

## Being Christian and Artistic

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**Abstract:** After understanding what art is, the author tries to relate the art to Christian Revelation and human imagination. Every one has imagination and imagination makes man human and gives him a world of meaningful and civilized existence. All may not be able to paint, sing, sculpt, dance or write poetry, novels and stories. Even if we leave the mastery in such arts to the accomplished artists in their respective fields, the ordinary man in the street can be called an artist. He remembers his significant experiences of the yester days and years and imaginatively recounts them as meaningful stories. He sits around with people and spins yarns and narrates the past events manifesting a hidden hope in existence. He lives his stories in working for his family and celebrating his life with the community. Often his simple actions of love and gratitude tell long stories silently. He lives as an artist and if his basic story is about God in Christ, then he is a Christian. As a corollary to the above statement, we will have to say that every Christian is an artist in some way. Thus the author affirms, that the more one is a Christian, the greater his responsibility to live the story of Christ, i.e., to be an artist-Christian.

**Keywords:** Imagination, Christian revelation, story, art, artist, aesthetics.

*“In fact art is more indispensable than science. Man can live without science in the modern sense of the word. The human being cannot survive without art. ... Art means to make something of your life with your body and with your surroundings on a human scale.”* Raimundo Panikkar

It is interesting to dream of Christians who are by nature artistic. I would very much like to imagine each Christian as a special sort of artist! Theologians like Raimundo Panikkar, Samuel Rayan and Sebastian Kappen have spoken of the Christian believers as artists. They honestly thought that human beings become human and holy only through creative pursuits, artistic production and aesthetic enjoyment. Their theology was based on the philosophical anthropology well expressed by the tallest of Indian art critics of modern times Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy: “Artist is not a special man but every man is a special sort of artist.”<sup>1</sup> So for a *Christian to be an artist is not a dream but an accomplished fact, though in the seed form*. Of course in the present Ecclesial setup Christians are more comfortable not to feel and work as artists. Well, we need to examine the structure of this ‘tragicomedy’. Perhaps Christians have insufficient knowledge about the inner event of art and imagination. This is the context in which I would like to propose that Christian revelation and Christian faith are constitutionally imaginative and artistic.

## **A. What is art?**

We shall here try to focus on the fundamental features of the phenomenon of art. A work of art is a symbol and a process that has goes into its making is the esemplastic, analogical and playful imagination. Imagination is a process of symbolization. The art-symbol which is produced is cognitive; it presents an idea of a feeling. The feeling element of an art-symbol makes the idea it presents significant and relevant. It is not a pure objective, abstract and intellectualised idea, but feeling makes it causative of an affective union. The idea a work presents then cannot be separated from the affective event. This event is an event of truth, a hermeneutical event. It is an encounter with a work which effects the existential ‘real-ization’ of truth. It is both a

cognitive and an affective realization of truth. It is the event of *aletheia*. In this disclosure of truth the mental or psychic horizons of humans are opened up. The aesthetic shock of experience provides a new interpretation of reality. A new world of possibilities is opened up for human existence. In the same event their practical and historical existence is grounded firmly. That is to say, this event of the disclosure of truth is not only a notional or mental event, but a practical one. It involves man bodily because imagination and symbolization is rooted in man's bodily existence. Imagination works in collaboration with image making. We could say that it is the hands of the craftsman that imagine.

Finally, an art-symbol as cognitive offers a criticism of reality. It subverts the idea of what normality is. As imagination is a free activity, constrained neither by convention nor by pure logic, it always creates a new vision of reality which will be the seed of transformation in the individual and society. In short, art is an activity that involves the whole man and it is a process integral to the hominization of man.

There are different manifestations of art. The imagination which transforms the diverse activities – linguistic, literary, manual, vocal, and bodily – of man creates diverse forms of works and symbols. A sculptural image is a form given to raw matter. A dance recital is the myriad forms given to human body through gestures and movements. A musical piece is shape given to voice and sounds. A metaphor is a literary form. A myth is a form of archetypal imagination and a ritual its dramatic form. A story can be seen as the interplay of mythical imagination and historical remembrance. In our coming theological discussions we will conveniently use different works of imagination or symbols. To understand revelation, Christ mystery, the Church and sacraments, we make use of different symbolic forms like image, icon, dance, myth, story, and ritual.

## **B. Who is an Artist?**

An artist is a person who cooperates with the process of creative imagination. Creative imagination is a process which involves the artist, the work of art, the receptor, artist's bodily involvement and the esemplastic power of the human mind. It is at once a process of knowing and of doing. The artist knows primarily by doing, by the bodily and

sensorial involvement in making a work of art. For him art is a way of life since it involves working with the hands and knowing with the mind.

· He lives in a world different from the empirical world. It is a world created by imagination. Imagination transforms the empirical day-to-day world into a world illumined with significance – ‘world apparelled in celestial light’, as Wordsworth would say. It may have for him an aesthetic significance proper (that of sheer beauty), emotional significance (vitality), religious significance (of mystery) or archetypal significance (of collective unconscious).

He is a man with feelings or ‘heart’. He knows and is in the world with his guts, the seat of feelings. The feelings that charge the world with power and illumine it with radiance make him a relational being, a person who cherishes interpersonal relationships soaked in emotional depth. The feelings that move him are not unrestrained egotist passions which consume persons, but they are mellowed and sublimated aesthetically. The feelings of an artist are intellectualised to an optimum degree so that he is not blind because of them. He is the unmoved mover, the serene revolutionary, the angry prophet who loves peace.

A man of feelings that he is, he does not spurn reason. He is a rational human being who is critical of what is ‘normal’ and what is taken for granted. He is not destructively critical standing away from reality without involvement in it as he is also not too immersed in reality through great emotional involvement.

The picture of the artist presented here is not of a craftsman producing beautiful wares. Just by being a skilled vocalist, a famed painter he does not rise up to the standards set by this picture. *The artist here is an intensely living and fully functional human being.* It is not a picture of the artist spoiled by the consumer society that atrophies his hand in harness and removes his prophetic fangs spewing divine anger.

## C. Christian Revelation

We may say that the warp and woof of the Christian life are revelation and faith.<sup>2</sup> “In the biblical perspective, revelation and faith comprise the totality of Christian existence.”<sup>3</sup> If we are at all allowed to analyse the component elements of Christian life, we can see that

God has his part in it, i.e., his call of love, invitation to grace or his good news and man has the complementary role of response to the call, cooperation with his grace or his generous faith. The Good news is that salvation and the Kingdom of God are available to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and to be saved we need to believe in the Gospel, i.e., accept Christ as the forgiving Lord and Saviour and to repent and be converted (cf. Mk 1: 15)

The specific Christian revelation of God is the proclamation of the good news in and through Jesus, the Christ. In the Old Testament we see that God has spoken from creation onwards especially to his chosen people Israel through mighty deeds and through the words of the prophets. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” (Heb 1: 1-2). The Christ event is not only the climax, but it is also the recapitulation and summary of all that God had spoken.

The revelational acts of God diffused and spread throughout the history of Israel are contracted into the personal history of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. “By Jesus’ complete receptivity to the self-bestowing love of God, all that had haltingly and successively been made present in the history of Israel was recapitulated and focused in one life span.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus Christ became the full vehicle of revelation in his death and resurrection.<sup>5</sup> In his death and resurrection, the Son reveals the Father, and the Father is glorified by his Son. When God ratified his full revelation in Christ, he made Christ the channel of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who enlightens all men in truth. “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear.” (Acts 2:23; cf. Jn 17:13| Eph 1:13-14).

The source of the true and primary revelation is God revealing through Christ. Jesus Christ is the gospel that the Christian believes in and accepts with his whole mind and heart. Now, the phrase ‘Christ is the revelation’ says much about the content of Christian revelation, i.e., the person and event of Christ, but it says little about what revelation itself is. The Christian, the believing human being, is the receptor of the revelation, and as artist-Christians we are concerned with how the

revelation works its way to the believer. Art is a way to knowledge and here we shall examine the reception of the Good News as mediated through art and the related processes of aesthetic consciousness and imagination.<sup>6</sup>

## **D. The Concept of Revelation in Crisis**

In the world of Christian theological writings, the word ‘revelation’ is disappearing.<sup>7</sup> If we look through the indexes of recent theological works, in all probability, we may not find a section on revelation. So in vain we will be searching for a coherent exposition of the meaning of revelation. This does not point to the non-existence of the reality of revelation, but to the disapproval of a certain understanding of revelation. The disapproved and decried notion is revelation as a pseudo-scientific or scientific category. “It is this scientific meaning of Christian revelation in Christian theology that has become indefensible, a fact that is implicitly admitted by theology’s embarrassed silence.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Christ Mystery**

According to Paul, the saving event effected in Christ’s death and resurrection is a *Mysterion*<sup>9</sup> (cf. Eph. 3:4; 1Cor 1: 23-24). This mystery was hidden in God from the beginning (Col 1: 2<sup>^</sup>) but it is progressively manifested in the history of salvation and especially in Christ. But, the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ is hidden behind images and symbols.<sup>10</sup> Jesus Christ himself is the true image of the Father (1Col 1: 15) and for the believers in this mortal historical life God can be known only in a mediated form, as through a darkened glass (1cor 13:12) imperfectly. So revelation has to do with a hidden God and the mystery of his gracious love. For a human being and hence for the Christian, a mystery is not available in perfectly clear and logically presented concepts as in a scientific manner, but it can be evoked as the meaning of works of art.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Concept of Christian Revelation**

The First Vatican Council presented revelation primarily as the communication of supernatural truths which are inaccessible to the power of natural reason. The Second Vatican Council saw revelation as the self-communication of God to man and thus a personalistic approach to revelation was adopted.<sup>12</sup> This shift in perspective points

to the new emphasis that is being given to revelation as mystery, encounter and process. Now the main issue of revelation is no longer centred on the eternal truths preserved in Scripture and Tradition, because revelation has been now placed in the wider context of human existence, history and society.<sup>13</sup>

The understanding of what revelation is has its own history.<sup>14</sup> In the earliest period of Christian era, man had been in search of meaning in his human affairs and worldly existence. The philosophies and the religions of that time provided their own answers which were not fully satisfactory to the man of the New Testament times. At that point of time, the Christian spokesmen came up with the 'right' answer. Christians *knew* the answer: God is one who took personal interest in the people and intervened on their behalf, that too definitively in the Christ-event. Christians knew the key to the meaning of the universe: the Christ-event.

According to the early Christians revelation meant "the entire process by which the problem of human condition was resolved."<sup>15</sup> For them, the revelation of God and his manifestation of the divine plan of things took precedence over all the human attempts as found in philosophies and religious systems. They did not intend to mean it as some truths which are found only in the written biblical texts. They did not oppose Christian revelation to other revelations. Their point was that it is God who gives the answer.

However, decisive changes in the use of the word revelation occur in the period after the Renaissance, Reformation and the scientific revolution in the West. To cope with the modern scientific onslaughts on religious beliefs, theology began to be conceived as a science in the modern sense of the word. Revelation began to be seen as the object of faith which is located somewhere, e.g., in Scripture and the doctrinal pronouncements of tradition. Theology applied the same rigorous logic and stringent controls of reason as science did on the object of investigation. As in science, in theology too, the premises are assumed to be available for investigation. Revelation then is 'the given' for the science of theology.

But as far as theology is concerned this assumption about revelation is far-fetched and unwarranted because there exists no clear objective

data from which a theological reasoning can proceed. But once the premises are assumed, certitudes are possible. Basing on the certitudes arguments and apologetics arose as to who could give a final and sure interpretation of the revealed truths and where these truths are primarily located.

### **Faith as Assent to Propositional Revelation**

Faith was understood as the assent to true and divinely revealed propositions. If revealed truths are in the form of propositions, now reason has a claim over revelation too. So, two sources of knowledge of the divine are posited: reason and faith. But Church never fully gave in to the claims of reason. In the First Vatican Council, it was maintained that natural reason could attain the knowledge of God but in a confused ways, with admixture of error. With the light of reason alone, the truths of religion cannot be known satisfactorily. Only through divine faith we could know those truths that are hidden in God and unless they are revealed by God, they cannot be known.<sup>16</sup> Knowledge through faith exceeds knowledge through reason, but all the same, the idea that relation can be stated in clear propositions remained unchanged and valid. It is to this idea of revelation, the Second Vatican Council took an exception.

### **E. Imagination and Revelation**

The analogy 'through glass darkly' or 'the obscure reflection as in a mirror' used by Paul is a warning "against thinking of God as an 'object' of knowledge to which theology has direct and immediate access..."<sup>17</sup> There is no immediate face to face access to God because our knowledge of God is indirect, mediated and reflected. Our knowledge of God is mediated through images. I concur with William Dych that "it is precisely the work of the imagination, both in life and in art, to provide the images which enable us to 'see' God in Paul's sense."<sup>18</sup> Imagination has a vital role in revealing the mystery of God to the believers.

In a world where scientific thinking reigns supreme, God is an unverifiable hypothesis, an illusion or a projection of the fears and desires of man. Imagination comes to mean the opposite of knowledge, and art performs only a decorative function in life. It is a passing diversion from the serious business of life and the pursuit of genuine



knowledge. This type of rational attitude to life is rooted in the widely accepted assumption that man has a reasoning mind which functions autonomously, independent of hoping, wishing, desiring or imagining.<sup>19</sup>

Rationalism does not take into account the whole person who is doing the thinking. It does not do justice to the unity and totality of human experience and to the human historicity. Rene Descartes who coined the phrase ‘I think, there I am’ (Cogito ergo sum) is thought to have isolated reason to make it an autonomous faculty. According to him, real knowledge is available through “clear and distinct ideas.”

In the twentieth century this Cartesian supremacy of reason is questioned on many fronts, e.g., by Michael Polanyi, Jürgen Habermas, Peter Berger<sup>20</sup> and many others. Their studies have shown that the human knower is not a disinterested observer of an objective world but he is very much involved in the process of discovering the truth. It is not merely the mind, but it is people who think. They think from out of the totality of their existence and in relation to their existential situation.<sup>21</sup> This newer perspective on knowledge is reflected in the thinking of the Second Vatican Council when it places revelation and faith “within the universal context of the Christian existence.”<sup>22</sup>

## Images that Reveal

It is an axiom that icon precedes the idea and the image precedes the concept. Now we shall see that symbolic images contain the real while rational concepts only refer to the real. While reason precludes the subject from attaining objective knowledge, imagination unites both the object and the subject in images.

In our existential life, knowledge is not always merely rational and objective, because when we are conscious of the outside world, simultaneously we are aware of ourselves as different from what is objectified outside. And again, we realise that though we are aware of our difference from the world of objects, we are also aware that we are not indifferent to the world. The world of persons and things affect us subjectively. We are aware of the affective relationship that exists between the self and the world. “Awareness and affectivity together in their mutual interrelationship are the way in which we become conscious of the real world and the real self, and together they constitute the single pathway into conscious human existence in the

world.’”<sup>23</sup> The subjective and affective way of knowing and being takes into consideration the totality of human existence. This is made possible by the unity of our sensibilities.

### Unitary and Holistic Knowledge

The unity of sensibility is the lived unity of knowing and being in the existential life. The unity takes place at two points. First there is the unity of the subject and the object, the knower and the known. In one act of knowledge, we are in touch with the world and the self. This is precisely what is happening in the process of imagination. Second, there is the unity of awareness and affectivity in which the relationship between the knower and known is existentially grasped. The interaction and the interrelationship between awareness of the world and the self and the affectivity that exists between them cause our real existential and holistic knowledge of reality. This is a knowledge which has its roots in experience and which is expressed in images.

In the lived unity of the existential life of the knower the dichotomies of intellect and will or knowing and desiring are secondary and they are derived from the lived experience. In a dichotomised scheme of reality (which of course has its place, in human communications and critical thinking) the concrete and the particular are abstracted and universalised into concepts and generalities. But before the particular experiences are generalised in terms of verbal concepts, there are the images. The images are formed in concrete life, during the process of work, and also when we sensorially experience the world and involve ourselves in concrete matter. It happens when matter is being explored and then shaped in diverse ways. Images arise while we are still in the affective relationship with the world. “It is in our images of the real that we grasp the real self and the real world together in the unity of their lived and experienced relationship and in the unity of awareness and affectivity...”<sup>24</sup>

Our knowledge of the real concrete world exists objectively and subjectively in imagination and its images. For the knower, nothing is more real and objective than images. Knowledge through images and the imagination is the most basic and concrete type of knowledge. In it the reality of affective relationship with the world is respected and because our affective and conscious relationship with the world, we cannot but form images of the real.<sup>25</sup> Experience, thus, is inevitably

expressed in images. While concepts are our rational constructions, images are experiential happenings. It is through these images that God is revealed.

## **Images that Grow into Stories**

But images of the real may be ‘false’ due to false generalizations. Images are true, but when they are applied to areas where we have no experience, then we go wrong. This is the risk of knowing through images unlike through clear concepts. Through the maturation of lived experience images grow into a whole system of related images. Experience stores up images in memory and suggestive activity of *dhvani* and the esemplastic power of imagination connect many images drawn from memory and shape them into a whole world of images, the *mundus Imaginalis*. Our experiential knowledge is shaped into the world of our self which has a direction, coherence and form.<sup>26</sup> Our self then has a story which is made up of many images of the real; or rather a story formed out of our experience has a self and a world. The story of Christ forms the lives of the Christians.

“The task of the imagination is to imagine the real.”<sup>27</sup> To imagine the concrete reality in all its complexity and inherent possibilities and to shape our affective and sensorial experience of the particularities of matter into a story and a world of the self is a free and responsible activity.<sup>28</sup> The images go into a story form without our asking, when we are in affective and experiential contact with reality. They emerge. They form without guiding formulas or blueprints. In this way imagination can be said to act freely, but at the same time, our story and our world is the result also of our active openness and receptivity. Our imagination of the real is a responsible activity, because instead of leaving things as they are, we choose to involve ourselves in them affectively and sensuously, which then become my images. So imagination is a responsible involvement with reality, by which new stories of the self and new paradigms of life are formed.

## **Lived Story is Revelatory**

Our stories are composed of images of the real, but neither stories nor images are merely literary, i.e., verbal stories and verbal images. We need to remind ourselves that imagination which forms images in

and through an affective relationship with the concrete and historical reality is an act of image-making with hands (or with bodily involvement). Imagination does not dichotomise mental or verbal images and material or historical images. Our stories are not then merely verbal or mental figments, but they are stories lived historically. We are the stories that are formed. Our communities are the stories that are the stories that are narrated. Our culture and our civilization is our own lived story.

Christianity used to be thought of as a self-enclosed system of ideas and revelation as a set of supernatural truths in propositional form. Now we can understand them as people who live the story of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord.<sup>29</sup> Christianity is based on and emerges from a story *of a God* who manifested himself and lovingly offered himself to men through his Son, Jesus Christ. It is the story of *a people* who experienced the risen Lord and who remember the great deeds of God wrought through Jesus Christ.

## Story of Christ

The earliest religious documents of both the east and the West are simple stories. The Bible too is a long story of a God who loved man with a covenantal faithfulness. The Christian creeds of faith are narratives too. “The primary and historically consistent way that we have expressed our religious sensibility is through stories.”<sup>30</sup> But these stories have mythical and historical dimensions.<sup>31</sup> They are historical insofar as they embody images arisen out of historical experience. But they are not a series of events strung together as brute facts. There is a mythic interpretation of the idea symbolised in the narrative or the non-successive truth expressed through the successive events. The mythic element of the story builds our world and the historical element roots our existence in concrete particular experiences.<sup>32</sup> Christian revelation thus can be seen as the historical revelation in the concrete life of Jesus and the mythic revelation in its supernatural significance, both of which are united in the written, spoken and lived story of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

To tell and live the story of Jesus Christ means to remember and recall the historical Jesus in all his historical particularity. His memory which is passed on as lived tradition is a ‘histori-memory’ and not just

ideas about is ontological constitution.<sup>33</sup> This tradition which is passed on is preserved in art-forms – stories, plays, music, dance, rituals, architecture, painting and sculpture. In these the images of Jesus Christ are re-imagined for that sake of the present and thus the Christian story matures and ‘real-izes’ in the life of the Christian community. Then the Good News, the Christian revelation, becomes visible and tangible in the world.<sup>34</sup> The community of faith built around the Good News is the art-work of God who builds the Kingdom. In the community that lives the story of Christ, revelation and faith are conjoined inseparably.

## **F. Aesthetic understanding of Revelation**

Instead of conceiving revelation as truths in propositions, when we consider it as Truth in art forms e.g., story, painting, etc. we have an aesthetic understanding of revelation. The aesthetic way is an alternative way to the rationalistic and propositional way. The three distinguishable characteristics of the aesthetic activity according to Gabriel Moran are the following.<sup>35</sup> First it pertains to concrete materials and it does not abstract them to the level of general ideas. The aesthetic way to present a universal idea is through its embodiment in particular events, people and things. Second, the aesthetic knowing is not simple rational; it is meta-rational too; it is a knowing through feeling and affectivity. Third, it is a holistic way to knowledge. Truth is not primarily sought in self-evident propositions but in relation to the environment in which the human being forms an organic part.

Revelation as an aesthetic category is concrete, affective and holistic. In the all-embracing and holistic function of revelation no more logical dichotomies are entertained, e.g., the splits like cognitive/affective, active/passive, human/nonhuman or Christian/non-Christian. It refers to the total relational pattern which can never be possessed by anybody. Revelation is what happens in an affective relationship with the concrete world and it happens in images and symbols. Revelation as an aesthetic category cannot be contained in Scripture alone or in the holy offices of the Magisterium and its doctrinal declarations. The Church, the Magisterium and the believers, all can only participate in the revelatory events and images.<sup>36</sup> Christians, or the Church, do not possess revelation but revelation possesses all human beings.

## Revelation and shape of the community

Revelation conceived in aesthetic terms has such far-reaching effects that we will no longer be able to say that the Church has the monopoly of revelation, because it cannot fetter truth in clear concepts and unambiguous propositions. Aesthetically speaking, revelation has a Church.<sup>37</sup> As revelation has many faces in many a story and myriad images, correspondingly the Church will have many forms and shapes. The concept of the monolithic Church<sup>38</sup> will have to go and the Church has to be imagined as many communities who participate in the rich mystery of the good news in diverse ways according to historical and geographical limitations and possibilities.

## G. Revelation and Non-Christians

Can non-Christians receive revelation? According to First Vatican Council, non-Christians can come to a knowledge of the existence and the nature of God who is the creator of the universe using only the power of natural reason. "Hence the apostle — testifies that God is known to the Gentiles in the things that have been made (cf. Rom 1: 20)..."<sup>39</sup> But if God can be known through natural reason it cannot be without God's grace, God's free offer of salvation and love. Paul says that the Good News is for everyone the Jew and the Greek (cc. Rom 1: 16). Moreover, God desires that all men may come to the knowledge of truth (cf. 1 Tim 2: 3-4). But according to the First Vatican Council, the non-Christians do not receive revelation proper. The non-Christians, although they are graced, cannot come to the clear and unambiguous knowledge of God because their access to God is only through natural reason.<sup>40</sup>

If we grant that imagination is a gift of God to all human beings and that it is through imagination we grasp the Good News, then we also have to admit that non-Christians have access to revelation proper in their own right. Karl Rahner grudgingly acknowledges that "it would be wrong to regard the pagan as someone who has not yet been touched in any way by God's grace and truth. If, however, he has experienced the grace of God... then he has already been given revelation in a true sense even before he has been affected by missionary preaching from without."<sup>41</sup> An anonymous Christian then is assumed to be a Christian anonymously. But I am not sure whether we can baptise non-Christians

anonymously. Aesthetically speaking, revelation creates the many and varied religions, of which Christianity is one, and no one set of images of faith and stories of God are perfect, images have to grow and stories have to grow richer through wider experience and greater involvement with other people who have different images of God, the Real.

### Mutual fecundation of revelations

Here emerges the question as to the unique revelation of Christ to the Christians. We saw earlier that the specific Christian revelation is that Christ is the Lord and Saviour. How is the specific revelation in Christ related to the ongoing revelation and to the other specific revelation of other religions? For Christians, Christ experience is paradigmatic. The image of Christ is the primal image and the story of Christ is the basic story. When a Christian experiences God in the historical vicissitudes, in encounter with other religions or in personal relationship, he interprets his basic image of Christ and he retells the story of Christ. As for a man belonging to another religion, Hindu Shivite, for example, when he experiences Christ in his encounter with a Christian or a Christian work of art, his images of God become richer, and he is able to tell the story of the one God, the Father of all, in a more meaningful way to himself and to others, in words and in lived life. Thus, revelation can be seen as the primal story which is continuously retold, integrating the ongoing revelation of God in and through history.

## H. Revelation and Faith

Revelation incorporates within itself the phenomenon of faith. Revelation and faith are two moments of one existential act and experience. Earlier we saw that revelation occurs in involvement with matter, which already can be characterised as faith. Faith is man's existential response, the living out his basic story. When a Christian lives out the story of Christ, he learns through painful experience that there are ever new images of Christ and his own story is imperfect and so he retells his story of Christ. Thus revelation goes on in and through the faith response, and the openness to new revelations leads to creative ways of responding to man and God.

We can understand both revelation and faith as dialogic. Revelation is not merely God's showing forth; it has a human element. In human

work and involvement in history he attains the openness to receive the Good News. So revelation is a gift and an achievement at the same moment, albeit it can never be reduced to a human invention. Likewise faith is a dialogic process that takes place between God and man. The impulse to involve in history comes as a response to the Good News the Christian receives. The initiative comes from God and so it is a gift. Once we are moved by a divine impulse, human decision takes over and faith becomes a task to be performed responsibly. This dialogical structure of revelation and faith elucidate the reality of the ongoing divine-human encounter. The divine penetrates the human in revelation and the human communes with the divine in faith.

### **The Artist-Christian**

If the revelation in Christ and the response in faith to God makes the Christian existence (as seen earlier, p. 160), then we can speak of the artist-Christian. The artist-Christian receives the revelation in Christ and responds in faith as an artist. The artist's way of life and the pattern of his existence make him open to receive revelation through images and stories. His imagination enables him to approach the mystery of the Christ-event and to assimilate the images and symbols through which the mystery of Christ confronts him. The artist, because he exists through praxis or image-making, expresses his response of faith through historical and bodily involvement in the material world. The artist receives revelation through it. He lives his Christian life as an artist. He exists in being an artist. He is a Christian through art and imagination, in its all-inclusive sense. That is why he can be called an artist-Christian.

According to Ananda Coomaraswamy all men are artists by nature, and only what kind of artist one becomes is left to the particular situation he finds in a society. The idea that an artist is not a special kind of man but every man is special kind of artist is Coomaraswamy's favourite idea.<sup>42</sup> Every man has imagination and imagination makes man human and gives him a world of meaningful and civilized existence. All may not be able to paint, sing, sculpt, dance or write poetry, novels and stories. Even if we leave the mastery in such arts to the accomplished artists in their respective fields, the ordinary man in the street can be called an artist. He remembers his significant experiences of the yester



days and years and imaginatively recounts them as meaningful stories. He sits around with people and spins yarns and narrates the past events manifesting a hidden hope in existence. He lives his stories in working for his family and celebrating his life with the community. Often his simple actions of love and gratitude tell long stories silently. He lives as an artist and if his basic story is about God in Christ, then he is a Christian. As a corollary to the above statement, we will have to say that every Christian is an artist in some way. The more one is a Christian, the greater his responsibility to live the story of Christ, i.e., to be an artist-Christian.

## Notes

- 1 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, p. 24.
- 2 Cf. Errol D'Lima, "Christian Revelation and Faith", cyclostyled notes, De Nobili College, Pune, 1982, p. 1.
- 3 J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (ed.), *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 3rd ed., T.P.I., Bangalore, 1978 (Hereafter cited as J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (ed.), *The Christian Faith*), p. 34.
- 4 Gabriel Moran, *Theology of Revelation*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1966, p. 60.
- 5 Gabriel Moran, *Theology of Revelation*, p. 76.
- 6 There are two possible approaches to revelation available to us within the aesthetic context. One is the path illumined by images as opposed to concepts and propositions. The revelation through images is placed before a backdrop of its peculiar epistemological pre-eminence and the disadvantage of a propositional revelation. The second approach is the way of religious experience engendered through art-images. Art is related to religion in the realm of affective and meta-empirical depth-experiences. Art in general and Christian art in particular, e.g., icons reveal God by effecting religious experiences. In this approach, the different realms of experience – aesthetic, religious and human – are compared and contrasted to determine how art occasions religious experience. We treat here only the first approach, e.e., revelation as non-propositional knowledge.
- 7 Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within revelation", in *Aesthetic Dimensions of religious Education*, ed. Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, Paulist Press,

New York, 1979 (Hereafter cited as Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within Revelation"), p. 153.

8 Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within Revelation", p. 154.

9 Xavier Leon-Dufour (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed., TPI, Bangalore, 1973, p. 373; cf. Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, Biblo and Tannen, New York, 1971, pp. 29-48.

10 Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 502.

11 Avery Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, Corpus books, Washington, 1968, p. 20.

12 J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (ed.), *The Christian Faith*), p. 43.

13 J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (ed.), *The Christian Faith*), p. 34.

14 Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within Revelation", p. 155-156.

15 Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within Revelation", p. 155.

16 J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (ed.), *The Christian Faith*), p. 47-49.

17 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, LVII (March 1982), p. 116.

18 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 117.

19 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 117.

20 cf. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, 1958; Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1971; Peter Berger and T. Luckman, *Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*, Irvington Press, New York, 1966.

21 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 118.

22 J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (ed.), *The Christian Faith*), p. 34.

23 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 118.

24 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 120.

25 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 121.

26 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 121.

27 William Lynch, *Images of Faith*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1973, p. 63.

28 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 121-122.

- 29 Mary Warnock, "Imagination – Aesthetic and Religious", *Theology*, LXXXII (November, 1980), p. 405.
- 30 John R. May, "Myth and Parable in American Fiction", *Thought*, LVII (March, 1982), p. 53.
- 31 Mary Warnock, p. 405.
- 32 Cf. John R. May, "Myth and Parable in American Fiction", p. 53.
- 33 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 126.
- 34 William Dych, "Theology and Imagination", *Thought*, p. 127.
- 35 Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within Revelation", p. 154.
- 36 Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within Revelation", p. 159-161.
- 37 Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within Revelation", p. 163.
- 38 When the form of the Church is deduced from propositional revelation which the Church itself has ratified, changes and variety in the form of the Church are almost impossible. With such an understanding of revelation, Church has to be individualistic, monolithic, rationalistic and bureaucratic. cf. Gabriel Moran, "Teaching Within Revelation", p. 163.
- 39 J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (ed.), *The Christian Faith*, p. 47.
- 40 Cf. Kevin McNamara, "Is There a Non-Christian Revelation", in *Service and Salvation*, ed., J. Pathrapankal, TPI, Bangalore, 1973, p. 192.
- 41 Karl Rahner, "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions", *Theological Investigations*, V, p. 131.
- 42 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, p. 24.

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