatis Humanae* 2). The Council reversed the accepted Catholic teaching which gave freedom only to the truth and not to persons, claiming that error had no rights. The conquest of Saxony by Charlemagne, the 'discovery' and invasion of Latin America, and even the colonization and Christianization of Africa are at times justified by taking recourse to the theory of just war.

That this concern for truth has not only theological but also political causes gives it a dubious credibility. The birth of formal orthodoxy in the early Church was simultaneous with the formation of the Christian empire which needed political and religious unity. The quest for unity of faith and of the Church was often prompted by other considerations. Peace within the Church was decisive for the maintenance of good order within the empire; so it became a matter for the emperor and the empire to maintain peace in the Church. The Ecumenical Council became a judicial functionary of the emperor instead of the expression of collegiality in the Church, the emperor himself convoking it throughout the first millennium. Emperors would also, without much difficulty, switch between 'true' faiths. This same attitude was now carried over into the second millennium with the formation of Christendom. Church and state constituted one unity. Heresy threatened both the Church and the state, and hence a common crusade against it was justified. The science of theology flourishing in the universities tried to develop an organic, uniform formulation of the faith and it gave rise to dissent; and the Church, its juridicism and its institutions supported by the emerging science of canon law, dealt with doctrinal conflicts decisively. But the multiplication of conflicts made the safeguarding of the truth by the pope and the bishops alone increasingly difficult.¹⁷ Thus the setting up of institutions with juridical powers independent of the pastoral responsibility of the bishops began, with damaging consequences for the Church.

The institution of the Inquisition, with its sorry reputation for violence and its arrogant display of ecclesiastical power, amply recorded in Church history, deserves special mention. It has compromised the credibility of the Church considerably. The Inquisition properly so called came into being when in 1232 the emperor Frederick II issued an edict for the whole empire entrusting the hunting-out of heretics to state officials. Thereupon Gregory IX (pope from 1227), fearing Frederick's political ambitions, claimed this office for the Church and appointed papal inquisitors. In 1252 Innocent IV allowed the use of torture by his bull *Ad extirpanda*, to break the resistance of the accused. In 1542 Paul III established the Congregation of the Inquisition as the final court of appeal in trials for heresy, giving it enormous powers; it was reorganized by Sixtus V in 1588. Once the Protestant challenge ceased, the Inquisition concentrated on social anomalies like witchcraft, or on internal enemies like dissenting movements such as Jansenism. The French Revolution and the accompanying turmoil violently shook European society as a whole, and the papacy in particular. It resulted in the 'Restoration' whose dominant value was submission to authority without question. Pope Gregory XVI's programmatic encyclical *Mirari vos* of 1832 said that the Church must set aside the *indulgentiam benignitatis* and by virtue of its divine authority *virga compescere*. Increasing attention to the doctrinal dimension of the life of the Church, attention to the details in which the faith was formulated and an extension of the scope of doctrinal decisions

binding in faith etc., made the Inquisition and the papacy move from the role of guardians of the deposit of faith and orthodoxy to that of definers of faith and doctrine; from the sphere of discipline to the sphere of doctrine. The First Vatican Council cemented this with its theology of revelation and the dogmas of papal primacy and infallibility. It presented revelation as a body of truth abstracted from the historical process B a ready-made truth; Catholics had the option either of accepting this position or of falling into error. The reaction to Modernism and other liberal movements in the first half of the twentieth century, the rabid fervour with which error and those in error were persecuted with secret and arbitrary trials, denunciations, ruining of individuals and their reputation, suppression of academic freedom etc. proved that the Church was ready to safeguard the truth of its doctrines at any cost. It was Pope Pius X, well known for his anti-Modernism purge, who in 1908, changed the title of the Congregation of the Inquisition into the Holy Office, and Paul VI in 1965 gave it the title Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The recent actions of this important organ of the Roman Curia, which has changed its name several times, but not its basic nature, have shown that the "reforms" it has undergone have not been adequate. Giuseppe Alberigo has pointed out the following inadequacies in the functioning of this doctrinal watchdog of the Catholic Church: "*Ecclesiologically inadequate*, in that it deputes questions of safeguarding orthodoxy to a body distinct from and isolated from the people of God and from

those responsible for pastoral care; *theologically inadequate*, in that it makes reference to an abstract and ideologized acceptance of the deposit of faith to the detriment of its pastoral nature and multiform riches; *historically inadequate*, because it is still strictly bound to models of ideological conformism which the modern world has superseded.”¹⁸ Its present head, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, seems to confirm this assessment in his famous interview with Vittorio Messori which later on appeared in book form under the title *Conversation on the Faith*. In it he gives clear expression to his understanding of orthodoxy and truth in the Catholic Church which he seems to identify with authentic Catholic teaching, and which he is called upon to defend.

Many other examples can be pointed out to show that freedom has been and is still being suppressed in the Church in many ways, through its violation of fundamental human rights, silencing of persons, excommunications, legal rigorism, denial of the right to academic freedom etc.; there is a wide gap between liberative theory and repressive practice in the Church.¹⁹ Before I conclude this article, I would like to briefly point to the philosophical basis of this repressive practice in the Church, namely, its epistemology, and add a theological corrective to it. The Church’s epistemology claims a crude realism with regard to knowledge about the world and God; it also creates a dualism between reason and experience. This leads to an unhistorical concept of truth and revelation. What must be done, believed and hoped for are objectively given, to be taught to the people by the

hierarchy. This objective data of revelation allows no place for the subjective ways of the believer in making the faith his/her own. All subjective conditions for knowing and arriving at the truth are completely rejected. Therefore, there is the constant temptation to formulate an absolutist language and a uniform interpretation of texts. When reason is divorced from its anchor in experience, right doctrine becomes an absolute, other-worldly reality. The danger here is arbitrary reason with that of arbitrary power to decide truth and reality; power to stipulate the correct reading and interpretation of texts and to silence dissenters. A detached and abstract concept of reason is considered as the vehicle of eternal truth. Correctness of doctrine is all that is important, for, the ultimate question concerns the nature of reality whose interpretation is entrusted to ecclesiastical guardians. This gives the Church a source of power to control and demand obedience with repressive effects.

Against this we say that revelation and truth must be understood from a more modern perspective. Revelation makes no sense without the human being’s answer in faith. This response, that takes place in history as a definite experience, in a concrete language, also belongs to the content of revelation. We are not adding anything to revelation here but are interpreting revelation. Neither part is independently the whole of revelation. So a completely objective content of revelation outside of history is a questionable concept. The whole of revelation and faith exist in history. There is no zone that is immune from the storms of man’s history, no zone of pure

theology.²⁰ But the Spirit, who is constantly active in the Church and whose ‘strength is revealed in weakness’, preserves the identity of the Christian faith intact, and helps it to ‘remain in the truth’ through the vicissitudes of history.

But truth can be attained only from an historically situated perspective, that is, there is a perspectivism in every assertion of truth. We can possess it only in a historical, perspectivistic or relative way. Coming to the truth is a continual historical process. Truth is oriented towards universal consensus but is always sought within a constantly changing situation of question and answer. It is never found fully in my interpretation of reality but in going beyond my historical answer. I need also the other person’s truth (perspective) in order to come to the fullness of truth. The articulations of faith also have this perspectivism because they are also made in a historical situation of question and answer. Creative faithfulness to the Gospel is possible only in a changing and developing history. Therefore to suppress the freedom of the Christian in the name of truth is no service to the truth.

Yves Congar, while speaking about the identity of the Church says that the identity of or the truth about the Church consists in the fact that it is an organic whole, constituted by a network of relationships and interactions. “It is impossible to restrict oneself to *a single* criterion,” he says, “to ancient texts without the living magisterium, or to the living magisterium without the ancient texts, or to authority without the community or to the latter without the former, or to the apostolicity of the ministry without apostolicity of doctrine, or *vice versa*, or to the Roman Church separated from catholicity, or to the latter detached from the former . . . all these criteria together should ensure a living faithfulness and identity in the full historicity of our lives and our knowledge.”²¹ There is no other way in which legitimate freedom can be maintained in the Church. When one organ of the Church claims for itself all the ‘freedoms’ and all the other constituencies of the Church are mere beneficiaries of this freedom, there is no chance for the ‘message of freedom and liberation’ to be actualized in the Church and in the world.

Notes

1. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, New York: The Modern Library, no year, 268.
2. Indeed there has been an attempt to write such a history. The multivolume enterprise of Karlheinz Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*, Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowolt, begun in 1986 is the best example.
3. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Truth and Freedom,” *Communio*, 23 (Spring, 1996), 34.
4. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation’”, Vatican city, August 6, 1984. The text is taken from *Origins*, 14 (September 13, 1984), 194-204.
5. Rudolf Pesch, “Jesus a Free Man,” *Concilium*, (March, 1974), 58.
6. Leander Keck , “The Son Who Creates freedom,” *Concilium*, (March, 1974), 71-82.

7. For a concise but good presentation see Josef Blank, "The Concept of Power in the Church: New Testament Perspectives," *Concilium*, 197 (3/1988), 3-12.
8. As quoted by Peter Huizing and Knut Walf, "What does the 'Right to Dissent' Mean in the Church?," *Concilium*, 158 (8/1982), 6.
9. Incidentally, Pope Gregory XVI, a reactionary pope from the first half of the nineteenth century, in his encyclical letter *Mirari vos* (1832) condemned the freedom of conscience as a 'false and absurd maxim' and as 'madness'.
10. *Ibid.*, 3-12. Also see in the same volume, James Provost, "The Catholic Church and Dissent," pp. 13-18 for a definition of the term dissent and other related issues.
11. A controversy in the early Church regarding the validity of baptism given by heretics.
12. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 40 (1907), 636-637.
13. Gabriel Daly, "The Dissent of Theology: The Modernist Crisis," *Concilium*, 158 (8/1982), 55.
14. These ideas are taken from the above article, pp. 53-57.
15. Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, "The Importance of Organized Opposition Groups and their Rights in the Church," *Concilium*, 158 (8/1982), 89.
16. Herman Häring, "The Rights and Limits of Dissent," *Concilium*, 158 (8/1982), 95-107, here 105.
17. Giuseppe Alberigo, "Institutional Defence of Orthodoxy," *Concilium*, 192 (4/1987), 85-86.
18. *Ibid.*, 92-93.
19. Cf. the article by F.J. Laishley in three parts: "Repression and Liberation in the Church: I. An Anatomy of Repression;" "Repression and Liberation in the Church: II. An Anatomy of Liberation;" "Repression and Liberation in the Church: III. Theological Reflection," *Heythrop Journal*, XXIX (1988), 157-174; 329-342; 450-460.
20. Edward Schillebeeckx, "Infallibility of the Church's Office," *Concilium*, (March, 1973), 78.
21. Yves Congar, "Norms of Christian Allegiance and Identity," *Concilium*, (March 1973), 25.

Freedom and Liberation

Reflections on the Church's Vocation and Mission

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The quest for freedom and liberation is quite widespread in our country today. This is noticeable especially among the poor, the Dalits, the tribal people and women. They long to be liberated from oppressions of various kinds so that they can live in freedom and dignity. Besides this, there is the quest for inner freedom, for liberation from the emotional blocks which prevent people from reaching wholeness and peace. It is this quest that makes them go in for therapies of different kinds. Moreover, a large number of our people are engaged in the quest for spiritual liberation. That is why they flock to the so called god-men or frequent the meditation centres which are proliferating in India today.

The Church in India needs to redefine its mission and reshape its life so that it can effectively respond to the contemporary quest for freedom and liberation. In this paper, I shall contend that the Church's vocation is to be a community of radical freedom and that its mission is to work for the total liberation of humankind. Such an understanding of its vocation and mission will give the Church a new vitality and a new relevance in our country today.

The paper begins by clarifying the idea of freedom and liberation. It goes

on to develop some theological perspectives on the Church's vocation and mission. Then it examines the dimensions of freedom in the life of the Church and investigates the areas of liberation the Church should engage in.

1. Freedom and Liberation

1.1. Though freedom is a matter of daily experience, it is difficult to define it. One can perhaps understand it negatively as the absence of external force as well as internal necessity. Positively, it denotes the capacity for self-determination. Hence, a person is said to be free when he/she is not determined by internal compulsions or external pressures. He/she determines him/herself.

Freedom is basic to human existence. Only through the exercise of freedom can humans realize themselves and achieve their destiny. As Vatican II declares:

For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man be left "in the hand of his own counsel" so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to him. Hence, man's dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice. Such a

choice is personally motivated and prompted from within. It does not result from blind internal impulse nor from mere external pressure (GS 17).¹

As a created reality, human freedom is finite and fallible.² It can be used to make wrong choices – choices that do not help persons to realize themselves or to establish right relationships to God and other humans. Humans are essentially social. Only by relating to other humans can they really become what they are meant to be. This truth applies also to human freedom. It is only in the community of other humans that we experience and exercise true freedom. Besides, human freedom has been damaged by sin and stands in need of the healing grace of God. By giving his grace God does not cancel out or destroy what he did in creation. God's grace makes us an enhanced version of ourselves.³ It enables us to become more truly free. When the New Testament asserts that Christ has set us free it does not deny that God created all humans free. What it says is that Christ has healed and restored our freedom which was damaged by sin.

1.2. Such an understanding of freedom sheds light on liberation. Liberation is the removal of the obstacles to the full exercise of freedom.⁴ It involves all the processes which have as their goal the creation of the conditions necessary for the exercise of authentic freedom. It is not true to say that liberation produces human freedom. Liberation merely removes the obstacles to its exercise. "Indeed a liberation which does not take into account the personal freedom of those who fight for it is condemned in advance to defeat."⁵

There is often a tendency to view liberation rather negatively as the mere removal of the obstacles to the full exercise of freedom.⁶ But liberation can also be understood positively as an experience or a process which enhances, enriches our life. Thus, when someone says that the theological education he/she has received has been a liberating experience, he/she does not only mean that it has removed the obstacles to the full exercise of freedom. He/she also asserts that it has brought enrichment to his/her life. In fact, one can even think of liberation as a process that can lead to the fullness of life which is salvation. Liberation is thus a term which is quite rich in its meaning. Hence, it is wrong to reduce the work of liberation to a merely this-worldly project of socio-economic and political liberation.

Besides, the religious heritage of Asia helps us to understand liberation in a new way. As George Soares-Prabhu says:

But the word 'liberation' in Asia evokes specifically Asian resonances. With its profound religiosity which has found expression in its great "metacosmic soteriologies" (Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism), Asia, the "cradle of all the scriptural religions of the world", cannot possibly understand 'liberation' in merely socio-economic terms. The religious traditions of Asia (Buddhism and Hinduism in particular) claim to mediate 'liberation' (*moksha, vimmokha*) as an experience of unconditioned freedom resulting from an experiential realization of the radical relativity of the empirical world. Such a "perceiving of the emptiness of the transitory" (Dhammapada vii, 92) leads to the cessation of consum-

erism and greed (*alobha*), to a quenching of hatred and prejudice (*adosha*), and to the dispelling of utopian illusions engendered by the absolutization of finite values (*amoha*). It leads, that is, to a state of absolute freedom from psychological and sociological bondage, which finds its concrete, institutionalized expression in the Buddhist monk (*bhikku*) or Hindu wandering ascetic (*sannyasin*). Here we have the ‘classless individual’ who is totally free because he has ‘renounced’ (that is, come to realize the radical relativity of) everything that once held him in its grip. ‘Liberation’ for the Asian psyche is not only liberation from poverty, but equally the liberation which leads to that ‘poverty’ which is freedom from illusion, attachment and greed.⁷

It is this rich understanding of liberation that we need to appropriate for ourselves.

2. Theological Perspectives

2.1. Some years back a Vatican Instruction declared: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of freedom and a force of liberation.”⁸ What was said about the Gospel in fact applies to the whole Bible.

As the Old Testament bears witness, “Israel experiences God primarily as the liberator God”.⁹ This is why Israelites often speak of God as the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt, “out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:2). In fact, this may be the only way to name the God of the Bible since he refuses to reveal his name (see Ex. 3:13-14). As Mark Coleridge points out:

The God of the biblical story proves constantly to be a God who names

himself *in action*. Therefore, if you wish to know who this God is, then do not ask his name: look at what he does. This is a God who names himself in action. In that sense, the biblical story which recounts God’s action in time is nothing other than a naming of God; and in the liberation of slaves we see the seminal action of the God whose first name is Exodus.¹⁰

The Bible makes it clear that Israel is liberated from bondage in order to become Yahweh’s people (Ex 6:6-7). And as Yahweh’s liberated people Israel is expected to adopt a new way of life. George Soares-Prabhu observes:

Its shape as Yhwh’s people is spelled out in the great codes of the Bible, notably the Covenant Code in Ex. 21-23, the Holiness Code in Lev. 17-26 and the Code of Deuteronomy in Deut. 12-26. These make it clear that unlike neighbouring societies (the Canaanite city states or the great empires of Egypt, Babylon, or Assyria), the societal structures of Israel are not to be oppressive and exploitative, but just – indeed, marked by a special concern for the care of the needy and the protection of the powerless (the widow, the orphan and the refugee).¹¹

This clarifies the place and role of Law in Israel’s life. Its purpose is to preserve freedom, thus making Exodus an enduring experience. Coleridge explains: “This means that at the heart of the Bible there lies the mystery of a liberating obedience, with the biblical voice insisting: Obey this Law and you will come forth from your Egypt, whatever it may be.”¹²

2.2. According to the Gospels, the Kingdom of God was central to the life and ministry of Jesus.¹³ In a significant

study, Soares-Prabhu has shown that the Kingdom of God is Jesus' vision of a new society.¹⁴ He believes that the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is the revelation of God's offer of unconditional love to sinful humans. And if humans positively respond to God's offer of love, then a process of liberation begins. As Soares-Prabhu asserts:

When the revelation of God's love (the Kingdom) meets its appropriate response in man's trusting acceptance of this love (repentance), there begins a mighty movement of personal and societal liberation which sweeps through human history. The movement brings *freedom* inasmuch it liberates each individual from the inadequacies and obsessions that shackle him. It fosters fellowship, because it empowers free individuals to exercise their concern for each other in genuine community. And it leads on to *justice*, because it impels every true community to adopt the just societal structures which alone make freedom and fellowship possible. Freedom, fellowship and justice are thus the parameters of the Kingdom's thrust towards the total liberation of man. Together they spell out the significance of the Kingdom, and tell us what the Kingdom, in practice, means today.¹⁵

The mission of Jesus was thus directed to the liberation of humankind.

This is confirmed by the Gospel of Luke. Luke begins his narrative of the public ministry of Jesus with an account of the inaugural sermon which Jesus delivered in the synagogue of Nazareth (Lk 4:16-30). This sermon not only launches his ministry but also interprets its meaning. By deliberately changing

part of Isaiah 61: 1-2 and adding a phrase from Isaiah 58:6, Luke has produced a programmatic statement which explains the meaning of Jesus' mission and ministry:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (LK. 4: 18-19).

This text spells out Jesus' understanding of his mission. His mission is to evangelize, to proclaim the good news of liberation to the poor, to herald freedom to the captives, sight to the blind and liberty to the oppressed. In this way he is to inaugurate the time of salvation prefigured by the Jubilee year of Old Testament (Lev. 25: 8-17, 25-28).¹⁶

It is generally held by scholars that the inaugural sermon at Nazareth is a Lukian composition. But there is reason to believe that Luke's formulation reflects Jesus' own understanding of his mission.¹⁷

2.3. The first Christians were quite aware of the freedom to which they were called: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another" (Gal 5:13). They also knew that it was Christ who had liberated them: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1: see also Jn 8: 31-36). However, as Rudolf Pesch has asserted:

The New Testament concept of freedom, which proclaims that the Christian is not at the disposal of all the powers of this world, should be thought of not in a purely individual sense, but in a social and ecclesiological context. The Christian community, the Church, is above all the fellowship within which eschatological freedom is realized here and now in anticipation, the free fellowship of those who are no longer enslaved and subjected to the elements, the gods, of this world, to the powers of fate or to the law and the letter of the law, but who have been set free by Christ and are bound only to the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2), to love.¹⁸

Hence, the Church is meant to be a community of radical freedom.¹⁹

2.4. During the last fifty years there has developed in the Church a deeper understanding of its mission. For centuries the salvation of souls had been regarded as the purpose of mission. And this was to be achieved by the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, especially baptism. In the course time it became increasingly clear that God can and does save people even if they have not accepted the gospel and received baptism. So the purpose of mission was reformulated as the establishment of the Church in different places and among diverse peoples. Vatican II describes the Church’s mission as the “task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ” (AG 6; see also LG 17). But the Council is not fully satisfied with this description. Hence, it goes on to affirm that the Church has

received from Christ the mission to proclaim and inaugurate God’s Kingdom among all peoples (LG 5). Vatican II also maintains: “Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than a manifestation or epiphany of God’s will, and the fulfilment of that will in the world and in world history”(AG 9). The Council has thus taken the first steps towards a redefinition of the Church’s mission.

(The Third Synod of Bishops held in 1971 clearly saw that the total liberation of humankind is a constitutive dimension of the Church’s mission. Hence it declared:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.²⁰

Two things are worth noting here:

1. The bishops stress the fact that work for justice and liberation is so essential to evangelization that there can be no evangelization without it;
2. The bishops are quite sure of what they are asserting. Hence the phrase, “fully appear to us.”

Paul VI deals with the question of liberation at length.²¹ He begins by pointing out that it was primarily the Kingdom of God that Christ proclaimed and that the Church should do the same. He goes on to affirm that there are profound links between evangelization and human liberation.²² Hence, evangelization necessarily includes liberation. And yet, it would be wrong to reduce the Church’s evangelizing mission to a merely this-

worldly project of socio-economic and political liberation. The Church cannot forget the spiritual as well as the eternal dimension of evangelization. As the Pope expresses it:

Hence, when preaching liberation and associating herself with those who are working and suffering for it, the Church is certainly not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and dissociate herself from man's temporal problems. Nevertheless, she reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual vocation and refuses to replace the proclamation of the Kingdom by the proclamation of forms of human liberation; she even states that her contribution to liberation is incomplete if she neglects to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ.²³

John Paul II basically agrees with Paul VI, though he expresses himself quite differently.²⁴ He is convinced that "The proclamation and the establishment of God's Kingdom is the purpose of his (Jesus') mission".²⁵ And the Church has received the mission to work for the Kingdom. He is quite original in his explanation of what it means to work for the Kingdom: "Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms."²⁶ He believes that the Kingdom of God was realized and made present in Jesus Christ. Hence, his declaration "All forms of missionary activity are marked by an awareness that one is furthering human freedom by proclaiming Jesus Christ."²⁷

From what has been said so far, it is clear that the Church's mission is to

collaborate with God in his work for the establishment of his Kingdom. God is present and active in the world for the integral liberation of humankind. In order to collaborate with God, the Church needs to discern the presence and purposes of God in the events, needs and desires of people today (see *GS* 11). The contemporary quest for freedom and liberation "is one of the principal signs of the times which the Church has to examine and interpret in the light of the Gospel."²⁸ The Church also needs to respond this quest through effective action. As the Third Synod of Bishops, 1971, has pointed out:

The present situation of the world, seen in the light of faith, calls us back to the very essence of the Christian message, creating in us a deep awareness of its true meaning and of its urgent demands. The mission of preaching the Gospel dictates at the present time that we should dedicate ourselves to the liberation of man even in his present existence in this world.²⁹

While working for the integral liberation of humankind, the Church has to become a community of real freedom, since it is called to be an initial realization of the Kingdom of God (see *LG* 5). Speaking of the People of God, Vatican II says: "The heritage of this people are the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in his temple" (*LG* 9). It also teaches that the ministers of the Church are servants of their brothers and sisters and that their duty is to coordinate the activities of all while respecting their God-given dignity and freedom (see *LG* 18).

3. Dimensions of Freedom in the Church

In this section I wish to highlight the main dimensions of freedom in the life of Christians both as individuals and as a community.

3.1. Freedom from ‘God’: As we have seen, the Israelites experienced God primarily as the liberator God, as the one who sets people free. Jesus experienced God as *abba*. And he revealed to us the God of unconditional love, who makes his sun shine both on the good and the bad alike. Faith in the God of the Bible should naturally lead to an experience of great freedom.

Unfortunately, this is not what usually happens. The vast majority of the Christians I have come to know deeply are frightened of God. Their relationship to God is far from being a liberating one. Most of them picture God as a glorified police inspector or a cruel judge who is out to punish them. This image of the punishing God is often the result of their projecting on to God their experience of an overly strict parent.

Besides personal experience, socio-cultural factors exert an influence on the way people picture God. In a society where master-slave relationship obtains people tend to think of God as the Supreme Master. In a society where the monarchical form of government exists God is looked upon as a great King. In a male-dominated society God is regarded as the highest ruling male, the most powerful Patriarch. Religion, too, has a negative impact on the way people imagine God. Speaking of the liturgy of the Church, Samuel Rayan observes:

Is it not remarkable that so many official prayers are addressed to ‘Almighty and everlasting God’? One could wish that the New Testament figure of God as the gentle Father, as Compassion, as Love came to the fore oftener.³⁰

According to Catholic tradition God is incomprehensible and ineffable. Human minds cannot grasp him, nor can human language adequately express him. Hinduism, too, thinks of the Ultimate as being without name and form – *Nirguna Brahman*. If God is thus beyond our thoughts and words, we have to learn to think of him, to imagine him in ways that are liberative and life-giving. The Old Testament idea of the liberating God and the New Testament image of the unconditionally loving Parent can be of great help to people in their efforts to form ideas/images of God that are not oppressive or terrifying. The catechesis, the preaching and the pastoral care of the Church should enable people to free themselves of negative ideas/images of God and to form positive, liberative ideas/pictures of him.

3.2. Freedom from Lords: In the New Testament we find an egalitarian understanding of the ecclesial community. The Church is looked upon as “a new community in Jesus Christ, a community in which the oppositions which prevail in the rest of the society are removed”.³¹ This is particularly true of the opposition between master and slave. Jesus is quite radical in the rejection of domination. As Mark records it:

So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their

rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:42-45)

This is a gospel tradition which the other evangelists too have preserved (see Mt. 20: 25-28; Lk 22: 24-27). As E. Schillebeeckx observes:

According to Paul and the whole of the New Testament, at least within the Christian communities of believers, relationships involving subjection are no longer to prevail. We find this principle throughout the New Testament, and it was also to determine strongly the New Testament view of ministry. This early Christian egalitarian ecclesiology in no way excludes leadership and authority; but in that case, authority must be filled with the Spirit, from which no Christian, man or woman, is excluded in principle on the basis of the baptism of the Spirit.³²

In the course of time, the ministerial understanding of leadership gave way to a hierarchical understanding. The leaders of the Church were said to have "sacred power" because of which they were thought to be superior to the ordinary believers. This led to the rejection of the egalitarian ecclesiology of the New Testament. In a draft prepared for Vatican I we read:

But the Church of Christ is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the same rights. It is a society of unequals, not only because among the faithful some are clerics and some

are laymen, but particularly because there is in the Church the power from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach, and govern, and to others not.³³

Besides, authority in the Church began to be conceived closely on the pattern of jurisdiction in the secular state. In fact, according to the definition of Vatican I, the pope has "the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church."³⁴ While discussing colonial and colonized theology Samuel Rayan remarks:

The Church, assimilated to imperial systems, has come to love a little show of pomp and power. A great deal of traditional clerical theology is about hierarchical power and about minutiae of rituals, titles, procedure and precedence, and not about You-are-my-friends, or You-are-the-branches, You-are-all brothers/sisters type of relationship within the community!³⁵

As a result, the leaders of the Church thought of themselves as lords and masters of the ordinary faithful and oppressed them in manifold ways. A radical rethinking of the nature of leadership and profound changes in the exercise of authority in the Church are necessary if the bulk of the people of God are to experience genuine freedom.³⁶ Leadership in the Church is Spirit-filled ministry, and not an exercise of power and domination over the faithful. And leaders have to show respect for the God-given dignity and freedom of their brothers and sisters (see *LG* 18). Only those Christians who have shown themselves to be mature and committed disciples of the Lord should be chosen to be ministers, as they are likely to

perform their ministry in the spirit of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. If this is done, the people of God will be liberated from the many lords of today and experience genuine freedom in the Church.

3.3. Freedom from Sin: It is part of our faith that Christian believers obtain freedom from sin (see Rm. 6:18-23; Jn. 8:31-36). As John L. McKenzie explains:

Freedom from sin is not only freedom from guilt and punishment for past sins, but also freedom from the bondage to concupiscence which impels men to sin; through Christ man is delivered from slavery to his own desires (Rm. 7:3-25).³⁷

All this may be true. Still, most Christians do not experience freedom from sin. There are probably many reasons for this. One of them surely is the undue importance given to sin in Christian life and Christian thought. The preaching and the catechesis of the Church lay too much stress on sin and the avoidance of sin. It would seem that the primary task of the Christian is to avoid sin. But this is not the perspective of the Bible. The Bible is not directly concerned with sin. It is true that the word, sin, occurs on almost every page of the Bible. Still, the approach is different. The OT is centred on the Exodus and the Covenant, that is, on God's liberating activity through which he makes Israel his people. Sin is dealt with indirectly, as Israel's failure to live according to the demands of the Covenant. In the NT Jesus' life and ministry is centred on the Kingdom of God. He announces that the Kingdom of God is at hand, that is, that God is savingly

present and active among us. The Apostles, however, proclaimed salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Once again, sin is referred to indirectly as that condition from which Jesus saves. Hence, a Christian should think and speak of sin only in the context of God's forgiving love. Otherwise, sin would become an oppressive reality.

Besides, the vocation of a Christian is not primarily to avoid sin but to follow Christ, to work for the establishment of God's Kingdom and live by the values of the gospel. As a popular hymn has it:

To follow the Lord and find freedom,
To love as He loved and bring peace,
To spend our lifetime for his Kingdom,
To want it to grow and increase.

3.4. Freedom from Law: It is necessary for the Church to have laws which define its values and objectives and the means to achieve them. In fact, a large body of people like the Church cannot function smoothly without laws. And yet, laws may go against the freedom of believers. As J. Hawkins has pointed out: "For the majority of the members of the Church, however, canon law represents the experience or threat of penalty or oppression."³⁸

One of the main reasons for this is the fact that the ordinary faithful has little say in the law-making process of the Church. As citizens of democratic countries they exert considerable influence on the governance of their states. Besides, Vatican II has powerfully affirmed the equality of all the members of the Church (see *LG* 32). The Council also spoke of the supernatural sense of faith

which characterises the people of God as a whole:

For, by this sense of faith which is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, God's People accepts not the word of men but the very Word of God (cf. 1 Th. 2:13). It clings without fail to the faith once delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3), penetrates it more deeply by accurate insights, and applies it more thoroughly to life. All this it does under the lead of a sacred teaching authority to which it loyally defers (*LG* 12).

Commenting on this text L. Örsy states:

That is, the community has the capacity to come to correct insights into the word of God; to insights which then lead them to a thorough application of the same Word to life. In theological terms, the Council affirms that the assistance of the Spirit is given to the people of God, all of them, bishops and laity together, to discover Christian values and find the ways and means to reach out for them. This means obviously that there is a power (*dynamis* in biblical speech) in the Christian community to create good laws which can help to usher in the Kingdom.³⁹

The leaders of the Church need to show greater respect for the dignity of all the faithful and ensure their active participation in the law-making process of the Church.

Equally important is to have greater appreciation for the immense diversity that exists in different parts of the world and not to impose a uniform code of law on the different local churches of the world. In a speech at the Synod of Bishops, 1974, Cardinal Picachy asserted:

Now it is clear that human cultures, religious traditions, circumstances of life, along with men's needs and expectations, differ from one place to another. Through this diversity the Spirit is manifested in different ways. Hence, pluriformity in the life of local churches is by all means to be encouraged and fostered. Pluriformity is likewise desirable in styles of evangelisation, forms of ministry, ecclesiastical law and administration, religious life and its organisation as well as in the promotion of a truly creative liturgy.⁴⁰

It is worth recalling that Paul VI, faced with widely varying situations in the world, did not feel competent to put forward a solution which has a universal validity. He asked the different Christian communities to find solutions to the problems of their people.⁴¹ Something similar should be done in enacting laws which are relevant to the concrete situations of various local churches.

It is also necessary to develop a healthy Christian attitude to law. All laws are meant to promote the welfare of human beings. "The Sabbath was made for humankind" (Mk. 2:28). Or as Paul declares: "For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Gal. 5:14). If love for one another is the characteristic mark of a disciple of Jesus (Jn 13:35), everything in the Church including its laws should foster such love.

3.5. Freedom from Dogma: According to contemporary Catholic theology, a dogma is a divinely revealed truth which has been proclaimed as such by the infallible teaching authority of the Church and hence is binding now and forever on all the faithful.⁴² It is only in

the last hundred years or so that the term dogma has acquired this meaning.

It is the binding nature of dogma that causes problem. When appropriate authorities define a dogma what are the faithful obliged to do? Are they merely required to accept a formulation, a set of words? That would be sheer formalism. Or are they obliged to internalize the dogma – to believe interiorly what the dogma means. That would be doing violence to the conscience of the faithful. As G. O'Collins succinctly puts it:

In the technical definition of dogma the phrase 'binding on all the faithful' either says too little or it says too much. It says too little, if it concerns no more than external regulations of language. It says too much, if it implies that dogmas can and should exercise a normative control over the inner beliefs of both Christians in general and Church leaders and teachers in particular. But in both cases liberty is threatened.⁴³

Before I discuss the problem of the binding nature of dogma, it may be useful to situate dogma in the larger context of Christian faith. Christian faith is primarily a personal relationship to God. It is more like love than knowledge. It is an act by which a person entrusts his/her whole self to God in response to God's self-revelation (*DV5*). Obviously there is an intellectual dimension to faith as it involves the acceptance of the Christian message. Hence, one can speak of the content of faith, a content "to which faith is linked and by which its finds its bearings".⁴⁴ But that is secondary.

The ultimate norm of faith is not dogma, but the living God. And to make

dogmatic formulation the ultimate norm of faith is nothing short of idolatry. Moreover, no dogma can be as important as inspired Scripture. In fact, "All dogmas need to be checked against the record of foundational revelation which the Bible provides."⁴⁵

In this connection, it is instructive to recall the ministry of Jesus. Jesus announced the advent of the Kingdom of God and called people to repentance. He did not ask them to believe in a set of propositions. Jesus invited people to follow him freely. It was quite clear to him that some of them would choose not to follow him. Hence the question: "Will you also go away?" Jesus of the gospels invited, challenged and even threatened people, but never forced them to follow him. Moreover, for Jesus faith was not intellectual conviction but commitment and action. As Samuel Rayan writes:

Traditionally, in the patristic and Scholastic West, faith has been understood as an intellectual conviction. Hence the concern with dogmas and their elaboration, and the killing of people whose terminology differed from that of the people in power. Faith was reduced to correct words and creeds, to neat orthodoxy. But the truth is that saving faith consists in orthopraxis, in right living, in doing God's will. Jesus said, "It is not everyone who calls me, 'Lord, Lord,' who will enter in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father".⁴⁶

Rayan adduces a number of texts to show that Jesus understands faith as orthopraxis.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, the Church has adopted an approach which is quite different from that of Jesus. Speaking of the Church's teaching function, Avery Dulles says:

The Church is therefore a unique type of school – one in which the teachers have the power to impose their doctrine with juridical and spiritual sanctions. Thus teaching is juridicized and institutionalized.⁴⁸

One wonders if the biblical idea of bearing witness to Christ and his message would not be more effective. In any case, unless the transforming power of the gospel at work in the lives of the faithful is clearly visible, the Church's preaching will not be credible.

In the light of what has been said so far, how can we understand the 'binding' nature of dogma? In and through dogmas our predecessors in faith are speaking to us. We ought to listen to them. In the Judaeo-Christian, divine revelation is often mediated through social and ecclesiastical channels. The formulation of dogma may be regarded as one such channel. Besides, in and through dogmas God may be speaking to me here and now. To quote O'Collins once again:

Where a specific dogma renews an insight, communicates a message or evokes a religious feeling, it 'binds' me to follow that insight, accept that message or act on that religious feeling. In brief, dogmas oblige where they actually prove to be revealing.⁴⁹

But there is no way of making sure that this will always happen. Hence, many dogmas have no influence whatever on the life of the faithful.

3.6. Freedom from Mammon: The word 'mammon' is probably not of Greek but of Chaldaic origin.⁵⁰ Etymologically, it comes from *aman*, meaning that in which one trusts. In Aramaic 'mamona' denotes anything of cash value, property or fortune. Originally, it had no negative connotation. And yet, Jesus emphatically declares:

No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (mammon) (Mt. 6:24).

Commenting on this passage C. H. Grundmann says:

Jesus does not fight mammon, he fights against the hold mammon has on humans. There he makes his point. And that mammon can get hold over people at all is not by force of itself but by man's not putting all trust in God alone but consciously or unconsciously in possessions, in kind, kin, cash and knowledge. Things meant to be at the disposal and service of people have attained a power over them which has made them become slaves of their own artefacts.⁵¹

Unfortunately, individual Christians as well as the institutional Church as a whole have often been enslaved by mammon. It is true that the Church needs material resources to fulfil her mission in the world. But are there no limits to what she may legitimately possess? Canon Law affirms the Church's right to own temporal goods:

The Catholic Church has the inherent right, independently of any secular power,

to acquire, retain, administer and alienate temporal goods, in pursuit of its proper objectives. (Canon 1254)

Commenting on this canon, L. Örsy states:

The meaning of this “inherent right” could not be determined without taking into account the “inherent duty” not to accumulate wealth to the detriment of the common good. Moral theology alone is capable of giving some norms as to how the right balance should be achieved, a balance fitting for a community which professes that the poor are blessed. Had this right been interpreted always theologically, the excessive accumulation of wealth by the Church might not have taken place, and in consequence the rightful resentment of the poor against the Church and the eventual expropriations might not have followed, as they did at the time of the Reformation, or the French revolution, or the reunification of Italy.⁵²

Even today, the Church seems to rely too much on material resources. That is probably why there is an accumulation of wealth by different organs of the institutional Church. In this connection it is good to recall the wise words of Vatican II, “Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and under oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path in communicating to men the fruits of salvation.” (LG 8).

It is important for Christian believers to become aware of the enslaving hold that wealth has on them. Today global capitalism has made money or the growth of money into a god which is

devoutly worshipped by millions the world over. Hence, Christians need to realize that like the rest of humanity they too are placed before a radical choice: God or mammon.⁵³ To choose God is to opt for life in freedom.

In this section I have dealt with some of the important dimensions of freedom in the Church. I have mainly spoken of “freedom from”. It is also necessary to treat of “freedom for”. Christian freedom is for love, community, creativity etc. However, what is extremely important is to enable all believers to discover “the nature of freedom in its most profound sense . . . as love, as the capacity for self-communication, as the spontaneous impulse to minister and not be ministered to, as the outgoing will to communion with the others.”⁵⁴

4. Areas of Liberation

There are many areas where our people are in need of liberation. From among these, I wish to single out some to which the Church should give special attention.

4.1. The Church and the Poor: Even after 50 years of Independence, we have not been able to remove poverty from the face of India. Millions of our people are still utterly poor. In fact, there is sufficient evidence available today to show that the policy of economic liberalisation which India adopted in 1991 has led to an increase in poverty.⁵⁵ Equally evident is the alarming eclipse of social consciousness among the rich and the powerful. As Felix Wilfred has noted:

The decades between 70's and 90's will be remembered for the vibrant sense of social justice. Since the 90's with the advent of globalisation and new economic policies in the country, for the upper castes and classes – who are also mostly the policy makers – social justice has become the bad dream of yester-years. This anaesthetising of social consciousness and responsibility is the worst thing that has happened. For it strikes at the very root of our capacity to envision a different order of things, a different kind of society.⁵⁶

Hence, it is important for the Church to take sides with the poor and work for their liberation. Ever since Vatican II there has been a lot of talk about preferential option for the poor. But only a small minority of Catholics – priests, religious and lay people – are actually involved in working with the poor. The vast majority of the faithful, both clerical and lay, do not really bother about the poor. What Paul VI wrote some 28 years back is valid even today:

Let each one examine himself, to see what he has done up to now, and what he ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action.⁵⁷

4.2. The Church and the Oppressed: One of the significant signs of the times is the upsurge of the Dalits, the tribal people and women. They are fighting for their dignity and freedom. They are refusing to be treated like door-mats. Obviously, there is a backlash.

The atrocities against them are on the increase. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Dalits are slaughtered every year. The tribal people are also being increasingly discriminated against. Crimes against women like rape, murder etc. are also growing rapidly.

It is therefore imperative that the Church gets actively involved in the movement for the liberation of the Dalits, the tribal people and women in our country. As we Christians are a small minority in India, we cannot contribute much to the liberation of the oppressed unless we co-operate with all those who are working for the same cause. The Church should take the initiative to start a mass movement of all people of good will for the strict enforcement of the Fundamental Rights and the effective implementation of the Directive Principles of State Policy spelt out in the *Constitution of India*. The Founding Fathers of the Republic dreamed of a just and egalitarian society in which all the citizens would be able to live in freedom. They wanted the State to establish and protect "a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life."⁵⁸ They were for the equality of all before law and against discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.⁵⁹ They were particularly concerned about the welfare of the weaker sections of society. Hence, they enacted the following:

The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes,

and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.⁶⁰

With its vast network of institutions spread all over the country and a large number of committed and well-trained personnel at its disposal, the Church in India should be able to persuade people of all faiths and secular ideologies to join together in a mass movement for the creation of a just society based on the Constitution and the liberation of all the oppressed, especially the Dalits, the tribal people and women.

4.3. The Church and Individualism: With the rapid spread of capitalism in our country more and more people are imbibing such bourgeois values as blind competition, ruthless efficiency, self-interest, personal gain, craze for success and narrow individualism. Keen observers of the contemporary scene seem to think that global capitalism is deliberately spreading the ‘gospel’ of modern culture. According to Michael Amaladoss, the characteristics of this culture are:

A materialistic outlook on life and reality, a spirit of individualism and competition, an attitude of consumerism, an approach of autonomy in the name of science from ethical and religious control, profit-oriented commercial activity.⁶¹

James Patras believes that U. S. cultural imperialism is involved in the promotion of individualism. As he forcefully expresses it:

Cultural imperialism and the values it promotes played a major role in preventing exploited individuals from responding collectively to their deteriorating conditions. The symbols, images and ideologies that have spread

to the third world are major obstacles to the conversion of class exploitation and growing immiseration into class conscious bases for collective action. The great victory of imperialism is not only the material profits, but its conquest of the inner space of consciousness of the oppressed directly through the mass media and indirectly through the capture (or surrender) of its intellectual and political class. Insofar as a revival of mass revolutionary politics is possible, it must begin with open warfare not only with the conditions of exploitation but with the culture that subjects its victims.⁶²

What we need to realise is that capitalism and the culture it fosters are downright individualistic. Today global capitalism is systematically using the media to desensitise the public and thereby to prevent the rise of revolutionary consciousness based on the sense of solidarity of the oppressed.

It is here that the Church has to intervene in order to counteract the culture of individualism by promoting a ‘civilisation of love’ and a ‘culture of solidarity’. The Church should make use of her educational institutions, social centres and the mass media to bring home to people the harmful consequences of a culture of individualism and to make them aware that we humans belong together and that our destinies are intertwined. Unfortunately, many Catholic schools, colleges and other Church-related institutions are under the influence of the Multinationals and are spreading the individualistic culture of global capitalism. If effective steps are not immediately taken to liberate these institutions from this pernicious influence we shall one day wake up to realise that

we have done a disservice to the people of India. For just as in the heyday of colonialism our educational institutions consciously or unconsciously collaborated with the colonisers, so too in this era of globalisation we will be making a similar mistake by promoting the cause of global capital.⁶³

By way of conclusion I would like to make two observations:

1. While speaking about the Church's mission of liberation we need to keep in mind that the Church cannot in fact liberate people. It can only attempt to create conditions for people to liberate themselves. Hence, the mission of the Church is to facilitate the process by which people free themselves.

2. Work for liberation is an area where interreligious collaboration is possible. It would seem that all the religions of India\Asia share a common concern for liberation (*vimukti, moksha, nirvana*) Hence, the suggestion which Samuel Rayan makes is eminently practical:

The best way, then, for religions to grow and purify themselves, the fin-

est way for them to break out of their narrow prisons and encounter one another is (a) to collaborate in the transformation of society, in the work of building a new earth, a classless society, the family of God on this earth, a community of friends in which faith, prayer, (the Eucharistic) bread and all productive resources are shared blessing and common responsibility; (b) to struggle together against all that degrades the human, hurts human dignity, alienates us from ourselves, from one another and from the earth, and obstructs the coming of a fresh future; and (c) to celebrate together the strivings, the struggles and the victories and liberations however small, however fragmentary.⁶⁴

Such collaboration will certainly promote communal harmony and national integration.

At a time in human history when the quest for freedom and liberation is so powerful and so widespread it is necessary for the Church positively to respond to this quest. Otherwise, there is a danger that the Church will become largely irrelevant to the life and concerns of humans today.

Notes

1. Unfortunately, the English versions of the Documents of Vatican II and Papal Encyclicals do not use bias-free language. So, too, some of the authors quoted in this paper. Please do not hold me responsible for it.
2. See Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 1986, n. 30.
3. See J. Coventry, *The Theology of Faith*, Cork: Mercier Press, 1973, pp. 63-64.
4. See *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 31.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. G. Soares-Prabhu, *Inculcation, Liberation, Dialogue*, Pune: Jnanadeepa Vidyapeeth, 1984, p. 7.

8. CDF, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation”*, Mumbai: The Daughters of St. Paul, 1984, p. 5.
9. G. Soares-Prabhu, “The Kingdom of God: Jesus’ Vision of a New Society” in D. S. Amalorpavadas (ed.), *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1981, p. 595.
10. Mark Coleridge, “The Truth Will Set You Free: The Path from Egypt to Eden,” in *The Way* 35 (1995) 3, p. 183-184.
11. G. Soares-Prabhu, “Expanding the Horizon of Christian Mission,” in Augustine Kanjamala (ed.), *Paths of Mission in India Today*, Mumbai: St. Paul’s, 1997, p. 41.
12. Mark Coleridge, “The Truth Will Set You Free: The Path from Egypt to Eden,” p. 187.
13. G. Soares-Prabhu, “The Kingdom of God: Jesus’ Vision of a New Society”, p. 587.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 583-584.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 601.
16. See G. Soares-Prabhu, “Good News to the Poor: the Social Implications of the Message of Jesus,” in *Bibelbhāshyam* 4 (1978) 2, pp. 202-203.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
18. Rudolf Pesch, “The New Testament Foundations of a Democratic Form of Life in the Church,” in *Concilium* 3 (1971) 7, pp. 50-51.
19. G. Soares-Prabhu, “Radical Beginnings: The Jesus Community as the Archetype of the Church,” *Jeevadharma* 88 (1985), pp. 307-325.
20. *Justice in the World* n. 6.
21. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), 29-39.
22. *Ibid.*, 31.
23. *Ibid.*, 34.
24. See his *Redemptoris Missio*.
25. *Ibid.*, 13.
26. *Ibid.*, 15.
27. *Ibid.*, 39.
28. CDF, *On Theology of Liberation*, p.7.
29. *Justice in the World*, 35.
30. S. Rayan, “Decolonization of Theology,” in *Jnanadeepa* 1 (1998) 2, p. 147.
31. G. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 92-93.
32. E. Schillenbeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, London: SCM Press, 1985, p. 39.
33. NR, 369, as quoted by Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1974, p. 35.
34. See Neuner-Dupuis, 830.
35. S. Rayan, “Decolonization of Theology,” p. 147.
36. Speaking of the ministry of the pope, John Paul II wrote in *UT UNUM SINT*, 1995, n. 94: “This service of unity, rooted in the action of divine mercy, is entrusted within the college of bishops to one among those who have received from the Spirit the task, not of exercising power over the people – as the rulers of the gentiles and their great men do (cf. Mt. 20:25; Mk. 10:42) – but of leading them toward peaceful pastures.” I hope that all those who are entrusted with the ministry of leadership in the Church will take to heart these words of the pope.
37. John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968, p. 288.

38. J. Hawkins, "Freedom in the Church: Conflicting Horizons," in *The Way* 35 (1995) 3, p. 194.
39. L. Orsy, *Theology and Canon Law*, pp. 115-116.
40. As reported in *Word and Worship* 8 (Jan-Feb 1975), p. 127.
41. See *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 4.
42. Gerald O'Collins, *The Case Against Dogma*, New York: Paulist Press, 1974, p. 2.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
44. H. Fries and K. Rahner, *Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, p. 13.
45. O'Collins, *The Case against Dogma*, p. 40.
46. S. Rayan, "Decolonization of Theology," p. 148.
47. See Mt. 7:21-27; Lk. 6:46-49; 10:29-37; Jas 2:14-17; Mt. 25:31-46.
48. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, p. 35.
49. O'Collins, *The Case Against Dogma*, p. 53.
50. See C.H. Grundmann, "Mammon – Its Biblical Perspectives" in *Mission Studies* 25 (1995) 2, p. 157.
51. *Ibid.* p. 162.
52. L. Örsy, *Theology and Canon Law*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 114.
53. See U. Duchrow, "God or Mammon: Economies in Conflict," in *Mission Studies* 25/26 (1996) 1 and 2, pp. 32-67.
54. J. C. Murray, "Freedom, Authority, Community," in J. H. Provost (ed.), *Code, Community, Ministry*, Washington: Canon Law Society of America, 1982, p. 10.
55. See J. Chathanatt, "Bharat Vs India: The New Economic Policy and the Marginalized," in *VJTR* 61 (1997) 11, pp. 818-819.
56. Felix Wilfred, "Church's Commitment to the Poor in the Age of Globalization," in *VJTR* 62 (1998) 2, p. 80.
57. *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 48.
58. *Constitution of India*, art. 38.
59. *Ibid.*, art. 15.
60. *Ibid.*, art. 46.
61. Michael Amaladoss, "Globalisation from the Perspective of the Victims of History," in *Integral Liberation* 1 (1997) 3, p. 131.
62. J. Petras, "Cultural Imperialism in Late 20th Century" in *EPW*, 1994, p. 2073.
63. See F. Wilfred, "Church's Commitment to the Poor in the Age of Globalization," p. 89.
64. S. Rayan, "The Other and the Theologian" in S. Arokiasamy (ed.), *Responding to Communalism: The Task of Religions and Theology*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991, pp. 439-440.

Changing Perceptions of Indian Christians in Independent India

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When we speak of Indian Christians or of the Indian Church we are not referring to any homogeneous or monolithic community, as such a community does not exist. There are various Church bodies and denominational groups spread out over the length and breadth of the country and each of these has its own genesis, history and characteristics. Thus, when we refer to the Indian Christian Community it must be understood in a broad 'umbrella' sense and must be nuanced accordingly.

To put this brief survey of Indian Christian perceptions over the fifty-odd years of our independence in proper perspective, we must bear in mind that the history of Christianity in India spans almost two millennia. Christianity reached Indian shores centuries before it became the official religion of the Roman Empire under the Emperor Theodosius. According to tradition, it arrived through no less a person than the Apostle Thomas, one of Christ's immediate disciples.¹ Ancient Kerala welcomed Thomas long before it gifted Adi Shankara to India and the rest of the World. Even if the Thomas referred to is the later Thomas of Cana and not the Apostle Thomas, the later Thomas visited India in the Fourth Century of the Christian era.²

Before coming to the changing perceptions of Indian Christians in the post-Independence period, it is pertinent to ask what those perceptions were in the first place even before the advent of Independence. It is only against this backdrop that there can be any meaningful discussion of changes, if any, in those perceptions following Independence. Given that an Indian Christian community, however loosely defined and however widely scattered, was in existence long before Independence, what was their self-awareness within the total social context? There cannot but be a differentiated answer to the above question depending on which specific group of Christians one is referring to, with regard to which region and which social class and in respect of which historical period. Thus, we need to draw up a profile of Indian Christianity on the basis of historical, geographical, social, cultural, economic and political parameters before proceeding to answer the question posed above. It may be possible to do so only cursorily here.

A Hoary Tradition

Historically, Christianity made its appearance in India in the coastal areas of South-Western India much before it spread to other parts of the subconti-

ment. The long-established sea trade routes connecting Southern India with the ancient Middle East made it possible for early Christianity to travel to India from what was then Greater Syria. Hence, the term Syrian Christians used to designate those Christians of Kerala who have adhered to that branch of Christianity over the centuries. For the sake of convenience we shall refer to this branch of Christianity as Syrian Christianity to distinguish it from Latin Christianity which came to India a millennium and a half later with the arrival of the Portuguese.

Syrian Christianity came to India in a wholly peaceful manner along with trade. There was nothing aggressive or hegemonic about it. It was very oriental and acclimatized itself effortlessly on Indian soil. It had no connotations of cultural domination or colonial conquest. Thus, like Zoroashtrianism brought into India by the early Parsi refugees who landed near Sanjan many centuries later, it was fully absorbed into the social mainstream and was thoroughly indigenized. Hence, there is no trace of any so-called 'minority complex' among the Syrian Christians of Kerala. Add to this the fact that those who embraced Christianity hailed from the upper castes and were already high up on the social ladder. The case of the Latin Christians hailing from the lower castes is somewhat different.

If we speak of the self-awareness or self-perception of the Syrian Christians we therefore find that their sense of belonging within the overall social matrix and of efficacy in matters social, cultural, economic or political is of a very

high order. This has been the case for generations before the advent of Independence. It continues to be so in the post-independence period as well. If at all there have been any changing perceptions among Keralite Christians, these changes have nothing to do with being Christians but with being Keralites caught up in certain socio-economic problems that affect all sections of society across denominational boundaries. Prolonged commercial and cultural contact with visitors from overseas, be they Jew, Arab or European, has made for a cosmopolitan outlook that Christian and non-Christian Keralites share alike. Keralite Christians, like their non-Christian countrymen, have shown a remarkable alacrity in moving out of their home state to far-flung areas in India and abroad. Also, thanks to their high degree of literacy and attendant socio-political awareness, Keralite Christians have done well for themselves in various walks of life, be it commerce, the professions or politics.

Christianity in Kerala offers an apt illustration of a faith that has spread peaceably by way of a spiritual and cultural osmosis rather than by the twin agencies of flag and sword. Centuries before the rise of Christianity, Buddhism had made its peaceful way from India to West Asia in much the same way that Christianity from West Asia later came to India via the established trade routes. The peaceful cross-fertilization of cultures, economies and faiths has perennially been a source of enrichment of the common human heritage. It is neither desirable nor feasible to stymie this on-going process.

One of the ironies of history is that whereas Syrian Christianity had no adversarial relationship with any of the non-Christian creeds in the midst of which it had taken roots and thrived, it did have a serious confrontation with Western or Latin Christianity which made its appearance in Peninsular India with the arrival of European explorers, traders and missionaries in the Sixteenth Century. Thus, a ‘civilizational clash’ occurred not only between Christian and non-Christian but between Christian and Christian, specifically between oriental Christianity and its occidental variant. It is important to highlight this aspect of the development of Christianity in India as it has implications for the moulding of the perceptions of various denominations of Indian Christians vis-a-vis themselves and one another. It also has implications for how non-Christians could view their Christian compatriots in the light of the historical evolution of Christianity in India. When one considers the broad sweep of history, the post-Independence developments in Indian Christianity are but a brief footnote to a lengthy saga. While not discounting the latter, which we shall turn to presently, it cannot be forgotten that they can be properly assessed only against the background of the previous two millennia of the existence of Christianity in India.

Cleavages within the Church

Similar to the confrontation between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in Europe, minus the bloodshed, was that between Latin Christianity and Syrian Christianity in peninsular India. Much before the Protestant Reformation,

there had taken place the Great Schism³ between Rome, the seat of the Roman Catholic Church, and Constantinople, the seat of the Orthodox Church, the former headed by the Pope and the later by the patriarch. Various branches of the Orthodox family were to be found spread over several countries in Europe (particularly Eastern Europe and the Slavic countries) and the Middle East. Syrian Christianity in India had its affiliation with the Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and had achieved a fair measure of autonomy in its local functioning. The appearance of Latin Christianity was viewed as an intrusion and a threat. The latter was very Western and therefore very alien. Its rites were conducted in Latin and its affiliation was with the Roman Pope. The rites of the Syrian Christians were conducted in Syriac and Rome did not feature in their scheme of things. The Roman Catholic Church was highly centralized and structured according to a rigid hierarchy, whereas Orthodox Christianity in its various branches was highly decentralized. To add to it, Latin Christianity had political strings attached to it inasmuch as the King of Portugal had, by special agreement with the Vatican under the system of ‘Padroado’ or Patronage,⁴ a say in the appointment of Bishops to the Orient. In fact the Archbishop of Goa was designated Patriarch of the Indies, a title which could not be taken to kindly by the well-established Syrian Christian Church in India with its hoary traditions dating back to Apostolic times. Indeed, since Syrian Christianity had nothing to do with Western colonial expansion whereas Latin Christian missionaries

followed in the wake of the latter, the perceptions of Syrian Christians and of Latin Christians were bound to be divergent if not antagonistic. In areas controlled by the Portuguese, conversion usually meant the adoption of Western names and life-styles and a distancing from the local culture which was viewed as pagan and idolatrous. The introduction of the Inquisition⁵ also added to the sense of unease over the methods and modalities of Latin Christianity among peoples, Christian and non-Christian, who were accustomed to a pluralistic situation in which Orthodox, unorthodox and heterodox persuasions all had a place in the sun.

While the cleavage between Latin Christianity and Syrian Christianity does not surprise one in the light of the foregoing discussion, what is even more curious is the cleavage that appeared within Latin Christianity itself in the course of its sojourn in India. I am referring to the rivalry between parish areas set up under the Padroado regime on the one hand and those set up under the 'Propaganda' regime on the other. The latter was largely independent of the patronage of Portugal and was handled directly by the Vatican through its Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Congregation de Propaganda Fide*).⁶ With the decline of Portuguese power, the old Padroado dispensation fell into disuse and was eventually supplanted by Propaganda. The anti-clerical regime of the Marquis of Pombal⁷ also played a role in the downgrading of Padroado. Instances of Padroado-Propaganda rivalry can be cited from local history. In Mumbai, certain Churches came to be known as

Portuguese Churches thanks to the Padroado connection. In earlier times, and even into the first few years of Independence, Padroado and Propaganda Churches jealously guarded their respective jurisdictional spheres within which they performed their pastoral functions and exercised their priestly ministries. But with increasing social mobility and marriages across jurisdictional boundaries, the erstwhile Padroado-Propaganda demarcation became meaningless and had to be abandoned.

Mumbai, like any typical metropolis, has proved to be a melting pot for various denominations of Christians no less than for those of other communities. The most sizeable groups are those of the so-called East Indians, Goans, Mangaloreans and South Indians. While the East Indians speak Marathi, the Goans and Mangaloreans speak Konkani and the south Indians mainly Malayalam and Tamil. Though the more Westernized sections of Christians speak English, they by no means constitute the majority of the Christian population in the metropolis. Indeed on an all-India basis, Christians whose functional mother-tongue is English would probably constitute a minority not very different in size from that of similarly Westernized sections of other communities. However, this would need to be established statistically. What this goes to show is that Christians, like their non-Christian compatriots, have taken to English and to varying degrees of Westernization for purely functional and utilitarian purposes. Their religious affiliation has nothing to do with this. It is considerations of better educational opportunities and of brighter employment

prospects in India and abroad that motivate them to cultivate English and other technical and professional skills. For some to view this as proof that Christians are estranged from their motherland and have their sights trained on foreign lands where their true loyalties lie is absurd. For every Christian who migrates either temporarily or permanently, there are probably hundreds of non-Christians doing so, and this could be verified statistically.

Speaking of Westernized Christians in metropolitan areas like Mumbai, it could be said that in the wake of Independence the realization dawned on them that in some respects they had tended to keep aloof from local languages and cultural patterns. This was probably because English gave them greater vertical and horizontal socio-economic mobility and because their felt need to use the vernaculars was minimal. Some of them might also have harboured prejudices and stereotypes about other communities based on their own self-imposed aloofness and resultant ignorance. But the same could be said of other social groups as well, and religion had only a tangential role, if any, to play in these perceptions and misconceptions. In fact, even among Christians, there were mutually allergic attitudes often prevalent among East Indians, Goans, Mangaloreians and South Indians. And if one considers the entire gamut of the various denominations of Christians, there was often no love lost as among Catholics, Protestants, Jacobites, Marthomites and so on. The saving grace of a metropolitan area is that in course of time denominational boundaries become porous even if they

do not disappear altogether. The East Indians might still have their 'Koli' (Fisherfolk), 'Kunbi' (Peasant) and 'Samvedi' (upper-caste) groupings as also the Goans their 'Bamon' (Brahmin), 'Shardo' (Kshatriya) and 'Sudir' (Shudra) rankings. But in a melting-pot situation these distinctions have been largely diluted and no longer evoke the same primordial sentiment they did a couple of generations ago.

The Post-Independence Period

The question might be posed here as to how Christians took to the end of British rule in 1947 and of Portuguese rule in 1961 on the assumption that they were presumably more comfortable under a Christian government, albeit a foreign one, than under a mainly Hindu indigenous one. In reply it may be said that there is no evidence that the British government particularly favoured Indian Christians in the various branches of the imperial administration. And the Portuguese regime in Goa, whatever other heads of criticism one might level against it, was the first to enact a uniform civil code applying to all communities without discrimination - an example that still awaits emulation in India, fifty years after Independence. Indian Christians had for generations before Independence lived in peace and harmony with their non-Christian brethren whether in British-ruled India or Portuguese-ruled Goa. There was therefore no reason for them to be apprehensive about their future in Independent India especially since the Indian National Congress under Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru literally bent over backwards to reassure the minorities that they had noth-

ing to fear and everything to gain from Independence. Jesuit Father Jerome D'Souza, a member of the Constituent Assembly, expressed his full faith in the sense of fairplay of the Leaders of Independent India when he declined to demand any special reservations for Indian Christians in the new constitutional dispensation. Valerian Gracias, Mumbai's first Indian Catholic Archbishop and India's first Cardinal, was well known for the eloquence with which he exhorted his co-religionists to be loyal to their nation no less than to their Christian faith, as there was no contradiction between the two. The Government of Independent India conferred the coveted Padma Vibhushan on him for his role in fostering patriotism, civic duty and national integration.⁸

For several years after Independence, the Indian Government allowed foreign missionaries to come to India and operate freely despite opposition from powerful conservative elements in Hindu society. The right to profess, practise and propagate one's religion has been guaranteed in the Constitution, though the right to convert has been hotly contested. India and the Vatican have maintained full and cordial diplomatic relations uninterruptedly and the latter has shown the sensitivity to rapidly indigenise the Church in India by appointing sons and daughters of the soil to key positions and gradually phasing out the foreign, mainly European and American, personnel. In fact the wheel has come full circle inasmuch as India now sends out its own priests and nuns to work in foreign countries in Africa, Europe and the Americas. The foreigners who now flock to India are not only

tourists but religious seekers and pilgrims who end up in Hindu ashrams and seek guidance from non-Christian preceptors. And it is non-Christian gurus and godmen from India who have large followings in the nominally Christian western countries.

Despite occasional hiccups and pin-pricks, Christians in India have by and large not harboured apprehensions about their role and status in free India. India has welcomed two Popes on its soil, Paul VI and John Paul II, both of whom were received with great deference and warmth.⁹ The Catholic Church in Mumbai received full cooperation from the civic authorities when organizing two major Congresses, the Marian Congress and the Eucharistic congress.¹⁰ No restrictions have been placed on the working of Church bodies like the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, the Church of North India, the Church of South India and the National Council of Churches in India. Church-run institutions are for the most part able to function without let or hindrance, though in recent days, instances of attacks on Christian institutions, places of worship and personnel have escalated significantly. These incidents are deplorable indeed but do not affect Christians alone and must be seen within the context of an overall decline in law and order affecting all sections of society.

The Controversy over Conversions

The Niyogi Committee Report which dealt with missionary activity in India stirred up a hornets' nest in Church circles due to the negative view it took of the subject.¹¹ Similarly the proposed

but never enacted O.P. Tyagi Bill, as well as anti-conversion bills passed by the legislatures of Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, raised the hackles of the Indian Christian community as they were seen to run counter to the freedom of religion guaranteed under the Indian Constitution.¹² Oddly enough, these bills were termed 'Freedom of Religion' bills, ostensibly aimed at protecting all religions but in reality intended to curb conversions to Christianity. The sore point with the Church authorities was that State agencies were being empowered to judge the merits of a sovereign personal decision in matters spiritual, while the onus of proof that the decision to convert was a free one, without inducement or fraud, was placed on both the converted and the converter. It was as though every conversion involved potentially guilty parties who had somehow to prove their innocence if they were to escape punishment. This was not acceptable under a liberal democratic Constitution.

Since conversion has become a bone of contention, it needs to be discussed with some rigour. On the face of it, in a free and secular society, anyone is at liberty to change his faith back and forth and as often as he chooses. It is nobody else's business, least of all that of the State. This freedom goes along with that of thought, expression and association. Public order and morality are the only constraining bounds and a plethora of civil and criminal laws are in existence to deal with these. Just as political parties, firms and corporations are free to sell their wares, while voters, clients and consumers are equally free to accept or reject them, religious

groups have the right to advertise their beliefs, and people have the prerogative to adhere to the latter, ignore them, or repudiate them. Many Christians in Europe and America have embraced Hinduism, Islam, Taoism or Buddhism, or have chosen to remain agnostic. Nobody need take umbrage at this. An anti-conversion stance might betray jealousy, or a deep-seated prejudice, or a sense of insecurity, or even, an inferiority complex. This aspect needs to be looked into.

The plain truth of the matter is that in contemporary India the average Christian is least interested in converting others to his faith or in adding to the numbers of his Church group. Like his compatriots of other faith persuasions, he is pre-occupied with securing his livelihood and bettering his prospects. The very fact that after nearly two thousand years Christians number barely 3% of the population speaks for itself. Part of the problem of conversion is related to the traditional Church policy of 'evangelization' which means 'announcing the good news'. The good news was supposed to be the teaching that Jesus mandated his disciples to spread among all peoples. One way of understanding this mandate was that a deliberate effort must be made by Christ's followers to win over as many adherents as possible to the 'way of salvation'. This was the path followed by missionary Christianity during the period of European colonial expansion and conquest of new territories. This activist policy came to be associated with the political ascendancy of foreign powers and the loss of freedom of indigenous powers. It could not but cause resentment among local cultural and religious groups. Another way

of understanding Christ's mandate was that his followers must imitate his virtues by loving and serving their fellow-men even to the point of self-sacrifice. This would be the best way of announcing the good news of Jesus' message. This latter understanding has overtaken the earlier understanding among Christians in Independent India. Christianity in India could not fail to be influenced by the generally tolerant and pluralist Hindu culture and civilization that has prevailed for centuries. Developments in Christian theology over the past half century, and particularly after the Second Vatican Council, have opened up perspectives within the Church, making the latter less sectarian and exclusivist in its outlook and in its approach to other Faiths. The accent is now on Dialogue rather than on a self-righteous Monologue claiming to hold all the truth the world needs to know. The Church would be well-advised to follow the policy of 'nishkama karma' or of non-attachment to the fruits of its labour. It should not seek to expand its spiritual empire but rather bear humble witness, in truth and love, to Jesus' message and leave it to others to be convinced or not.

The accent in evangelization today is on serving the poorer and weaker sections of society regardless of caste or creed. Even this may be viewed with suspicion as a ploy to lure the more vulnerable into the Christian fold. But there is little or no evidence to show that this has been happening or that Church numbers have swelled as a result. Post-Independence Indian Christianity has set great store by 'inculturation', by which is meant a conscious and sustained effort to express Christian belief, worship

and praxis in indigenous cultural forms. This has been largely in response to the general perception that Christianity was a Western transplant and therefore alien to Indian culture. Today Mass is often said in the padmasan posture by priests wearing saffron shawls and using the local language. There is a fair sprinkling of aratis, kirtans and bhajans in Church services and excerpts from the sacred writings of non-Christian religions are often read at prayer meetings. Inter-faith prayer services are frequently held to promote a sense of oneness and universality among adherents of different faiths. Rather than Christianity converting Hinduism, Hinduism has domesticated Christianity in India.

An effort has also been made to develop Indian Christian art forms as seen in the paintings of Angelo da Fonseca, Jyoti Sahi and Sister Genevieve. The Bharat Natyam explorations by Francis Barboza and the Hindi bhajans of Charles Vaz have been generally well received. If one considers dialogue and inculturation in their widest ambit, one must mention the pioneering efforts put in by the likes of Fallon, Antoine, Bede Griffiths, Le Saux, Lederle, DeLeury, Valles, Shilananda and Sister Vandana, just to mention a few by way of illustration. Esteller did scholarly work on the Rig Veda and Bulcke on the Romayana. In more secular disciplines, Fuchs contributed much to Indian anthropology, Heras to Indian Proto-history and Santapau to Indian botany. An Indian Christian theology has been in the making over the past few decades with names like Samuel Ryan, Sebastian Kappen, George Soares-Prabhu and Francis X. D'Sa,

among several others, being associated with the venture. The cumulative effect of all these developments has been that Indian Christianity no longer wears an alien appearance despite its global linkages. Christians have been writing and publishing in a number of Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarathi, Konkani, Malayalam and Tamil. In Maharashtra, the Marathi Khristi Sahitya Sammelan has been organized along the lines of the earlier well-established Marathi Sahitya Sammelan. Indeed, Indian Christians might be expected to be even more alert and active in the print media considering that the first printing press¹³ as also some of the early grammars and dictionaries were introduced into India generations ago by Christian missionaries.

Five Phases in Post Independence Christianity

Looking back over the past half century one can discern roughly five broad phases in Church development in India. For convenience, these phases are being here sequenced decade wise, though they are not to be put in water tight chronological compartments as there is considerable overlap among them, which is only to be expected in complex historical processes. On this cautionary note, one can view the decade of the fifties as broadly indicative of the first phase, the sixties of the second, the seventies of the third the eighties of the fourth and the nineties of the fifth.

The first phase, which followed soon after Independence and was mostly a carry over from the pre-Inde-

pendence period, was concerned with the traditional evangelization, involving ‘spreading the good news’ and witnessing to the faith through educational and humanitarian activities. While the educational and humanitarian activities were appreciated and aroused no controversy, the ‘spreading the faith’ activities aroused resentment in certain influential quarters in newly independent, Hindu-majority India. Vigorous efforts were made to ban conversions, expel foreign missionaries and re-convert neo-Christians to Hinduism. The experiences of the first phase led the Church in India to do some introspection and to adapt its policies and perspectives to the changed scenario in order to avoid confrontation with the majority community, a confrontation that would be both futile and detrimental to the interests of the Indian Christian community itself. Thus, in the second phase, the emphasis was on indigenisation of the Church, replacing foreign personnel with sons of the soil in a progressive manner.

In the immediate wake of independence, the government of India magnanimously offered Indian citizenship to a number of foreign missionaries who had put in long years in the country of their adoption and many of whom had contributed significantly to Indian society through their scholarship or social service in various fields. Entry visas continued to be issued to foreign missionaries after Independence, but government policy became more stringent in this regard and understandably so. The foreign missionaries themselves realized the socio-political changes underway in Independent India, with the result that many of them chose to re-

turn to their home countries while indigenous clergy were inducted into positions of responsibility and control within the Indian Church. Today, visas are issued to foreign missionaries in the rarest of cases. In effect, as mentioned earlier on in this discussion, it is the Indian Church which now sends its own personnel abroad, to Africa, Europe and the Americas.

The third phase saw the question of inculturation being taken up in earnest by the Indian Church and this aspect has already been dealt with above. In the fourth phase, the accent was on social justice which was also referred to as the preferential option for the poor. The criticism was often voiced, usually from within Church circles, that the Church was surreptitiously becoming an 'Establishment Church', seeking linkages with the powers-that-be and catering to elite groups in society, while neglecting the weaker sections. No doubt, counter-criticism from Hindu orthodox groups was also directed at Church bodies for fishing for converts among the poorest sections of society, especially the scheduled castes and the tribals. While the Church did have a clientele among the weaker sections, there was a growing realization that mere welfarism was not a desirable policy. Something must be done to change the structures of society precisely to bring about a more equitable distribution of opportunities and resources among all sections of people. Or else there would always be the specter of poverty staring us in the face. On the principle that prevention is better than cure, it would make more sense to preempt poverty by tackling its root causes

rather than trying to remedy it once it erupts. Here, the influence of Liberation Theology, first elaborated in Latin America by Gutierrez, Boff, Cardenal and others, was discernible as it made out a powerful case for establishing a just society in the here-and-now rather than preaching about a messianic kingdom in the hereafter. The accent was on liberating human beings from their fetters, on conscientizing and empowering them, thereby vindicating their status as children of God. But the struggle for social justice is no easy task. It usually leads to a polarization between the haves and the have-nots; and the Church has generally preferred a harmonization rather than a clash of interests among its followers. Thus, in the Indian Church, there have been cases of pro-changers like Fr. Vadakan, Fr. Tom Kocherry, Pradeep Prabhu, Sr. Alice and others having had to face the displeasure of their superiors and even disciplinary action. Opposition has also come from outside the Church with many instances being reported in recent times of assaults, often fatal, on priests and nuns and lay people involved in social action aimed at changing the status quo.

The struggle for social justice has led the Indian Church to realize that by itself it cannot hope to effect major changes in society given its minuscule size and limited resources. It needs to network with a wide cross-section of the national community and to broaden its perspectives beyond restricted ecclesial horizons. Else it will always remain a marginal phenomenon. It needs to plunge into the mainstream without reservations. And this imperative has ushered in the fifth phase of mainstream

participation in national life by Indian Christians. Though this participation is still on a modest scale, it bids fair to gain salience in times to come. While Christians have always been fairly well represented in the professions, in the media – particularly journalism and advertising and in sport, they have generally fought shy of business and politics. Part of the reason could be that they have been socialized into a value system that looks askance at both business and politics, at least of the run-of-the-mill variety. Both avocations are often associated with an elastic conscience and ‘dirty tricks’. At least where politics is concerned, a further consideration could be that in a democratic system, where sheer numbers count, a microscopic minority does not stand much of a chance at the hustings, except for places in Kerala, Goa, the Christian tribal belt in Bihar and some states in the Northeast (Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya) where Christians form a significant percentage of the population. While a few prominent Christians have been found in the ranks of the civil services and the police, the community has been very well represented in the armed forces, many occupying the highest echelons.¹⁴ When Christians therefore are questioned on their national loyalty, there is no better proof of the same than the ranks of Christian servicemen standing shoulder to shoulder with their non-Christian compatriots on the front lines of India’s defense.

As for business and politics, there has been a slight shift in perceptions and attitudes among Christians more recently. Some Christians have ventured into the world of business and have done

reasonably well for themselves. These hail mainly from Kerala and Mangalore. The ICEEDA (Indian Christians Economic and Entrepreneurial Development Association) has been established with a view to encouraging members of the community to develop their talents in business, trade and commerce and thus raise their living standards while contributing to the growth of the national product.¹⁵ And with the heightened awareness of business ethics and of environmentally friendly business practices, fair chances are that an increasing number of Christians may take to this avocation and distinguish themselves in it. As for politics, those places where Christians form a significant segment of the population already have representatives of the community among Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council and Ministers of the Government. Elsewhere, there is a growing awareness that indifference to the vital question as to who is to be entrusted with power over the people is not consistent with the Christian commitment to help shape a better world. One cannot keep aloof from politics and then complain that the wrong people have entered it and have hijacked the noble purposes of the State. Christians are being exhorted to exercise their franchise without fail and, if they are so minded, even to enter active politics while keeping in mind the common good and the purity of ends and means. Pre-election meetings have been held to make voters aware of the issues involved and of the need to vote for the right candidates. In the course of election campaigns, Charters of People’s

Demands have been drawn up and presented to candidates contesting the elections either on a party ticket or as independents. Candidates have been invited to address public meetings at which they have been cross-examined about their manifestos and their commitment to secularism, clean government and service of the people. A process of political education and socialization is now underway in the Christian Community albeit on a low key.

Problems and challenges

As in every human association, so also within Church bodies, there have been from time to time contentious issues that have engaged the attention of Church leaders. One such, particularly in Catholic circles, has been the sense of alienation that has crept into some sections of lay people who feel that Church structures have become too rigid and that the traditional forms of worship under clerical auspices have become stereotyped and uninspiring. This phenomenon is to be observed mostly in metropolitan areas where the pace of life is fast and stressful and where media exposure in a cosmopolitan milieu is the greatest. In Mumbai, for example, various groups of lay people have branched off from the official Church and hold their own prayer sessions separately, often in private homes and neighborhoods. They find this more meaningful and supportive than going to Church and listening to sermons. These groups, variously styled as 'charismatic' or 'Pentecostals', emphasize enthusiasm and fellowship in their prayer meetings with abundant singing, clapping and shouts of joy. In response to this move-

ment, the official Church has also permitted Catholic charismatics to function under controlled conditions. This step was taken to forestall large-scale defections from the official Church.

Another area of contention has been that of clergy-laity relations within the Church. The clergy have traditionally viewed themselves as 'shepherds of the flock' after the Gospel metaphor of Jesus the Good Shepherd who tends his sheep with the greatest devotion.¹⁶ This metaphor might have suited a pastoral society which has long ceased to exist in most parts of the world. And late twentieth-century lay people are not too enthusiastic about being treated as obedient sheep by the clergy. They have minds of their own and are increasingly disposed to decide matters for themselves particularly in non-theological affairs. They are asking for a share in decision-making within the Church, specifically where legal, administrative and financial questions are involved. In response to these trends, parish councils with elected members have been set up to aid and advise the clergy in Church administration.¹⁷ However, these are not fully democratic bodies in the generally accepted sense of the term as they are merely advisory and subject to clerical 'veto' in the ultimate instance. But they are a step in the direction of greater democratization in the Church. Speaking of democratization, the hierarchy and the more traditional-minded clergy are not in favor of 'democracy' within the Church. For them, the idea that power flows from the people goes counter to the theological proposition that God has called together his Church and entrusted the Church leaders with the task of

'guiding the flock'. On such a premise, any political type of democratic functioning with its competition for power and for majority votes would be singularly out of place. However, in our day and age, any notion of a 'divine right' to rule would be even more singularly out of place, and a realistic formula needs to be worked out for clergy-laity cooperation and power-sharing, especially in view of the added fact that increasing numbers of lay men and women are now theologically extremely well-informed and will not be preached to by the clergy.

From time to time, other tensions have surfaced, for example over the language to be used in Church services, as happened in Bangalore between Christian Kannadigas and Tamils. At other times the question of rites has proved a bone of contention, particularly between Latin-rite and Oriental-rite Christians. In effect, separate Bishops' Conferences have had to be constituted for the respective rites, with new dioceses or 'eparchies' being set up of rites other than the Latin rite.¹⁸ Among Syrian Christians in Kerala a cleavage has arisen between groups owing allegiance to the India-based 'Catholicos' on the one hand and those favoring the Syria-based Patriarch on the other. All these developments go to show that in the Indian Church, the search for particularistic identities goes hand in hand with more universal concerns, and in this respect Indian Christians are no different from their compatriots of other faiths.

In an ecclesial set-up in which the culture of patriarchy is still dominant, certain women's groups have been ex-

amining the role of women in the Church and have called for reforms in the civil laws of 1869 and 1872 regulating Christian marriage and divorce, as these laws are not only outdated but are particularly hard on Christian couples in general and Christian women in particular, especially in cases of failed marriages. More equitable laws governing matrimony and matrimonial causes are being sought with a view to promoting gender justice; and a draft bill has been drawn up after much deliberation within Church circles.¹⁹ But political vicissitudes at the Centre have prevented the bill from being taken up in earnest by Parliament and enacted into law. Like the proposed bill to reserve a third of the seats in Parliament for women, this bill too will have to await a more propitious time for its passage.

Another grey area in the Indian Church is the issue of the Dalit Christians or Christians of Scheduled Caste origin. These feel discriminated against even within the Christian fold, quite apart from their having lost the benefits of reservation or affirmative action on being converted to Christianity. This shows that caste-mindedness has affected sections of the Indian Church, and affirmative action within the Church itself is now called for. At the same time, the Christian community has been campaigning for the extension of the benefits of Government-mandated reservations to Dalit Christians as has been done in the case of Dalit neo-Buddhists and Dalit Sikhs.²⁰ A sore point with the Christian community is that Dalit Christians who re-convert to Hinduism are promptly given back the benefits of reservation which they had forfeited by embracing

Christianity. This shows that religion is in effect the sole criterion for granting or denying these benefits, no matter what might be said in the Constitution.

Conclusion:

From the entire preceding discussion certain broad conclusion emerge. The Indian Christian community, with all its idiosyncrasies, is as much Indian as any other community. It has international linkages no doubt, but so have the Government of India, other communities, political parties, professional bodies and associational groups. This is not surprising in an era of globalization. The Indian Church has no extra-territorial loyalties or political affiliation. Like other bodies, it receives foreign aid which is fully accounted for under the provisions of law. The Christian community in India, like other communities, has to con-

tend with various pulls and pressures from within and without and has to make a constant effort to fight caste-mindedness, gender discrimination and fundamentalist tendencies, all of which affect it in various ways. The Indian Church needs to democratize its structures in keeping with the national democratic ethos. It cannot demand civil liberties in the wider society while perpetuating clerical domination and restrictive practices within its own fold. The national agenda is a formidable one – giving effect to the noble aims and objectives set forth in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution and in the Directive Principles of State Policy. It will be both a challenge and a privilege for the Christian community to establish and maintain the closest bonds of solidarity with all other communities in order that we might keep our collective ‘tryst with destiny’.

Notes

1. Circa 52 A. D., whereas the Emperor Theodosius I declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 A. D.
2. Adi Shankara or Shankaracharya is generally placed in the second half of the eighth century A. D.
3. This schism or split occurred in 1054 A. D.
4. The system of Padroado was introduced by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 A. D.
5. The Inquisition was introduced into Goa in 1560 A. D. at the request of Francis Xavier. It was suspended in 1774, revived in 1779 and finally abolished in 1812. It aimed at establishing Christian doctrine and practice as officially approved and often resorted to coercion and even capital punishment to that end.
6. Established on 6 January 1622 and renamed as Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples following Vatican Council II (1962 - 1965).
7. Pombal: b. 1699, d. 1782.
8. Valerian Cardinal Gracias was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1964.
9. Pope Paul VI visited India in 1964 and Pope John Paul II in 1986.
10. The Marian Congress was held in 1954 and the Eucharistic Congress in 1964.
11. The Niyogi Committee Report appeared in 1956.
12. The proposed Tyagi bill (1978) and the enacted bills of Madya Pradesh and Orissa (1968) and of Arunachal Pradesh (1978) were perceived as going counter to the spirit, if not the letter, of Art. 25 of the Constitution.

13. The first printing press was set up in Goa in 1556 by the Jesuits.
14. For Christian representation in the armed forces as also in other walks of life, see D' Silva (selected readings)
15. The ICEEDA was set up on 2 September 1985, in Mumbai.
16. See, Book of Ezekiel 34: 1; John 10:11 and I Peter 2: 25.
17. According to the Code of Canon Law for the Latin rite promulgated by the Vatican on 25 January, 1983, every parish must have a council (Canon 536) and a Finance Committee (Canon 537).
18. Separate Conferences have been set up for the Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara rites. The eparchy of Kalyan, under the Syro-Malabar rite, was established in 1993.
19. The Christian Marriage Bill (1994) awaits introduction and passage in the Indian Parliament.
20. Dalit Sikhs were granted reservation in 1956 and Neo-Buddhists in 1990.

Document

South Asian Jesuit Provincials Support Their Theologians

The universal Church's greater awareness of the need to incarnate itself in different cultures is amongst the most precious blessings God is showering on us in the last years of this millennium. At the Second Vatican Council the Church experienced itself as a world Church and laid the theological and pastoral foundations for the realization that it is also a communion of local Churches, responsive to local experiences and problems in the context of mission.

Following this inspiration, Jesuits, like many others in South Asia, have engaged themselves in serious research, reflection and praxis in many areas of the Church's life, particularly in the areas of theology, spirituality, interreligious dialogue and inculturation. They are reconnoitering new theological grounds which span a wide spectrum of reality constituted by the complexity of a multicultural and multireligious continent. In addition to its ancient traditions, the continent is now being influenced by scientific and secularizing forces, economic upheavals, political uncertainties, environmental catastrophes, socio-cultural revolutions and fundamentalist religious uprisings. In India, the recent atrocities against minorities, including Christians, which have also directly affected some Jesuits, have made a dent in its commitment to a secular democracy.

It is in this context that we appreciate, support and encourage the work of our theologians and others to build up the local Church in India, and we want them to go even further and deeper, in fidelity to Christ and to the mission he has entrusted to us in the Church. We also note with satisfaction the demand by many Bishops at the Asian Synod for the autonomy due the local Churches in Asia. We regret that lack of enthusiasm within and various blocks from without the country have stalled the progress of inculturation in the sub-continent.

Living and working amidst such challenges, we, like many of our fellow Jesuits, are pained by the atmosphere of suspicion, not to say mistrust, created by recent decisions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith about our brothers Anthony De Mello and Jacques Dupuis, which seems symptomatic of a general discouragement, even disapproval, of the direction that Asian theology is taking. We think that such suspicion has been a disservice to the whole Church. The late Anthony de Mello pioneered the integration of Asian and Christian spirituality and methods of prayer. He has helped thousands of people in South Asia and across the world in gaining freedom and in deepening their life of prayer, of which we have abundant testimonies and our own personal experiences. Jacques Dupuis taught theology for over twenty years in India before being appointed professor at the Gregorian University in Rome. His quest for a theology of religious pluralism is marked, both by his experience of the plurireligious situation in South Asia, and his

loyalty to the doctrinal, magisterial and theological tradition of the Church.

We do not claim that their work is above critical attention. In an evolving situation, open and constructive criticism and dialogue are healthy and welcome. But we wish that this is done in full appreciation of the Asian cultural and plurireligious context in which these and other theologians are working. We also need to be mindful of the legitimate pluralism in theology within the unity of Faith and of the subsidiarity in decision-making in a Church that is also a communion of local Churches. We think that there is a lack of appreciation of difference and of proper procedures, when decisions are taken unilaterally without a dialogue with the Asian Churches. We are afraid that such interventions are eventually detrimental to the life of the universal Church, to the cause of the Gospel and to the task of interpreting the Word to those who do not belong to the western cultural tradition.

We are grateful for the appreciation and support our theologians have received from many Bishops and the People of God, in Asia and the world. We invite all, bishops, clergy, and the laity, to continue to support them with a trust that is sympathetic but not naive, critical but not censorious, because we are convinced of the importance of the theological task both for our work of evangelization, education and social justice, and for our whole thrust towards the inculturation of our faith. We would like to assure our theologians of our own continued support and encouragement to go ahead, joyfully and in fidelity to God, to the Gospel and to the Church, with the difficult and challenging task of making the Word of God relevant to the situation in South Asia.

*Lisbert D'Souza SJ
President, Jesuit Conference of South Asia,
For the Jesuit Major Superiors of South Asia*

Book Reviews

Radical Reforms for Third Millennium Church, by Avito Pottukulam, Copyright 1999 by Avito Pottukulam, published by C.C. Communications, Pharma Apts., Plot No. 88, I.P Extn, Patparganj, Delhi 110092. Pages 224, Price: Rs. 120/-.

The author's aim is stated in his Preface: "a humble attempt to assess the present day Church and suggest certain remedial measures for a radical reform to be brought about for the Church in the third millennium." For him, "triumphalism seems to be the root cause of all the evils in the Church." The rest of the book is divided into 16 sections with a very short conclusion. Each of the 16 sections takes up an issue in the Church and suggests remedies.

The author's call for "a radical return to the primitive evangelical humility and simplicity on the part of the Catholic Church" could perhaps be welcomed by all who have the interest of the Church at heart. The first section considers the fact that the Catholic population in the world is decreasing and calls for a radical change in the concept of Mission and Mission work (p. 18). Direct evangelization is the remedy for increasing numbers and should alone be termed 'Mission'; all other works should be termed Ministry. This suggestion claims Ephesians (4:11,12) and William Barclay in support. The author also asserts that priests or sisters or brothers working in colleges or elite schools want to be called missionaries "due to a kind of mission glamour." "These people can be called arm chair missionaries." In the same section, on page 24, the author states that "the Holy See should give a call to the Congregations of Religious Women to take up the direct Mission work." For this, they should leave the "majority of their Institute work." In the end, only those who evangelize by baptizing are "real Missionaries, as their Gospel proclamation is Baptism oriented." (p. 26) The rest are Mission workers and Mission helpers. (p. 25) And mission funding is to be applied to direct evangelization.

The author finds support for his thinking in *Redemptoris Missio* and *Ad Gentes* no. 6, but the ecclesial reality of today's Church must be moulded by a Vatican II theology that also has *Lumen Gentium*, *Nostra Aetate*, *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Gaudium et Spes* as its points of reference. Secondly, the mission of the Church is shaped not only by the gospel imperative but also by the context in which that imperative is to be realized. No serious attempt to understand the context appears in this section. The author adduces no evidence to support his contention that priests, sisters and brothers want to be called missionaries because of glamour. Such unsupported generalization is unfortunate!

If section one is considered in some detail, it is to illustrate the mode of arguing his case that the author follows in many of the following sections. In section eleven "Asceticism was not in God's First Plan," the author wants to describe the correct way of understanding and practising asceticism, and this is laudable. But the elaboration of a theology of what would have been had there been no fall (p. 147, 3. Asceticism was not in God's original plan) is pointless in the light of the one plan of salvation. A lack of cogent and persuasive development of argument mars the worthy aim of this book.

At times, the author makes useful and pointed suggestions, e.g. "an obligation of charity also must be added to the precept of hearing Mass." (p. 135) However, more solid investigation of situations and painstaking editing need to be done before this book can be recommended as a prophetic contribution to the Church of the Third Millennium.

Errol D'Lima SJ

Doing Theology with Tribal Resources: Context and Perspectives: Edited by Wati Longchar and Larry E. Davis, Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, 1999, Pp. 142. Price: Not Mentioned.

The present volume is the outcome of a three-day national seminar at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, on the theme “Doing theology with Tribal Resources”. The ten papers of the volume attempt to explore contextual theology relevant to the North East Indian context. They reflect on the emerging people’s theology in the Third World countries and see its relevance in a tribal context. They explore resources for articulation of a theology for the tribal people. They assess critically the impact of Christianity on the life of the tribal people.

James Massey in his article “Minorities in India with particular reference to the Specific Christian Issues” observes that though India has Constitutional provisions to safeguard the interests of the minorities, the manifesto of the majority-run political parties like Bharatiya Janata Party (1966) are still based upon mono-religion, mono-culture and mono-language. The Indian Christians as a minority is the second largest group with several denominations. There is discrimination not only of the minority Christians but also of the Dalit and Tribal Christians. The constitutional rights are important to Dalit and Tribal Christians because the right to freedom of conscience and to profess any religion (Article 15), the right to protect personal life (Article 21), and change of religion do not alter one’s social and economic conditions. Another issue concerns the increasing atrocities on the minorities in the country. The author suggests that these issues be considered as ‘Christian issues’ and not issues belonging to different groups within the Church.

The article “Bible and Social Transformation” by Bastina Wielenga, highlights the way the complex process of change affects different walks of life. He presents and overview of the social transformation in the light of the Bible. Reading the Bible in the light of the present crises may help our search for a life-sustaining, eco-friendly and people-friendly, inclusive society based on human kinship and solidarity, the way for God’s kingdom on earth.

Archie C. C. Lee in “The Plurality of Asian Religio-Cultural Tradition and Its Implications for Asian Biblical Studies” writes that the Bible has its social location, cultural background, economic environment and political situation. The historical critical method with its own limitations elucidates the history of the text. Social contexts, political orientation and socio-economic status of the reader have immense impact on the perspective of interpretation. The Asian biblical scholars need to search for and develop principles and methods of biblical interpretation relevant to their contexts of the plurality of scriptures. A cross-textual interpretation may consolidate the foundation of Asian contextual theology.

Theology of development is concerned with the translation of the Christian vision of the Reign of God into reality. That is what K. Thanzuva writes in his article “A Theology of development in the Context of Hill Tribes in North East India”. Though the theology of development has been with them since the inception of Christianity, it has not been theologically articulated. The paper discusses the development scenario with its policies and structures to identify the theological agenda to be addressed in the construction of a theology of development for North East India.

A. Wati Longchar in “A Critique of the Christian Theology of Creation” gives three different views of creation, namely, mechanistic, i.e., human perception of the physical

world merely as the sum total of many material components and energies; hierarchical, i.e., understanding of creation within a hierarchical order with angels at the highest peak among spiritual beings and humans as the highest among the created material beings; and anthropocentric, i.e., a world view in which humanity is the point of reference and the norm for all co-existence, which has been maintained throughout the history of Christianity. The author highlights the difference in the perception of reality between the tribal worldview and the dominant Christian traditions. In the dominant Christian traditions, humanity is the central point of reference and norm, but in the tribal world-view it is creation. In the present ecological crisis the tribal view of creation as the central focus will make creation theology dynamic, authentic and relevant.

N. Limatla Longkumer in “Rediscovering Women’s Role and Status in Society” draws our attention to three Ao stories portraying women who have played a significant role in their society and yet their roles were distorted by the patriarchal culture. The author suggests the following points to rediscover and reclaim the lost rights of women: one, to work out a fresh historiography of women’s stories from an inclusive perspective taking justice and equality of men and women into consideration; two, to change the old oppressive and dominant patriarchal structure of society; three to highlight the traditional myths, folktales, songs, poems and proverbs whereby women leaders, heroines and saints play significant roles in society, and, four, participation of both men and women in women’s liberation as a social issue involving all humans.

David C. Scott in his “Karam Raja”: A Defining Myth and Festival in Chotanagpur” looks at the Karam mythic narration and the ritual enactments as a mechanism to strengthen tribal cultural traditions – thereby elevating people, giving them renewed social and psychic energy by tracing them back to higher, better, divine and supernatural reality. Scott highlights the significance of myth as story-telling in explaining the discovery of human beings and their existence, their search for meaning in life.

Takatemjen in his article “Theology of Reconciliation: A Naga Perspective” writes that in a Naga context of the culture of violence, bloodshed, corruption, mistrust, injustice, tribalism and ethnic clashes, reconciliation is possible. The paper points out that certain socio-religious values from their traditional life and culture could be useful for developing a theology of reconciliation which the author hopes will help to build a better society, a new brotherhood, and neighbourliness in Nagaland in particular and our world in general. One of the resources for theologising from a Naga perspective is found in the practice of AKSU, i.e., the giving of pigs as present to develop friendly relationships and peace between villagers, protection of the tributary village by the principal village, establishment of brotherhood among the members of the same clan living in different villages, extending help during wartime, building up cordial relations between villages, establishing friendship during peace time, etc.. The author feels the abandonment of AKSU by Christianity was rather unfortunate as it has resulted in breaking down of relationships, peace and harmony among people.

A.Wati Longchar in his article “Dancing with the Land: Significance of Land for Doing Tribal Theology” examines the tribal people’s understanding of land and its theological significance. By analysing a few sayings and two genesis myths among the Kashi-Jaintia tribe in North East India. The starting point of theology for them is their affirmation of the land as the creation of the Supreme Being. Land is central to understand their worldview in terms of human selfhood, the Supreme Being, the Spirit, history and ethics.

“Doing Theology with Tribal Resources: Cautionary Remarks” by Roger Gaikwad records some cautionary remarks that the tribal heritage should not lead to romanticising the tribal world view. Whilst doing theology with tribal resources, there is a danger of giving priority to some given conceptual theology rather than seeking to indigenously express the existential experience of the life, power, and purpose of Christ which the people have had in North East India; two, if we want Christianity to be meaningful and effective, there is need of revitalizing and reconditioning of cultural categories. The existential contemporary tribal worldview is a life of integrated or conflicting opposites. At times, contemporary tribal life seems to be a compound of inseparable opposites such as natural joys and sorrows of life. At other times, contemporary tribal life seems to be permeated with incompatible opposites such as materialism versus charismatic spiritualism. The challenge confronting us today is how to use such complex tribal worldviews of integrated or incompatible dichotomies in doing theology in North East India.

Joseph Marianus Kujur SJ

The Book of Wisdom 6:22-10:21: An Encomium of Wisdom, And Its Inculturation in the Indian Wisdom Tradition by Amruthanandan Joseph Thallapalli, s.g (An excerpt of a Doctorate Dissertation) Rome : Faculty of Theology – Pontifical Gregorian University, 1998, pp. 145. Pr. N.P.

The Book includes select excerpts from the dissertation for the doctorate in the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome published in 1998. In fact it contains only the following: of Chapter I: The Introduction of the fourth section - “Wisdom in Other Biblical Wisdom Books” is omitted. Of Chapter III: “Exegetico-Theological Study of the Text”, the last section: “The Inculturated Theologizing Process of Pseudo-Solomon”, is available to the reader. Of Chapter IV: Interpretation of Wis 6:22-10:21. However, Chapter II: “The Challenge of the Context of the Book of Wisdom. The Response of the Author”, is wholly left out. Fortunately the Table of Contents of the original dissertation is given at the end of the volume in addition to the Table of Contents for the present work at the beginning. Unfortunately the Excursus: “Feminist Interpretation of Wisdom” on pp. 28-30 does not appear in either Table of Contents.

The layout of the book and the printing are excellent. Printing mistakes are indeed negligible. These are capital ‘R’ for the small ‘r’ on p. 44; on p. 47 “1 Cor” is given in italics. Finally on p. 97 instead of “to be termed” we have “to termed”, which is the only serious mistake. Acknowledgements are out of proportion and could be drastically curtailed in a work of this type.

The Bibliography as is to be expected in a doctoral dissertation is extensive. Commendable is the number of Indian authors that is made available. What one misses in the Bibliography are works on the Hellenistic religion of Isis, (since the author of the Book of Wisdom, according to the present author, interprets Wisdom in terms of this saviour goddess) and on Stoicism. Only two works of Plato are mentioned but no quotations from these are to be found in the book. E. Trinity’s article on p. 100 is left out in the Bibliography.

The introductory chapter which gives the motivations for this study shows the striking similarity between the age of Pseudo-Solomon (as the author of the Book of Wisdom is here called) and ours. Both find themselves at the dawn of a new era. Two other things that

are in common between Pseudo-Solomon and the Church in India are his openness to other faiths and philosophies like the Egyptian Hellenistic cult of Isis, the philosophy of Plato and the Stoics. The comparison between Wisdom (Sophia) and Indian Jnana which occupies the author towards the end of the book are already hinted at here. As the author belongs to the Religious family of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, he takes time out to deal with the latter's main theological work Love of the Eternal Wisdom. Finally the contents of all the chapters of the original dissertation are given even though only excerpts from the original are here printed. This of course helps the reader to fill in the gaps in the break of the narrative. Unfortunately on p. 19 the unit which the author comments upon is affirmed as Wis 6:22-10:21, but its justification is nowhere to be found. This is all the more problematic because as the author himself agrees on p. 16 "there is no unanimity regarding the exact boundaries" of the three parts of the Book of Wisdom. According to the author, the literary form of this unit is an encomium. As this is a rare form a word by way of its definition would be most helpful specially to the non scholarly reader. It is to be kept in mind that though we are told that the method followed in the thesis is the Hermeneutical Method, as the author himself confesses on p. 20, the Historical Critical Method is also followed specially in Chapter II.

Chapter III, in fact only one of its sections, which immediately follows upon the Introduction, merely exposes "the inculturated theologizing process of Pseudo-Solomon", that is, how he not only re-reads but also re-writes ancient Hebrew biblical traditions, in particular those from 1 Kgs 3-10 regarding king Solomon and the Patriarchal and Exodus traditions from the Books of Genesis and Exodus. The author faithfully adheres to the norms laid down by the Pontifical Biblical Commission's Document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993). The author makes it more than clear that though Pseudo-Solomon to all practical purposes identifies Wisdom with God and with Spirit thus presaging the later Christian trinity, he clearly upholds the distinction between God and Wisdom. For Wisdom is always God's gift to humans. When we come to the personification of Wisdom as the Spouse of God which according to Thallapalli is drawn from Egyptian Maat and Isis, we look in vain for references to primary or secondary sources on p. 26. The author draws our attention to the salvific function of Wisdom as is available in the case of Isis. When he comes to the four cardinal virtues once again he merely tells us that they are from the Stoics but no reference to their writings is made on p. 32.

In Chapter IV the author dwells at length on the actualization of Wis 6:22-10:21 made by his spiritual mentor Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort. He makes references to two authors, M. Gilbert and J.-P Prevost who have treated of this subject. See footnotes 12 and 13 on p. 43. The author then passes on to its actualization in our context. Interesting in this chapter is the section on Wisdom Christology on p. 52 which Christologists would do well to take note of. The next section is the most important for our author, that is, the inculturation of Wisdom in the Indian context. He addresses the problem from two angles, that is, social life and religion. First he deals but only in passing with the former, that is, with the caste system, and then treats at length on what we would call inter-religious dialogue. Interesting is his insight that not only Christians but also Hindus have engaged themselves in this dialogue. Among the Hindus he mentions in particular the reformers like Mahatma Gandhi and S. Radhakrishnan. From among the Christians he highlights Abhishiktananda (Dom Henri Le Saux). Finally he comes to the Jnana Marga of Hinduism. He pays attention to its treatment both in the Upanishads and in the Bhagvadgita. He also shows how the attainment of Wisdom in the Indian tradition is not something speculative but experiential and

has a bearing on our daily life. The author also warns us not to be one-sided in our efforts at inculturation by addressing ourselves exclusively to the Brahminical literature, what he calls Sanskritization, but to also pay attention to the popular religion of the Dalits, which by the way is not done here.

In conclusion we can say that the attempt is a very praiseworthy one, written lucidly. A revised edition of the work (which should also include some exegetical material), and which should shed the shackles imposed by the requirements of a doctoral dissertation, would be of great help to all Christians in our country in particular who believe in inculturation precisely at the threshold of the new millennium.

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