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Scientific and Religious Perspectives

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Editorial

Death is a fact of life which is both inevitable and universal. It threatens life not only in the last moments of life but right from the beginning. We humans are beings unto death. It is death which gives life "its radical uncertainty, final seriousness and ultimate mystery" (John R. Sachs). That is why we think it worthwhile to seek to understand death from an inter-disciplinary perspective.

There are three articles in this issue of *Jnanadeepa* which deal with death from the point of view of modern science. The first one attempts a molecular definition of death. Biologically people are considered dead when the electrical activity in the brain ceases. It is presumed that a stoppage of electrical activity indicates the end of consciousness. However, the suspension of consciousness must be permanent, and not transient, as occurs during sleep or a coma. The basic events leading to death involves the brain ceasing to supply information vital for controlling ventilation, heart rhythm, and/or vasodilation and vasoconstriction. The lung is unable to supply oxygen to exchange with the bloom stream. The heart and blood vessels are unable to maintain adequate circulation of blood to vital tissues. Problems in the central nervous system that may lead to death include infection, blood vessel disruption, malignant tumors etc. In the respiratory system, problems that can lead to death include lack of pulmonary blood flame, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, infections and cancer metastasis. A second article looks at death biologically. Death represents the failure of homeostatic mechanisms. In life cell death by injury or suicide is a regular phenomenon, but the organism continues to be alive because of an adequate replacement of cells. However, a point is reached when such replacement is unable to compensate for the deterioration caused by aging. Impairment of function beyond a point in one or more vital organs results in the death of the whole organism. One can also view death from a perspective that is beyond biology. Death

is both a physiological and a spiritual necessity. Death is inevitable because the imperfection of the body when the body has exhausted its functional space it must die. Death is also a spiritual necessity because the true purpose of life is the spiritual growth of the person. But there comes a point when the body cannot respond any further to the thrust for the further growth of the spirit. At that point it becomes necessary for the body to die. The third article makes some scientific reflections on death. After a brief discussion of the different ways in which different peoples and cultures understand life and death, the articles seeks to look at death from the Human Genome Project. It also examines the possibility of physical immortality through the Human Genome Project or through cloning. Even if such immortality is possible, is it desirable? The article concludes by pointing out the need to develop new and effective ethical principles to respond creatively to the challenge of the modern developments in science.

Closely related to this group of articles is one that discusses the constructive contribution which science and religion can make to the development of a culture of life. In many ways science and religion have been responsible for a lot of death and destruction in the history of human-kind. All the same, the article proposes that a healthy collaboration between science and religion will improve the chances of our personal well-being and collective wholeness (salvation).

Included in this issue is an article on the Buddhist view of death. It is a critical study of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. It points out that Tibetan Buddhism has adopted a very pragmatic approach to death which acclimatises humans, through a process of mediation, to the auscious period after death. It has also devised effective methods of accompanying the dying so that they can face death with a smile. This book offers valuable lessons to humanity in the art both of happy living and joyful death.

There are two articles in this issue which deal with death and resurrection from a Christian perspective. The first one seeks to develop a Christian theology of death. It begins by pointing out that there is a close relationship between life and death so that we can understand one only in relation to the other. The creative power of

God stands over against physical death as a promise of new life which is initially experiences in the unfolding of the present life. Its full realisation remains as a hope founded on God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

The second article deals with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and seeks to clarify its significance for humans. The Christian faith is based on the encounter of the first apostles and disciples with the risen Lord. They realized that Jesus was alive after he was crucified, died and was buried. The resurrection of Jesus gives us an insight into the mystery of God, of humans and the world. Ant it demands from us humans that we take responsibility for the future of humanity and the world.

There are two articles in this issue which discuss the understanding of death which is found in the funeral rites of the Catholic Church. The first one deals with the funeral service in the Latin rite and points out that the new funeral rite beings out three significant aspects of Christian death. Christian death is a proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ. Through baptism Christians enter into the paschal mystery of Christ. What was symbolically realized in their life through the reception of this sacrament has to be actualized throughout their journey in this world and will reach its climax when in death they will hand over their lives into the hands of God as Christ did on the cross. Further, Christian death is a gospel proclamation. The gospel is the good news of God for humanity. Its content is the risen Lord who destroyed sin and restored new life to humankind. It has to be proclaimed wherever the power of sin is at work in the world. Moreover, Christian death is an event of communion. Although death is usually experienced as separation, yet in the Christian vision of faith death is a moment of a deeper solidarity and personal communion with Christ and the Christian community. The second article develops a liturgical and theological reflection on the funeral rite of the Syro-Malabar Church. This rite is largely based on the funeral service in the East Syrian tradition. The East Syrian liturgy of the funeral with its highly appealing prayers and gestures reveals the East Syrian theology of death. The whole liturgy is a celebration of our participation in the death and resurrection of the Lord. The prayers,

hymns, scripture readings and actions like processions enable the faithful to understand the meaning of death as a participation in the death of Christ as well as our hope of sharing in Christ's resurrection.

Included in this issue is an article on Ecosophy: An Indian Paradigm of Eco-Spirituality which because of some technical problems was not published in the last (January 2006) issue of the Journal. This article explores some of the classical sources of India's spiritual heritage in order to develop a healthy, integral spiritual attitude to nature. There are basically two ways of dealing with the things of nature. The first takes them as objects for humans to possess, develop, control and consume. Such an approach has alienated humans from the life-nourishing eco-system and caused a growing sense of meaninglessness in the consumerist way of life. This is the spiritual crisis that affects individuals and societies today. The effective antidote to this malaise is to develop a second perspective: to look at the earth as the mother-base out of which we are born, through which we grow and into which we return and to relate to plants and animals as members of one family. This is the perspective of an earth-bound spirituality which leads to a harmonious living together of all created things.

It is our fond hope that the articles in this issue will help our readers to develop a healthy attitude to death and nurture within themselves the hope for the fullness of life.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ
Guest Editor

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Death not the End: Some Scientific Reflections on Death

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Abstract: It is clear that the concept of death of each society played a crucial role in determining its goal of life, mode of life and values in life. The author first discuss some of the prevalent views of life and some of the impact they have had on the lives of people. Then he deals with some recent scientific developments related to like HGP, cloning. This leads him to comment on some issues critically and philosophically. These considerations point to a situation far beyond the purview of science, far beyond the competence of professional scientists. These matters are far too pregnant with grave consequences to be left in the hands of scientists alone. We need to develop a broader perspective and a broader approach. We need to develop new and effective ethical values to respond responsibly and creatively to this challenge, an ethics that will enable us to benefit from the advantages of science without having to suffer from the bad effects of technological developments, or at least enable us to maximize the blessings of science while at the same time minimizing its curses. The author believes that humanity are capable of achieving such a broad perspectives.

Keywords: Cloning, DNA, HGP, new ethics, physical immortality, understandings of death, Trans-homo Sapiens.

Introduction: The Reality and Mystery of Death

The irony about death is that it is both a reality and a mystery at the same time. Although death is considered the most certain fact for any living being, there is no clear idea about what it is or when it will befall. Medical science has made tremendous strides in the medical care and treatment of patients. Yet, it is helpless when it comes to predicting the exact time of death even of the terminally

ill. Down through the ages different cultures, philosophies and religions have understood death differently. At the same time, it is clear that the concept of death of each society played a crucial role in determining its goal of life, mode of life and values in life. I discuss below some of the prevalent views of life and some of the impact they have had on the lives of people.

1. Death as the End of Life

This view was held by many from the beginning of civilization. According to this, death is the end of everything as far as the person is concerned. There is nothing beyond the grave. The Epicureans in the West, the Carvakas in India, the atheists and materialists in modern times subscribe to this view. For those who hold this view life on earth becomes the most important thing, and living the present life joyfully becomes their prime concern. Material pleasures and physical happiness become their primary goal. Ethical and moral values are looked upon from a mere pragmatic point of view.

2. Death as a Form of Enfeebled Life

For some societies life does not come to an end with death; rather it takes on another form, an enfeebled, scaled down form. This view was prevalent especially in Mesopotamia in ancient times. According to this view, a deceased person does not cease immediately, but rather goes down to the underworld gradually.

3. Death as a Continuation of Life

Yet another group looks upon death as a continuation of life. For them also life does not end with death, but continues on. Many tribal cultures subscribe to this view. For the Dayak of Borneo the soul returns to the earth after its 7th death, and enters into a mushroom or fruit near the village. When a lady eats that object, the soul invades the body of the woman and rebirth takes place.

4. Death as Perpetual Development

This is the evolutionary perspective of death. According to this view, life is an ongoing process, a never-ending process. Life is looked upon as an emergent quality from a universe that continues to transform itself. Similarly, the mind is also a quality that emerged from life. Sri Aurobindo, the Indian philosopher and mystic, held that the mind continued to evolve and develop into supermind.

5. The Scientific View of Death

Contemporary science in the light of its different findings, particularly in medical science, has developed a scientific view of death. In this context a few clarifications are in order. First of all, when science talks about death and immortality, it confines itself to the physical world. It means physical death and physical immortality. The spiritual dimension falls outside the purview of science, although in recent times much serious research has been going on to get a scientific understanding of the soul, immortality, etc. Secondly, there is much heated controversy about what physical death exactly means and when a person can be declared dead, scientifically speaking. Thirdly, science's criteria have to be limited to the phenomenal, functional, observational levels. Its criteria are empirical rather than metaphysical. Fourthly, recent developments in science have made the pplication of these criteria particularly complex. Thanks to these medico-technological developments, today science can enable a person to exercise certain vital brain functions even after the person is dead under normal conditions.

Death as the Cessation of Brain Function

In the world of science, particularly medical science, death is often taken as the cessation of brain function. Even in this narrow definition there are controversies. For some death comes with the cessation of the higher brain function, whereas for some others it happens only when all brain functions cease.

In this context we need to consider the different parts of the brain such as the hindbrain, the midbrain and the forebrain. The hindbrain consists of the medulla, the pons and the cerebellum. The medulla is responsible for vital functions like breathing, heartbeat and digestion. Several cranial nerves enter the brain at the medulla. The pons is a way station for neural pathways going to other brain areas. The cerebellum, on the other hand, controls equilibrium, muscle tone and the regulation of coordinated movements. Furthermore, the function of the midbrain is to process sensory information from the eyes and ears. Both the hindbrain and midbrain together form the brainstem, which serves as a complex relay station for messages traveling up and down the spinal cord. The centre of brainstem and

just above it where it joins the forebrain are very basic parts of the brain since they are responsible for crucial functions like breathing, temperature regulation and basic emotional responses. Even this short description shows how complex the brain is, and how diverse its functions are. According to the scientific view, in order to be declared brain dead, one must have sustained irreversible cessation of all the functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem.[1]

Although the above definition of death looks quite reasonable, the matter has become highly complex today, leading to serious ethical dilemmas, because of developments in science and technology. Today patients can be given "heroic" treatment to restart hearts after they fail. In such cases can we say that the person is dead? This and similar cases are giving rise to ethical dilemmas that never existed before.

Death and Recent Scientific Developments

Today science is no more confined to the laboratory or the drawing room of a handful of scientists. Science and its impact have become all-pervasive. Almost every aspect of human life has been touched, and in some cases transformed by science and technology. As I have argued in some other places, today science is in a position to determine not only what we have but also what we are.[2]

The Human Genome Project(HGP)

The genome of any being is the sum-total of the genetic information locked up in its DNA. The HGP consists basically in identifying and locating the 3.1 billion nucleotides or chemical base units, arranged into around 30 thousand genes within the 23 pairs of chromosomes in the nucleus of the human cell. Human biological life can be compared to a book, "the book of life," written in a language made up of 4 letters A (Adenine), G (Guanine), C (Cytocine), and T (Thymine), which are biochemical units known as nucleotides. Human DNA consists of a long chain of these units repeated over 3.1 billion times in varying combinations. Genes are small, specific bits of this DNA, and can be compared to words formed by these letters. When the working draft of the human genome was announced in June of 2000, it was thought that the human DNA had 100,000 genes. Today it is found to be only 30,000

or less. These genes are primarily responsible for determining how humans will be, what characteristics they will have, how they will carry out their essential functions, etc. These genes are arranged into 23 pairs of chromosomes in the human cell.

The ordering or sequencing of the 3.1 billion chemical units is not arbitrary. Indeed, it contains absolutely vital instructions and information for sustaining life, since it determines the production of the all-important proteins. However, it is also found that the actual genes and the bits of DNA controlling the on/off switch of the protein-producing activity of the genes, account for a mere 5% of the total DNA in the cell. Some recent studies put it even less. The remaining massive chunk is left as "junk" since present day science has not yet been able to assign any definite function for it[3].

This code or series of instructions contained in DNA can be compared to the Morse Code used in telecommunications, which when decoded conveys important messages. Today many scientists in various parts of the world are busy decoding this message to understand it and apply it to different fields like medicine, nutrition, etc.

The Importance and Implications of HGP

It is expected that in the future the genomic information of each individual will be available in CD or other inexpensive, user-friendly formats. This information, though absolutely fundamental and extremely useful, in itself can have only very limited impact on the individual and society. The situation can be compared to what happened in the physical sciences. Lord Rutherford's discovery of the structure of the atom was a trailblazer in the physical sciences. However, until it was combined with other theories and technological developments, it had only a limited impact. But when it was combined with breakthroughs in relativity, quantum theory, developments in nuclear and high-energy particle physics, etc., it could transform our understanding of material reality. It opened the way for nuclear power, better understanding of stellar phenomena, the origin of the universe, etc. It also spawned technologies like semi-conductors, transistors, radio, television, neon lights, lasers, etc., with numerous industrial applications. These developments transformed not only

the scientific world, but also the life style of even ordinary people all over the world. Similarly, when combined with other developments, technologies and techniques, such as genetic engineering, nanotechnology, computer and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, cloning, etc., the data provided by HGP can be a powerful force with far-reaching consequences for human destiny. We will discuss two such cases: the possibility of human immortality and of trans-human species.

The Human Genome and Physical Immortality

Here we are concerned not with spiritual immortality or the immortality of the soul, but with bodily or physical immortality. Bodily immortality is something all humans, even the most desperate ones when in their good senses, look for, but find it impossible to attain. The average life span of humans has increased significantly in recent times, thanks to better medical knowledge, better medical facilities, better food and living conditions. Yet, living beyond 100 years seems to be almost an impossible dream.

Today the HGP, in tandem with advanced knowledge about the process of aging, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, telomerase[4] treatment and cloning, has opened up the real possibility for some form of physical immortality or at least a significant prolongation of life. It may be noted that immortality is the ultimate, idealistic goal which may never be really attained by science. The hope today at the practical level is that science in the future will be able to prolong the human life-span substantially.

A number of theories have been advanced in recent times to explain how the human body ages and finally dies after a certain number of years. For instance, the free radical theory says that the biological activities of the organism produce certain free radicals as by-products, which gradually destroy the healthy cells. When a certain number of cells in an organ are destroyed, it becomes non-functional and dies. The programmed senescence theory, on the other hand, holds that the rate at which living beings age is predetermined, the genetic makeup controlling the aging and death of the cells.

More recent studies reveal that death occurs because the process of cell division or replication ceases after a certain limit. It has been

found that under normal conditions a cell dies after 50 divisions. This limit is known as the Hayflick Limit.[5] Once a certain number of cells die the organs involved cease to function and the organism dies. Hence immortality research targets on slowing down, or even arresting, the process of cell deterioration.

Recent researches enable us to have a clearer idea about the process of cell deterioration. It is found today that cell life depends on telomeres which occur like caps at the ends of chromosomes, protecting the chromosomes from deterioration. Every cell division results in the shortening of the telomere. Gradually it gets depleted and the cell division stops. Obviously, a better and detailed knowledge of the genome can help in arresting, or at least controlling, the depletion of telomeres.

It has been found that the enzyme telomerase can prevent this shortening process. Hence better knowledge and utilization of this enzyme can be of great help in the search for possible physical immortality. Since telomeres are part of the chromosomes, genomic knowledge is vital for prolonging the life span using this method.

Immortality/Long Life through Cloning

As has been pointed out, HGP in itself is incapable of prolonging the life span. But, in combination with cloning, nanotechnology and other techniques, it claims to be able to achieve this goal, although the actual realization will take a very long time and far more developments in technology. Long life can be made possible in two ways: by repair/replacement of defective parts and by cloning a living being just before its death.

Defective parts can be repaired by using nanotechnology which is technology at the molecular or atomic level. At present it is in the initial stages, but it is expected to develop rapidly in the coming years, thanks to parallel developments in computer and other technologies. Parts to be replaced in an organism can be obtained by cloning[6] although the morality of this process raises many serious questions. We are considering at the moment only the scientific possibility of this process. In this kind of replacement or transplantation of organs, the main difficulty is the rejection by the host. But if a clone is made by using the nucleus of the host itself

and a part from this clone is used for the transplantation, then the possibility of rejection is considerably reduced.

Transgenetic products also can be of great help in this context. This involves introducing into the DNA of one animal the genes of another living being. For instance, human genes can be introduced into a pig's DNA to produce a transgenetic animal, and its parts can be used for carrying out a transplant operation.

Another way to prolong life is by cloning the individual at the moment of death. Since cloning is claimed to produce an exact duplicate, the individual in a way continues to live through the clone.

In all these cases genomic knowledge is fundamental for the success of the process.

However, this process of cloning is beset with many problems. "Almost without exception, the world's experts in reproductive technology have agreed that cloning is not a safe way to try to produce a human baby.... It turns out, however, that creating cloned human embryos is more difficult than anyone imagined a decade ago."[7] Popular writings often give the impression that DNA is all that we need to produce an exact copy of a human being. Today it has been found that DNA has only a partial role. Epigenetics that control the activity of DNA also has an important role to play in forming the new being. "The job of DNA is to provide the instructions for building proteins, of which we are made. The job of epigenetic signals is to tell the DNA exactly how much of each protein to build at just the right time and in just the right cell."[8]

Again, at the time of fertilization the epigenetic signals are reset in order to bring about the complex process of development of the new being, whereas the DNA remains the same. When the new being is produced by cloning, there is no guarantee that the epigenetic signals will be reset. "In fact, all the evidence is that they are usually not set back to the starting point. The result can be catastrophic failure to develop properly."[9] A single consideration can reveal how serious and far-reaching the consequences can be. It has been found that in us human beings about 30% of the genes are expressed in our brains. The crucial step of brain development takes place in this way. Since epigenetic signals play a pivotal role in this process, if they fail, the being produced can be seriously defective.

Comments and Reflections

Humans as Co-creators

The HGP and other related developments in the biological sciences can be looked upon as a shot in the arm of human dignity since it raises humans from the level of mere creatures to that of co-creators or partners in the ongoing process of creation. The created world, despite being so breathtakingly amazing, still remains incomplete with almost infinite possibilities of further developments. Humans with their powerful resources of science are called upon to collaborate in completing this most sublime task. The HGP emphasizes this positive aspect of scientific developments.

The Limits of HGP

Some of the claims made concerning the capabilities of HGP, especially by the non-professionals, are highly exaggerated. HGP has given us only the ordering and location of the nucleotides in the 23 pairs of human chromosomes. It is a long way from here to the actual production of human characteristics. As Phillip Sloan of Notre Dame University points out, "Working scientists and molecular biologists are fully aware of the enormous complexities that are interposed between the paired base sequences ... and the actual expression of phenomenal traits – e.g., blue eye colour, a nose of a specific shape, or a defined behavioural pattern."[10] This comes about because "even though each cell contains the same nuclear information in the form of DNA located on the chromosomes, between the DNA base sequence and expressed traits lies a very complex system of relationships involving regulator genes (operons), introns, exons, messenger and transfer RNA's, triplet codons, protein synthesis from specific amino acids, and time-dependent embryological formation of specific structures from proteins."[11] That is why metaphors like "blueprint," "code of life," etc., are misleading simplifications, since they imply direct causal connections, whereas the actual connections seem to be statistical.

Reductionism

HGP and its claims are based on a strong reductionism – the sum of the parts is equal to the whole. Can this be held in the case of living beings, especially rational, free beings? An answer to this

question depends on what life and rationality are. Reductionism presupposes that life is made up of parts, and hence can be reduced to its component parts. Although we have a good idea about the manifestations of life, the question of what exactly life is seems still to defy any definitive answer.[12] The same can be said about rationality and human freedom.

Nature vs Nurture

HGP is related to the physical aspect of a human person, which, though absolutely necessary, is seriously inadequate to describe the human person since humans are far more than pure physical or material beings. A human person is not just a collection of atoms and molecules, however sophisticatedly organized, but is very much a product of his/her social, cultural, religious surroundings. Both what is given by way of nature and what is given by nurture are important in shaping a person. Hence HGP can provide only a partial explanation of a human person.

The Possibility of Long Life

Long Life through Repair

It is indeed possible to extend one's life by careful and effective repair of defective or damaged parts. However, if a more effective and lasting effect is desired, one will have to resort to nanotechnology. The expectation is that this technology will soon be very much within the capabilities of science. Since this is technology at the molecular level, the assumption is that the conditions at the micro-level are the same as those at the macro-level. But physics tells us that the micro-world of physics is governed by the uncertainty principle, which puts certain specific limits to what is attainable by science. Wouldn't there be some such principle in the world of biology also? If so wouldn't it put some limit to what is attainable in the micro-world of biology?

Long life through cloning

Cloning plays an important part in the efforts by science to prolong life since it cannot only supply suitable body parts for the replacement of defective parts, but also produce a true replica of a dying person so that he/she "continues to live." However, both these

possibilities involve serious questions, technical as well as moral. The practice of producing clones to supply parts for the human body is a matter of serious controversy since this demeans human dignity, reducing humans to a commercial commodity.

Cloning a dying person involves a number of problems. First of all, a perfect duplicate cannot be formed, not even physically. The process of cloning requires three agents: the donor who supplies the agent to be cloned in the form of a cell nucleus, the denucleated[13] egg which provides the required nourishment to the clone in its early stages, and the surrogate mother who takes care of the clone during pregnancy. A perfect duplicate can be produced only if the denucleation process is 100% complete, but it has been found that it is usually only 99% complete. Hence 1% of the ovum nucleus is present in the clone, thereby bringing in some of the features of the egg donor. This 1% can in no way be overlooked since we know that a difference of 1.6% at the genome level changes a being from a chimpanzee to a human being.[14] Thus even physically a perfect duplicate is impossible.

Even if science were to perfect its techniques and get a perfectly denucleated egg, this in no way guarantees a perfect duplicate since the womb of the surrogate mother provides the environment and nourishment for the clone in its embryonic and fetus stage, and so this surrogate mother will have a role in shaping this cloned being. Once the cloned child is born, the social, cultural factors take over the development of the child in significant ways, thereby foreclosing the possibility of real continuity with the original. All these considerations raise serious questions about the claim that cloning can be a reliable and authentic means for prolonging the life of a dying person.

The moral problems associated with this process are enormous. Since this has been discussed elsewhere, we will not take up this point here.[15]

Is a Long Life Desirable?

Although at first thought a long life is highly desirable, and an everlasting existence on earth even more attractive, a moment's reflection on the matter can reveal that this tempting prospect is not

all that rosy, particularly so if there is no guarantee about the good quality of life. If every person lives up to a thousand years rather than up to a hundred, as it is today, and if the current rate of increase of population continues, will there be enough material resources in the world to meet the normal needs of all? We also need to keep in mind that as people age more, their needs and the level of care required increase. Will there be enough space for people to live comfortably since there is no way of expanding the size of the earth? Migrating to other planets may be a solution; but so far we have not spotted any inhabitable planet. Will there be enough jobs to keep all employed? Already today taking care of senior citizens has become a frightening responsibility even for the most economically developed countries. If humans cannot be guaranteed of a life with dignity and reasonable comforts, a long life may be more a punishment than a blessing. These problems will be multiplied many times over if physical immortality for humans were to become a reality.

Trans-homo Sapiens Species

The possibility of our species developing is good tidings for all, and the prospect of humans being collaborators in this noble task is indeed a matter of honour for the human species. But if this onward progressive march should lead to the emergence of a trans-homo sapiens species, the situation could be extremely challenging and even alarming.[16] For one thing, like all the past phases of evolution, this too would be a slow, gradual process – it would not be the case that the existing species disappears abruptly, and a new one appears at once. This means that at a given time, both homo sapiens and trans-homo sapiens would be existing side by side. How would they look at each other? What kind of relationship would there be between the two? How would the expected superiority complex on the one side and the inferiority complex on the other be tackled? Can we deny that this situation would bring back the accursed slavery with a vengeance? One can expect social, economic and ethical unrest in this state of affairs. Chaos and confusion may become the law of the land.

The Need for a New Ethics

The scenario depicted above may look like pure science fiction, not to be taken seriously. However, the history of science tells us that when it comes to science, today's fiction is often tomorrow's fact; today's dream tomorrow's reality. It is true that the scenario above will not take place within a few years, but it will take place, and we will have to be prepared for it. Some effects of the developments in genetic engineering will hit us in the near future. For instance, eugenic use of genetic engineering knowledge and techniques for enhancing the characteristics of offspring in desired directions is very much on the cards now. This is something only the super-rich can afford under the present conditions. Rich nations can profit from it more than the less rich ones. All these will lead to discriminations within a nation and between nations, with accompanying political and moral problems. As the developments progress, the problems will become more acute and the divide between the haves and the have-nots will widen.

All these considerations point to a situation far beyond the purview of science, far beyond the competence of professional scientists, however gifted and well-intentioned they be. These matters are far too pregnant with grave consequences to be left in the hands of scientists alone. We need to develop a broader perspective and a broader approach. We need to develop new and effective ethical values to respond responsibly and creatively to this challenge, an ethics that will enable us to benefit from the advantages of science without having to suffer from the bad effects of technological developments, or at least enable us to maximize the blessings of science while at the same time minimizing its curses.

I believe that humans can do this. Just as humans have developed such a successful science, they can also help in developing new and revolutionary ethical principles and values. This is the principal challenge and task facing science-religion dialogue today. Both scientists and religious scholars need to join hands in this momentous task because our experience shows that science without values can lead to monstrous minds, and values without science can lead to mindless monsters.

Notes

1. "The Meaning of Death: Scientific and Religious." Internet.
2. See "The Human Genome Revolution, Society and Religion," *Samanvaya* 3 (2002), pp.74-93.
3. In this case also some recent studies have found a role for the "junk" genes in connection with the complexification and related properties of living beings.
4. Telemerase is an enzyme that protects cells from degeneration.
5. Leonard Hayflick in 1962 discovered that cultured human cells die after undergoing 50 divisions. The death of a human cell after about 50 divisions is known as Hayflick Limit.
6. The basic idea of cloning is quite well known today. The process involves obtaining an egg cell and denucleating it or stripping it of its nucleus. To this denucleated cell the nucleus of the cell to be cloned is inserted. The new cell is introduced into the womb of a surrogate mother where it grows into an exact duplicate of the original donor of the nucleus.
7. Ronald Cole-Turner, "The Cloning Controversy a Decade after Dolly," in *Omega: Indian Journal of Science and Religion*, forthcoming.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Phillip Sloan, "New Human Genetics and Religious Vision," in Job Kozhamthadam (ed.) *Contemporary Science and Religion in Dialogue: Challenges and Opportunities*, Pune, India: ASSR Publications, 2002, p. 130.
11. Ibid., p. 130.
12. In recent times attempts have been made to explain life, the spiritual dimension of humans, etc., in certain sophisticated versions of emergentism, supervenience, etc. However, all these attempts leave many questions unanswered.
13. Denucleated egg means that the nucleus has been removed from the egg.
14. Scientists some years ago found that the genome of a chimp differed from that of a human being only by 1.6%. Today some studies put it at 1%.
15. See my "Cloning of Dolly: Scientific and Ethical Reflections on Cloning," *Vidyajyoti* 62 (1998), pp.110-118.
16. See "The Human Genome Project and Human Destiny," *Omega: Indian Journal of Science and Religion* 1 (2002), pp. 36-57.

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Death:Biology and Beyond?

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Abstract: Life is a mysterious phenomenon, and so is death. Clinical death is now defined as the permanent and irreversible cessation of function of any one of the three interconnected vital systems, viz. nervous system, circulatory system and respiratory system. Even after a person is no longer alive, individual cells and tissues remain viable for variable periods of time, making their transplantation possible. Physiologically, death represents failure of the homeostatic mechanisms. Cell death by necrosis as well as apoptosis is a regular phenomenon, but the organism continues to be alive due to replacement of cells. However, a point is reached when replacement and physiological reserve are unable to compensate for deterioration due to aging. Impairment of function beyond a point in one or more vital organs results in the death of the whole organism. The Mother (of Sri Aurobindo Ashram) described death as the "decentralization and dispersion of cells". At the mental level, the replacement of the 'will to live' by a 'wish to die' is probably the beginning of decentralization. Decentralization is followed by ill-health, and finally death. Following death, dispersion of cells possibly transmits their consciousness to the new forms they assume. On the purely material plane, the time of death is inexorably fixed. But on higher planes of consciousness, a different type of determinism prevails. That is why the will to live, or its absence, may have a role in determining the time of death. Psychoneuroimmunology provides some partial but plausible explanations for the phenomenon. Death is both a physiological and a spiritual necessity. Physiologically, death is nature's solution for the imperfection of the body. When the body has exhausted its functional span, it is withdrawn, usually only after it has renewed itself by reproduction. Thus the old order keeps yielding to the new. Death is also a spiritual necessity because the true purpose of life is spiritual growth. When a person reaches the upper limit of his spiritual growth, further prolongation of life becomes meaningless.

Keywords: Aurobindo, Cell death, Clinical death, molecular death, Psychoneuroimmunology, somatic death.

Death is both an event and a process. It is an event after which a collection of matter that was once alive becomes just a collection of matter. Nobody has seen what it is that escapes from the living body during this radical transformation. That is why the phenomenon called life is shrouded in mystery. It naturally follows that the event during which it escapes is equally mysterious. But the event called death is the culmination of a process from which it cannot be divorced, viz., the process of aging.

In a broad sense, aging is a continuous process which begins with conception and ends with death. But what is more relevant to death is the impairment of functions seen in the later part of life. In this restricted sense, aging is due to a decrease in the efficiency of homeostatic mechanisms. Hence the body is unable to mount an adequate response to the challenges originating in the external or internal environment. This increases the vulnerability of the individual to a number of diseases, to one of which he finally succumbs during the event called death. Although progress towards the event of death may be a slow and insidious process, the event is precipitated when the functional capacity of at least one of the vital organs falls below a critical minimum. When that happens, the heart stops beating or the lungs stop breathing. In either case, the result is that no part of the body any longer has a continuous supply of oxygen. However, modern technology may create situations which are not so clear cut. The lungs may be made to work like bellows by mechanical means in a person who is unlikely to be ever able to regain meaningful life. That is what has necessitated the concept of brain death. If all the features of brain death are present, it is no longer justified to continue artificial life support. But since artificial life support may maintain a large number of organs in a viable state long after brain death, these organs are still fit to be transplanted where they can continue to live in another body.

Clinical Death

Doctors know very little about death. The only course in which they learn the subject at some length is that on forensic medicine. This is so because it is commonly assumed that their job is to postpone death as much as possible. If in spite of their efforts a patient dies, it signifies their failure, and they are out of the picture except perhaps to answer, in some cases, unpleasant medico-legal questions such as the time of death or the cause of death. That is why in case of incurable fatal disease, doctors are often unwilling to face the issue. They avoid talking about impending death to the patient or his relatives. They are ill equipped to talk to them in a manner that would make acceptance of the inevitable easier. Instead, they hide their distaste for death behind a cloak of intense activity. In the pre-ICU days, the parting service to the patient often was cardiopulmonary resuscitation and intracardiac adrenaline. These days, the patient is transferred to the intensive care unit (ICU) where tubes, flashes and beeps occupy the attention of doctors and nurses more then the patient to whom the equipment is connected. It is only recently that the importance of facing the issue of dying has been recognized, and some attention given to the best way of doing so (1). But this new trend is yet to get reflected in medical curricula.

Pronouncing clinical death

Till about forty years ago, the boundary between life and death was clinically well-defined. Death was defined as total stoppage of the circulation of the blood, and a consequent cessation of the animal and vital functions, such as respiration and pulsation (2). Doctors pronounced death when respiration and heartbeat had ceased, and when it seemed certain that these functions would not start and could not be started again (3). This could be presumed if heartbeat and breathing remained absent for at least 10 minutes because the brain survives without oxygen supply for only about 3 minutes, and without a living brain, resumption of circulation and respiration are impossible. But now that respiration and circulation can be maintained artificially for long periods of time, brain death has become an important criterion of death. Now death is defined as the permanent and irreversible cessation of function of any one of the

three interconnected vital systems, viz. nervous system, circulatory system and respiratory system (3). If any one of these systems fails, the other two also fail because the three systems are interlinked. The criteria of brain death are (a) fixed, dilated pupils, unresponsive to light, (b) absence of corneal reflex, vestibulo-ocular reflex, and cough reflex, (c) absence of cranial motor nerve responses to painful stimuli, (d) inability to breathe when the mechanical assistance provided by the ventilator is withdrawn temporarily, (e) coma and inability to breathe spontaneously continuously for at least 6 hours, (f) EEG silence continuously for at least 30 minutes. EEG silence is defined as absence of electrical potentials over 2 microvolts from symmetrically placed electrode pairs over 10 cm apart and with an interelectrode resistance between 100 and 10,000 ohms (4). However, very few countries insist that an EEG be available for determining brain death: clinical criteria are considered adequate. Being an expensive facility, EEG cannot be done in every hospital. Brain death has to be certified by a team of doctors consisting of a neurologist, anaesthesiologist and an experienced doctor of the intensive care unit of the hospital. The patient should be examined by the team at least twice at an interval of 6-12 hours. Further, none of the members of the team should have any interest in transplantation of an organ from the patient.

The criteria of brain death have become necessary because artificial life support systems can today keep intact in several patients the two cardinal signs of life, heartbeat and breathing, for several months after all reasonable hope of resuscitation has disappeared. Technology can thus maintain semblance of life when the person is not alive any more. Therefore additional criteria are needed to determine the point at which hope may be abandoned, and support systems switched off. On the other hand, strict guidelines for certifying brain death are also necessary because artificial life support can keep several organs in the body fit for transplantation for several hours after the person as a whole is, for all practical purposes, dead.

Somatic death and molecular death

Somatic death is said to have occurred when the person as a whole is no longer alive. The criteria of clinical death refer to somatic

death. After somatic death, maintaining oxygen supply through artificial life support can keep several organs alive for long periods as discussed above. But even if no artificial life support is used, the cells in different organs and tissues stay alive for variable periods of time after somatic death. Death of the cells is called cellular or molecular death. In general, molecular death occurs the earliest in organs which have the richest blood supply during life. Brain cells undergo molecular death within 5 minutes of somatic death, and muscle cells after about one hour, but blood cells and cornea are alive even 5 hours after somatic death. That is one reason why the brain cannot be transplanted; an organ can be transplanted only before it has undergone molecular death.

Suspended animation

Suspended animation is a state of extreme reduction in metabolic activity. The person may appear dead but the bare minimum metabolic activity is still going on throughout the body, and the person can return to normal activity. Some yogis can achieve a marked reduction in metabolic activity voluntarily, and thereby stay alive for relatively long periods in a place with highly restricted oxygen supply, such as an underground pit. One such yogi was examined by Prof. B.K. Anand and his colleagues at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. The yogi could bring down his metabolic rate to about half the 'normal' resting metabolic rate (5). A similar state is achieved clinically when hypothermia is induced to facilitate certain surgical procedures. Sometimes a person goes into suspended animation after drowning or electrocution. A person exposed to extreme cold may sometimes have all the signs of clinical death, but may revive after rewarming. The dictum in such cases is that the patient is not dead unless warm and dead.

The Process of Death

Life is maintained in complex multicellular organisms like a human being by a delicate balance of homeostatic mechanisms which ensure optimal conditions for the functioning of all cells of the body. In view of the complexity of the homeostatic mechanisms that maintain life, it is not surprising that sooner or later something goes

wrong at some crucial point, and life comes to an end. What is more surprising is that this happens after such a long time. One of the keys to our long life span is provided by the basic units of life – the cells. Most cells of the body have a life span much shorter than the organism to which they belong. But the process of cell division ensures that new cells replace the cells that die. The process of replacement is so exact that we do not notice the turnover and treat an individual as a stable entity. Imagine a machine from which only a few parts are removed at a time, replaced promptly, and then a few more parts removed from elsewhere, again replaced promptly, and so on. Soon a time will come when all the old parts have been replaced by new ones. In effect, what we have is a new machine but we remain under the illusion that it is the same old machine!

Cell Death

Cells may die due to an injury or poison. Cell death in this fashion is called necrosis. Cells, which undergo necrosis, swell and burst. However, what has engaged the attention of scientists very intensively during the last 25 years is programmed cell death, or apoptosis (pronounced *app-oh-toe-sis*). It seems that a cell normally generates a variety of molecules, some of which send survival signals while others send death signals to the cell. So long as survival signals dominate, the cell stays alive. Dominance of death signals triggers apoptosis. This mode of apoptosis has been termed cell 'suicide'. Cell death by a similar mechanism may be triggered also by toxic substances generated by neighbouring cells, e.g. by cytokines released by immune cells. This mode of apoptosis has been termed 'murder'. Neighbouring cells do not necessarily send lethal substances. They may also send trophic factors, e.g. the trophic factors released by nerve cells which keep neighbouring nerve cells, or the muscle cells which they innervate, alive.

Various regulators of cell death act through a series of chain reactions affecting genetic expression of some proteins, which in turn may eventually activate enzymes called caspases. Caspases are the final mediators of the apoptotic pathway. These enzymes break down protein molecules. Their name is based on the fact that they

selectively cleave protein molecules at sites just C-terminal to aspartate residues. Capases target proteins of the nuclear lamina and cytoskeleton. Attack on these critical structures eventually leads to cell death (6).

Why do cells have to die?

Using oxygen increases markedly the amount of energy that can be obtained from nutrient substrates. But it is also associated with the formation of reactive oxygen species which can damage the cells by attacking fats, proteins and nucleic acids. Although various defence mechanisms against oxidative damage have been built into cells, some damage does occur. Such damage is cumulative, and seems to be one of the contributors to the process of aging. It seems a stage finally comes in the life of a cell when the damage reaches such a level that further survival of the cell would not be in the best interests of the body as a whole. At this stage some unknown trigger triggers the apoptotic pathway, leading to cell 'suicide'. Some healthy cells may also undergo apoptosis, e.g. during embryonic life to sculpt tissues into a specific shape. Thus normal cells have no hesitation in quitting when no longer needed, or when their survival is no longer in the interest of the body as a whole.

Relationship between death and cell death

If cell death is a well regulated process, and dying cells are replaced by new cells, why does the organism die? This happens because the situation is a little more complex. We live in a hostile, competitive environment. A variety of chemical, physical and biological agents threaten our existence. The reason why we still survive is because responding to these agents is a part of the cellular defence mechanisms. If the challenge is overwhelming, or the response is inadequate, more cells may die than can be replaced. Inadequate response is a part of the process of aging. Even in the absence of an external onslaught, there may be apparently spontaneous abnormalities, which occur more frequently with aging. These changes may be: first, inadequate replacement of dead cells (atrophy); second, replacement by inadequately or inappropriately functioning cells (degeneration or scarring); or third, transformation

into neoplastic (cancer) cells. When such changes take place in any part of the body, initially nothing wrong may be observed because of the enormous physiological reserve. If the physiological reserve is exhausted, the impact depends on the organ involved and the degree of involvement. Impairment of function beyond a point in one or more vital organs results in death of the whole organism.

Death in unicellular organisms

In unicellular organisms, death is not a clearly discernible event. The reason is that long before the cell accumulates enough damage to die, it divides. The division results in two identical cells, each of them exactly like the parent cell. Since the parent is indistinguishable from the progeny, and very large numbers of such cells may be produced before some of them die, it is impossible to say when the parent cell died. This argument applies not only to unicellular organisms but to some extent to all organisms reproducing asexually. One may like to speculate that if asexual reproduction guarantees virtual (not real) immortality, why sexual reproduction evolved at all. Sexual reproduction makes it possible for the progeny to be different from the parents. The possibility of progeny improving upon the parents facilitates evolution. One might say that asexual reproduction is like photocopying while sexual reproduction is a creative art.

Beyond Biology

The Mother (of Sri Aurobindo Ashram) described death as the "decentralization and dispersion of the cells which make up the physical body" (7). In a very significant elaboration, She has also said "Death is the decentralization of the consciousness contained in the body's cells" (8). To clarify what She possibly meant, the Supreme Consciousness expresses itself in the universe in diverse forms. Each form expresses the universal Consciousness to varying degrees. Although the level of expression differs, every atom has a consciousness, every cell has a consciousness, and every individual has a consciousness. During much of the lifetime of an individual,

the consciousness of each cell is centred around the consciousness of the individual. But there comes a time when the centralization is weakened. As the Mother says, "the central will of the physical being abdicates its will to hold all the cells together ... it is this which inevitably precedes death" (7).

In order to understand why and when the process of decentralization begins, one may turn to what happens before decentralization. The consciousness of the individual is not static during life. Its ultimate destiny is to meet its source, or to express the Supreme Consciousness or the Universal Spirit completely. A few shuffling steps are taken in that direction during life; a sadhak on the path of yoga may put in a few extra strides. These steps are taken using the body as an instrument. As a result of these steps, there is a growth in the consciousness of the individual. But due to the limited plasticity of the body, further growth of consciousness is not possible while retaining the same body. The body which served as an instrument for growth of consciousness now becomes a bar to further growth. It is possibly when the material form becomes inadequate for responding to the pressure for further growth of consciousness that there develops, in the words of the Mother, "a kind of disgust with continuing the effort of coordination and harmonisation" (7). The "central will" to retain a collective consciousness gives way to decentralization of the individual consciousness of each cell. At the mental level, the replacement of the `will to live' by a `wish to die' is probably the beginning of decentralization. Decentralization is followed by ill-health, and finally death. Death is followed by dissolution of the body, leading to dispersion of cells. Eventually, the cells also dissolve, leading to dispersion of the atoms which compose them. The atoms may regroup themselves into new cells. The new cells may regroup into a new body.

A spiritual understanding of the process of death, as provided by the Mother in terms of decentralization and dispersion of cells, throws some light on the purpose of life. During the limited life span of an individual, growth of consciousness achieved by the individual leaves an imprint on the matter composing the body. Dispersion of cells possibly transmits the new level of consciousness to the new forms

it assumes. In the words of the Mother, "It is the consciousness of the cells that enters other combinations" (7).

In keeping with the trends of our times, a question is likely to be raised regarding the scientific validity of decentralization and dispersion of cells. Before we attempt to answer any such question, we need to remind ourselves that first, scientific truths are limited by the presumptions and methods of science; second, spiritual truths are wider and higher than scientific truths; and finally, seeing spiritual truths requires methods which are available to all but cultivated by very few. In short, a spiritual truth may not fit into the mould of science, simply because the whole cannot belong to a part. Having said that, the tendency of the central will to hold all the cells of the body together during life may be partly reflected in the single aim towards which all cells in the body work, i.e. to maintain homeostasis. Some cells replenish oxygen, some replenish food material, some remove waste products, while some coordinate the activities of all the rest, but all these individual functions are merely contributions towards the one common goal of maintaining homeostasis in the body as a whole. The beginning of ill health is a breakdown in the harmony between the activities of different parts of the body, leading to derangement in homeostasis. The breakdown in harmony may be a reflection of the decentralization of cells. The dispersion and dissolution of cells and consequent dissemination of a new level of consciousness after death of the individual are issues beyond the competence of science to examine and comment upon. However, if a parallel may be drawn, there seems to be a correspondence with the law of conservation. Not only matter and energy but also the soul of the individual seems to follow this law. They are all equally indestructible. Just as the matter belonging to an individual is recycled, his spiritual element represented by the soul is also recycled. Neither the material body nor the soul are destroyed, but both are recycled and enter new temporary consolidations which we call individuals. Body is consolidated matter, and the soul is consolidated Spirit.

At the birth of an individual, matter manifests the Spirit; during life, matter serves as an instrument of the Spirit; after death, matter

serves as a vehicle for dissemination of the Spirit. If the life has been used for the growth of consciousness, the disseminated matter manifests the Spirit less imperfectly than at birth.

The Time of Death

It is commonly held without any evidence, but with great conviction, that the time of death is fixed right at the time of birth, and that nothing can be done to change it. It is also commonly believed, with some evidence, but with far less conviction, that a person can delay or hasten his death if he strongly wants it. When asked to clarify this issue, the Mother has emphasized the spiritual dictum that we live in a deterministic universe, but qualified it by saying that there are different layers of determinism. On the purely material plane, the time of death is inexorably fixed. But if one rises to a higher plane of consciousness, a different type of determinism prevails. At higher planes, the determinism looks like free will, although there is nothing like free will in the universe. It is just that the laws that govern the higher planes are different: creating an illusion of free will is a part of those laws. To give an analogy, the computer sometimes seems to think and behave intelligently. But in fact the computer can neither think nor has any intelligence. Its behaviour is exactly as determined by the programmer. In the same way, we act exactly as determined by our Programmer (the Divine), but seem to possess free will. The semblance of free will is inherent in the programme. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence for seeming free will in relation to the time of death. Benefitting apparently from a strong will to live and confidence in self-healing, patients with incurable cancers often defy all statistics and live much longer than expected. More commonly, patients sometimes live for a few weeks or months after all hope is lost as if merely to reach a milestone such as a birthday or a child's wedding. Still more commonly, patients go steadily downhill in spite of all treatment once they have lost the will to live. Nothing seems to help once the patient has given in or given up. A significant determinant of the course of an illness are the 'live' or 'die' signals generated by the patient himself, depending on the attitude of the patient to the disease in particular, and to life in general. Psychoneuroimmunology (9) now has some partial but

plausible explanations for these phenomena. The spiritual explanation provided by the Mother is that a person does not die till he gives his consent, maybe only for "the hundredth part of a second". As She says, there is always something in the person which, out of fatigue or disgust, says: "Well, Ah! Let it be finished, so much the better"(10).

Premonition of Death

Support for the validity of a premonition of death is generally cited in terms of positive cases looked at retrospectively. This is indefensible because the process neglects the large number of cases in which the premonition is not followed by death. It is possible that even an unbiased study might detect that the premonition is followed by death more frequently than can be accounted for purely by chance. But that could be another way of looking at the loss of the will to live. If a person loses the will to live, he is likely to also get a premonition of death because nobody is immune to wishful thinking, especially in a helpless state. Psychoneuroimmunology provides a limited biological explanation for the march towards death being accelerated by loss of the will to live.

Life and Death

Two interesting questions, to which there can be both physiological and spiritual answers, are whether death is a reality and whether death is necessary. Physiologically, death is only a partial reality because a bit of the protoplasm continues to live, even after death, in the progeny. Physiologically, death is also necessary for getting around the problem of imperfection of the body. The body, like any machine, cannot function for ever Therefore renewal by reproduction has got to be coupled with death, the old order yielding to the new. Thus reproduction and death are two sides of the same coin and are designed to keep open the possibility of the evolution of better, less imperfect forms of life.

Spiritually speaking, the answers are similar although the arguments are different and deeper. Death is a partial reality because it results in breaking up of one form of life for reconstruction into

new forms. Nothing may perish, but the configuration existing before death ceases to exist. Recycling, reconstruction and renewal are the basic features of life. As Sri Aurobindo says, "... ... individual life is a particular play of energy specialized to constitute, maintain, energise and finally to dissolve when its utility is over, one of the myriad forms which all serve, each in its own place, time and scope, the whole play of the universe" (11). It is commonly assumed that at least the soul is immortal. But on that also Sri Aurobindo has given a valuable clarification. He says, "... when we insist on the soul's undying existence, what is meant is the survival after death of a definite unchanging personality which was and will always remain the same throughout eternity. It is the very imperfect superficial "I" of the moment, evidently regarded by Nature as a temporary form and not worth preservation, for which we demand this stupendous right to survival and immortality. ... ... It is that secret Spirit or divinity of Self in us which is imperishable, because it is unborn and eternal" (12). Thus it is only the divine Spirit which is immortal, not the entire configuration of the individual. Immortality of the soul resides in the fact that it is a projection of the divine Spirit.

Spiritually speaking, death is also a necessity. The manifest universe expresses the Supreme Consciousness only in a rudimentary form. Matter expresses so little of It as to seem Inconscient. Man expresses It better than any other form in the universe known to us, but still falls far short of full expression. Man is probably the only creature who can achieve significant growth of consciousness during life. But due to the inherent inertia of matter, there comes a point when the physical body cannot respond any further to the thrust for further growth of consciousness. At that point, it becomes necessary for the body to disintegrate, and death provides the mechanisms for fulfilling the necessity. It is interesting that the mere knowledge that death is inevitable ensures some growth of consciousness. All religious and spiritual traditions goad us to mend our ways. We often ignore these exhortations, but in old age, when the inevitable seems close, we turn to spirituality. The growth of consciousness a person may achieve in the short period between getting a terminal illness and death may exceed the growth achieved in the entire life before the illness.[1] Not only the person who is ill, many of those who take

care of him or come in close contact with him during the illness may also experience a similar surge of spiritual growth.

Death is Nature's answer to two properties of matter: its tendency to decay; and its inability to respond, beyond a point, to the demands of spiritual growth. Out of the two, the latter is a deeper reason why death is necessary. As Sri Aurobindo says, "Even if Science .... were to discover the necessary conditions or means for an indefinite survival of the body, still, if the body could not adapt itself so as to become a fit instrument of expression for the inner growth, the soul would find some way to abandon it and pass on to a new incarnation. The material or physical causes of death are not its true causes; its true inmost reason is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being" (12).

The culmination of the process is that a dying person invariably speaks the truth. That is why, the dying declaration holds immense credibility in law.

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Death: A Molecular Definition

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Abstract: This article tries to understand and define death scientifically. Today's scientific development of Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and prompt defibrillation posed a challenge, rendering the previous definition inadequate. This general definition of death is now called "clinical death", and even after it occurs, breathing and heart beat may be restarted in some cases. Events which were causally linked to death in the past are now prevented from having an effect; even without a functioning heart and lungs, a person can be sustained with life-support devices. In addition to such extremes, a growing number of people would die quickly if their organ transplants or cardiac pacemakers failed. The author explains in detail the phenomenon of Apoptosis and describes scientifically the phenomenon of death.

Keywords: Apoptosis, brain death, Cell death, DNA, RNA.

Death is the full cessation of vital functions in the biological life. Generally death is defined as the cessation of heart beat (cardiac arrest) and of breathing. The development of Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and prompt defibrillation posed a challenge, rendering the previous definition inadequate. This general definition of death is now called "clinical death", and even after it occurs, breathing and heart beat may be restarted in some cases. Events which were causally linked to death in the past are now prevented from having an effect; even without a functioning heart and lungs, a person can be sustained with life-support devices. In addition to such extremes, a growing number of people would die quickly if their organ transplants or cardiac pacemakers failed.

Today, where a definition of the moment of death is required, doctors and coroners usually turn to "brain death" or "biological death": people are considered dead when the electrical activity in their brain ceases. It is presumed that a stoppage of electrical activity indicates the end of consciousness. However, suspension of consciousness must be permanent, and not transient, as occurs during sleep, and especially a coma. In the case of sleep, EEGs can easily tell the difference. Identifying the moment of death is important in cases of transplantation, as organs for transplant (the brain excluded) must be harvested as quickly as possible after the death of the body.

Cell Death

Normal cellular function involves the production of free energy required for vital cellular metabolism, the production of enzymatic and structural protein, the maintenance of chemical and osmotic homeostasis of cell, and cell reproduction. During normal functions, cells require oxygen, phosphate, calcium, nutritional substrates, ATP - which is required as a source of free energy, intact cell membranes, and a steady-state activity that requires oxygen consumption. If any of these functions are interrupted, eventually it will lead to cell death.

The cell starts to multiply and proliferate to start a life. Initial division of the cells is influenced by environment and surrounding biochemicals which maintain the viable or conducive atmosphere for division. The changes in this immediate environment influence the cellular proliferation and also death. Every day cells divide and die to maintain the balance. The different biomolecules are distributed in the body maintaining a fine balance among themselves and their environment. The slightest alterations in these biomolecules lead to death in later stages. For e.g.; the alterations in deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) with a consequence of synthesis of faulty proteins lead to accumulation of wrong molecules. These molecules accumulate causing dysfunction of the cellular machinery leading to cell death.

Ribonucleic acid (RNA) is the molecule that receives information (transcription) from DNA and converts this message to a protein sequence (translation). A change in RNA which is transcribed normally from the DNA, by a change in gene sequence will lead to death of the accurate message transfer, which is not noticed in the

initial stage. The abnormal protein synthesized, due to a sequence change leads to the production of non-functional protein. The accumulation of this abnormal protein in the cellular environment can lead to functional deterioration of cell and finally death of cell.

In every individual, cells die and are replaced everyday. As individuals grow old functional capability of this repair is reduced and death of the cells increases than proliferation leading to death of the tissue. The accumulated tissue death in an organ can lead to the functional arrest of the organ – that's the death of the organ. This is also supported by recent clinical research. If the deterioration of one organ is not cared for appropriately, the cumulative functional deterioration of a specific organ can affect the other organs and finally the death of an individual.

For every cell, there is a time to live and a time to die. There are two ways in which cells die:

- They are killed by injurious agents.
- They are induced to commit suicide.

Death by injury

Cells may be damaged by injury such as mechanical damage or by exposure to toxic chemicals. The dying cells undergo a characteristic series of changes - They and their organelles like mitochondria swell because the ability of the plasma membrane to control the passage of ions and water is disrupted. Then the cell contents leak out, leading to inflammation of surrounding tissues.

Death by suicide

Cells that are induced to commit suicide undergo the following processes:

- shrink;
- develop bubble-like blebs on their surface;
- have the chromatin (DNA and chromosomal protein) in their nucleus degraded;
- mitochondria break down with the release of cytochrome C;
- break into small, membrane-wrapped, fragments.

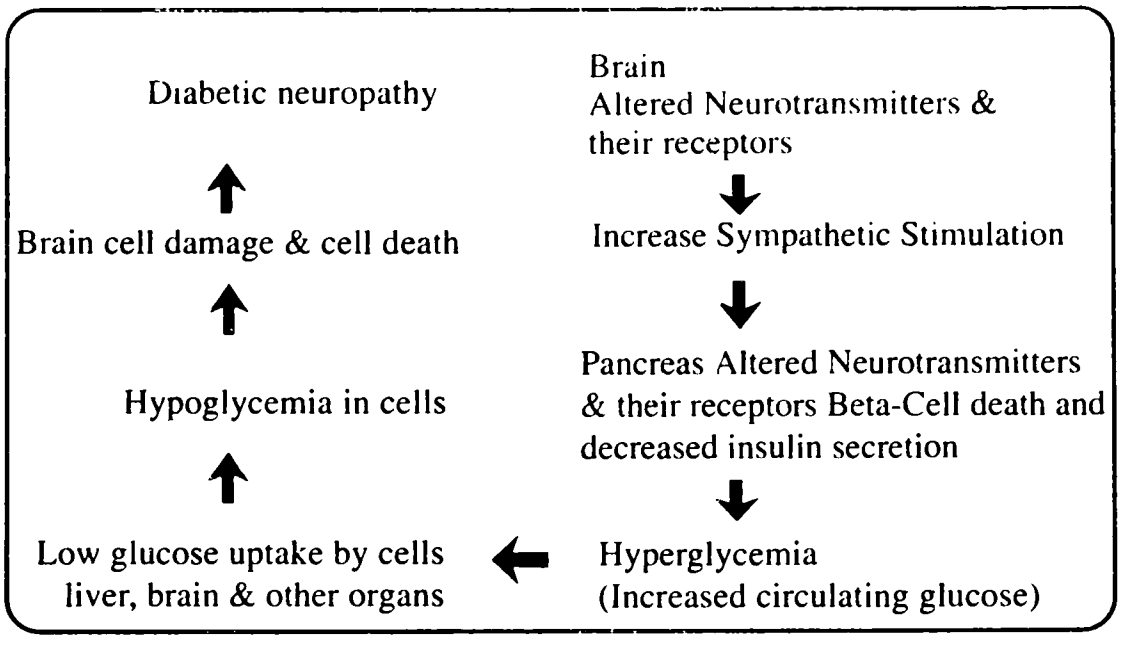


Fig 1: Brain function and diabetic neuropathy

- phospholipid phosphatidylserine, which is normally hidden within the plasma membrane, is exposed on the surface.
- bound receptors on phagocytic cells like macrophages and dendritic cells then engulf the cell fragments.
- phagocytic cells secrete cytokines inhibiting inflammation

The pattern of events in death by suicide is so orderly that the process is often called programmed cell death. The cellular machinery of programmed cell death turns out to be as intrinsic to the cell as mitosis. Programmed cell death is also called apoptosis.

The Mechanisms of Apoptosis

There are 3 different mechanisms by which a cell undergoes apoptosis.

- Generated by signals arising within the cell;
- Triggered by death activators binding to receptors at the cell surface: eg: TNF-alpha, Lymphotoxin, Fas ligand
- Triggered by reactive oxygen species.

Why should there be apoptosis?

A cell undergoing apoptosis serves mainly two functions, *viz.* programmed cell death is as needed for proper development as mitosis. This can be understood by citing the following examples - The resorption of the tadpole tail at the time of its metamorphosis into a frog occurs by apoptosis, the formation of the fingers and toes of the fetus requires the removal of the tissue between them, the sloughing off of the inner lining of the uterus (the endometrium) at the start of menstruation occurs by apoptosis, the formation of the proper synapses between neurons in the brain requires that surplus cells be eliminated by apoptosis. Programmed cell death is also needed to destroy cells that represent a threat to the integrity of the organism. Examples: Cells infected with viruses - one of the methods by which cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTLs) kill virus-infected cells is by inducing apoptosis. As cell-mediated immune responses wane, the effector cells of the immune system must be removed to prevent them from attacking its own cells. CTLs induce apoptosis in each other and even in themselves. Defects in the apoptotic machinery are associated with autoimmune diseases such as lupus erythematosus and rheumatoid arthritis. Damage to cell genome can cause a cell to disrupt proper embryonic development leading to birth defects or the cell to become cancerous.

Cells respond to DNA damage by increasing their production of p53. p53 is a potent inducer of apoptosis. The mutations in the p53 gene, producing a defective protein, are so often found in cancer cells. Radiation and chemicals used in cancer therapy induce apoptosis in cancer cells.

What makes a cell decide to undergo apoptosis?

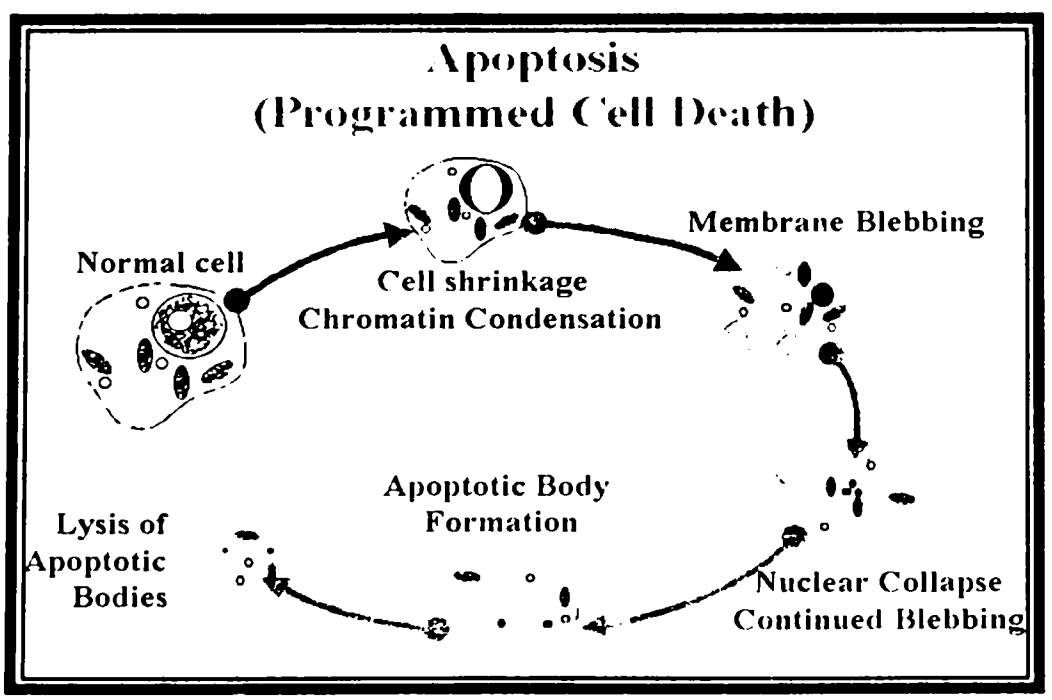
There is a fine balance between the withdrawal of positive signals; that is, signals needed for continued survival, and the receipt of negative signals. The cell death or continued survival depends on which way this balance tilts.

The continued survival of most cells requires that they receive continuous stimulation from other cells and, for many, continued adhesion to the surface on which they are growing. Some examples of positive signals are growth factors for neurons and Interleukin-2 (IL-2), an essential factor for the mitosis of lymphocytes.

The negative signals are increased levels of oxidants within the cell, damage to DNA by these oxidants or other agents like ultraviolet light, x-rays and chemotherapeutic drugs, accumulation of proteins that failed to fold properly into their proper tertiary structure and molecules that bind to specific receptors on the cell surface and signal the cell to begin apoptosis. These death activators include: Tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-á) that binds to the TNF receptor; Lymphotoxin (TNF-â) that also binds to the TNF receptor and Fas ligand (FasL), a molecule that binds to a cell-surface receptor named Fas (CD95).

When to establish that the brain is dead?

Certifying doctors must ascertain that there is no evidence of brain function over a period of time, the loss of function is not a result of drugs, hypothermia (low temperature), hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) or hyponatraemia (low blood sodium). The person has sustained a brain injury sufficient to account for the irreversible loss



of brain function - often this is done by CT scan. There are no reflex functions associated with coughing, gagging, eye movement, blinking, or dilation of the pupils. The person makes no attempt to breathe when disconnected from the respirator for several minutes. During the previous test, the carbon dioxide level of the blood has risen above the point at which breathing is normally stimulated.

Physiological changes leading up to death

The basic events leading to death involve the brain ceasing to supply information vital for controlling ventilation, heart rhythm, and/or vasodilation and vasoconstriction. The lung is unable to supply oxygen to exchange with the blood stream. The heart and blood vessels are unable to maintain adequate circulation of blood to vital tissues. In the cerebrovascular system, hemorrhage, pump failure, and decreased carbondioxide leads to decreased PCO_2 leading to Cheyne-Stokes respiration.

Problems in the central nervous system that may lead to death include infection, blood vessel disruption, malignant tumors, or metabolic changes such as renal failure, hepatic failure, and pancreatic failure. Early signs of decompensation in the central nervous system include sluggish pupils that are non-reactive to stimuli, and that are dilated and fixed (this is also an effect of certain drugs). Confusion and the inability to orient oneself may also be signs of decompensation. Later signs include lethargy, decreased ability to perform simple cognitive functions, and attention only by tactile, auditory, or visual stimuli. The very late signs include stupor or sleep, withdrawal of purposeless involvement to stimuli without wakefulness or arousal, or loss of bowel control. Other general signs include being in a semi-comatose state (movement occurs only with pain), or in a deep coma (unresponsive to all stimuli).

In the respiratory system, problems that may lead to death include the lack of pulmonary blood flow, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), infections, and cancer metastasis.

Changes after death

The physiological consequences of death for the human body follow a recognized sequence through early changes into bloating, decay, changes after decay and finally skeletal remains.

Soon after death (15–120 minutes depending on various factors), the body begins to cool (algor mortis), becomes pallid (pallor mortis), and internal sphincter muscles relax, leading to the release of urine, feces, and stomach contents if the body is moved. The blood moves to pool in the lowest parts of the body, livor mortis, within 30 minutes and then begins to coagulate. During this, the body becomes distended and skin colour progressively changes from green to purple and finally to black. The body experiences muscle stiffening (rigor mortis). During this process, the muscles gradually become hard due to decreased ATP and lactic acidosis within muscle fibrils which peaks at around 12 hours after death and is gone in another 24 (depending on temperature) as enzymes begin to break down the tissues. Within a day, the body starts to show signs of decomposition (decay), both autolytic changes and from 'attacking' organisms—bacteria, fungi, insects, mammalian scavengers, etc. Internally, the body structures begin to collapse, the skin loses integration with the underlying tissues, and bacterial action creates gases which cause bloating and swelling. The rate of decay is enormously variable and depends on numerous factors. Thus, a body may be reduced to skeletal remains in days, though it is possible under certain conditions for remains to stay largely intact for many years.

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Contributing Consciously to the Culture of Life: Science and Religion in Encountering Personal and Collective Death

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Abstract: The author relates always life to death. Then he affirms that today we are confronted not only with the personal death of individuals, but also the (possible) collective death of the human species as a whole. In such a context, any analysis of death (and life), according to the author has to take up the larger challenge confronting us, that of our collective extinction. Religions are called to respond to the task of fostering life individually and preserving it collectively. In the face of challenges of grave magnitude, our response includes all the resources at our human disposal. Today the solution to the problem of personal death and possible cosmic annihilation includes the insights and capabilities that we derive from religions and sciences, understood in a general sense. So the author pleads for cooperation between science and religion where they can critique and enrich each other so that the chance of furthering personal life and preserving biological life is at its maximum.

Keywords: Personal death, cosmic annihilation, transhumanism, doomsday arguments, religious violence.

0. Introduction

"I have come so that you may have life, life in abundance " (Jn 10: 10). This simple and straight-forward statement, I believe, sums up religion in general and Christianity in particular. But today we are confronted not only with the personal death of individuals, but also the (possible) collective death of the human species as a whole. In such a context, any analysis of death (and life), I believe, has to take up the larger challenge confronting us, that of our collective

extinction. Religions are called to respond to the task of fostering life individually and preserving it collectively.

In the face of challenges of grave magnitude, our response includes all the resources at our human disposal. I believe that today our human solution includes the insights and capabilities that we derive from religions and sciences, understood in a general sense. I further believe that when religion and science can critique and enrich each other, the chance of furthering personal life and preserving biological life is at its maximum.

0. 1 Affirming Life in Its Fullness

In the classic book *The Denial of Death*,[1] Earnest Becker talks about humanity's curse, that is, its knowledge of death, conscious and not — dead human beings engage in denying the horror, the horror of creation and of destruction. He describes several ways in which that denial manifests itself. They could be through an avoidance, through absorption or through collective, ritualized and institutionalized denials of death. Another attempt at denying death is through a heroic transcendence of death, or at least the illusion of the transcendence of death. It is this denial of death that creates what Becker calls "man's tragic destiny. " [H]e must desperately justify himself as an object of primary value in the universe; he must stand out, be a hero, make the biggest contribution to world life, show that he counts more than anything or anyone else." Although we deny death, we are aware that whatever we do on this planet has to be done in the lived truth of the "terror of creation, of the grotesque, of the rumble of panic underneath everything." [2] Whatever is achieved must be achieved from within the subjective energies of creatures, without the deadening, with the full exercise of passion, of vision, of pain, of fear, and of sorrow.

Becker affirms that the problem in our day is not that there isn't enough knowledge (about life and death). The problem is that there isn't enough integration of this knowledge into a kind of wisdom that would properly summarize the accumulated knowledge. He acknowledges the difficulty in claiming that there is one direct insight into what causes (almost) all of the neuroses of life, which is the inability of people to see and overcome the ultimate paradox of life, that we live and die at the same time.

Countless times Becker makes the point in his book that the way most people live with these paradoxes is a "lie in the face of reality." That is, starting from childhood, most people use all kinds of repressions to pretend that they are not going to die. Much of society is based on symbolic systems for people to feel heroic, because when we achieve heroism we feel that we have transcended our mortality. Much of this heroism is in fact false, even disempowering, because for example most pointedly with entertainers and athletes we often project our need for heroism onto them.

Becker proposes all our thinking patterns and all our social structures are designed to shield us from knowledge of death. Trapped in an existential nightmare, we have no choice but to make up illusions to distract us from the unthinkable truth.

0. 2 More than Personal Immortality

It is in this background that of the collective amnesia or denial of death that I want to focus on life and its fullness. Without in any way diminishing the tragedy of death, I want to focus on the preciousness of life – both personal and collective. For I believe that at the moment life is threatened – both my personal life and the collective life of humanity. When we truly become aware of this threat and live our precarious and precious existence authentically and joyfully, we contribute not only to the extension of our own life (personal immortality) but to the survival of human and biotic life (evolution of life).

Further I believe that the two pillars that can contribute to the fostering of life today are religion and science, both understood in generic senses. So in the first part of this section we shall examine the ambiguous contribution of both science and religion to countering life/death. A healthy interaction between them, it is proposed, will improve the chances of individual well-being and collective wholeness (salvation).

1 Contribution of Science to Life

Though it is difficult to define science, people have a general understanding of what science is. The Oxford dictionary says, "Science in the broadest sense refers to any knowledge or trained

skill, especially (but not exclusively) when this is attained by verifiable means." Elsewhere I have tried to describe science in terms of three C's: Concreteness, Critique and Challenge.[3] In this section, I want to understand science in a general manner and see briefly how it has contributed negatively and positively to a culture of life/death.

1.1 Negative Consequences on Science

The vast majority of people are enamoured by science and sees it as a positive factor in promoting human welfare. A typical statement by none other than Bertrand Russell shows it. He claims: "With the death of religion goes superstition, oppression and hatred. With the success of science comes understanding and freedom and love."[4] In spite of all my respect for his scientific acumen and social involvement, I must still hold that his was a naive view, widely shared by the common public.[5] There are various ways in which science has promoted the culture of death.[6] Though space prevents me from going into the details, I can mention some of them.

The Crises

The ecological crisis caused by the emission of and the depletion of the ozone layer is to a large extent caused by science.[7] The possibility of a nuclear war which could wipe out life from our planet would not be there without modern technological advancement.[8] Auschwitz – at least in magnitude – would not be possible.[9] Added to them are the harmful byproducts ("collateral damages") associated with any new scientific discovery.

The Doomsday Argument

The Doomsday argument was conceived by the astrophysicist Brandon Carter in 1983.[10] Originally some fifteen years ago, it has since been developed in a *Nature* article by Richard Gott, and in several papers by philosopher John Leslie and especially in his recent monograph *The End of The* World. It has since been independently discovered by Holger Bech Nielsen. Similar theories predicting an end to the world from population statistics were proposed earlier by Heinz von Foerster, among others.[11] The Doomsday argument[12] is a probabilistic argument that claims to predict the future lifetime of the human race given only an estimate of the total number of humans born so far. Briefly it tries to predict the doom of humanity based on available scientific evidences and statistical methods.[13]

1.2 Positive Contribution of Science

In spite of these reservations, I do not in any way condemn science as anti-human and pro-death. On the other hand, when we look at today's civilization, we see the tremendous growth that science has brought about even in the spiritual realm.

A basic understanding of science and technology has become indispensable for anyone living in today's world, because technology – a product of science – has become an important part of people's lives. Science education aims at increasing common knowledge about science and widening social awareness. The process of learning science begins early in life for many people; school students start learning about science as soon as they acquire basic language skills, and science is always an essential part of the curriculum. Science education is also a very vibrant field of study and research. Learning science requires learning its language, which often differs from colloquial language. For example, the terminology of the physical sciences is rich in mathematical jargon, and that of biological studies is rich in Latin names. The language used to communicate science is rich in words pertaining to concepts, phenomena and processes, which are initially alien to children.

Tremendous Development of Science and Society

Due to the growing economic value of technology and industrial research, the economy of any modern country depends on its state of science and technology. The governments of most developed and developing countries therefore dedicate a significant portion of their annual budget to scientific and technological research. Many countries have an official science policy, and many undertake large-scale scientific projects - so-called "big science". The practice of science by scientists has undergone remarkable changes in the past few centuries. Most scientific research is currently funded by government or corporate bodies. These relatively recent economic factors appear to increase the incentive for some to engage in fraud reporting of the results of scientific research.[14]

Therefore it is no exaggeration to claim that science has made our lives more comfortable (e.g. aeroplane, mobile telephones), has improved human health (discovery of penicillin and the present

medical practices) and extended the human life-span. Science has significantly contributed to the promotion of life, and helps us to understand the very life that is part of us.[15]

Life-Extension Techniques[16]

The best case I can find of science furthering human life and well-being is the attempt to extend our life-span indefinitely and even eliminate physical death altogether. Transhumanists today hope to eliminate physical death altogether. Using information and techniques from nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, cryonics and human genome projects, they hope to arrive at a time when human beings will be able to live forever. Obviously, no mainstream scientist believes that physical death can be overcome. But as I have pointed out elsewhere, it has crept into the unconscious of a powerful section of "progressive humanists", and their search for the elimination of physical death may bear fruit.[17]

One of the pioneers of transhumanist movements, Hans Moravec, dreams that the brain can be downloaded into a computer system. Eternal life is just around the corner! As Moravec muses: "With enough dispersed copies [of ourselves], our permanent death would be unlikely"[18]

Thus it is right for me to claim that science has an ambiguous relationship with regard to human progress and well-being. On the one hand, it has led to unimaginable progress. On the other hand, it has been the cause of unmitigated suffering and pain. So science has contributed both to human life as well as to human death! So we may ask if science (technology) has become a religion of menace:

> On a deeper cultural level, these technologies have not met basic human needs because, at the bottom, they have never really been about meeting them. They have been aimed rather at the loftier goal of transcending such mortal concerns altogether. In such an ideological context, inspired more by prophets than by profits, the needs neither of the mortals nor of the earth they inhabit are of any enduring consequence. And it is here that the religion of technology can be rightly considered a menace.[19]

Scientists like J. Robert Oppenheimer,[20] Alfred Bernhard Nobel [21] and Albert Einstein[22] typify such ambiguous stands towards science and life.

2 Contribution of Religion

Just as science, it is difficult to define religion. Religion is found in almost every culture and it may be understood as the basic vision of life providing us with meaning for our existence. Elsewhere I have tried to understand religion in terms of three V's: Values, Vocation and Vision.[23]

2.1 Negative Consequences of Religion on Life

If I focus on the negative consequence of religion, it is in no way to affirm that this is its predominant contribution. I want to deal with only three basic facts that have led to real tragedies in the name of religion: the crusades, religious terror and conflict with science.

The Crusades[24]

The crusades were a series of military campaigns—usually sanctioned by the Papacy—that took place during the 11th through 13th centuries. Originally, they were Catholic Holy Wars to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims, but some were directed against other targets, such as the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars of southern France, the Northern Crusades, and the Fourth Crusade which conquered Constantinople. The Crusades were an incredibly violent undertaking, even by medieval standards. It is sad to note that crusades have been at least indirectly justified by claims such as:

> The aim of Christianity is not to fill the earth, but to fill heaven. Why should one worry if the number of Christians is lessened in the world by deaths endured for God? By this kind of death people make their way to heaven who perhaps would never reach it by another road.[25]

In his reports about the conquest of Jerusalem, Chronicler Raymond of Aguilers wrote: "It was a just and marvellous judgment of God, that this place [the temple of Solomon] should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers."[26] St. Bernard is said to have announced before the Second Crusade that "The Christian glories in the death of a pagan, because thereby Christ himself is glorified."[27]

Religious Terror and Violence

Terror in the Mind of God[28] explores the use of violence by marginal groups within five major religious traditions: Christianity (reconstruction theology and the Christian Identity movement, abortion clinic attacks, the Oklahoma City bombing, and Northern Ireland); Judaism (Baruch Goldstein, the assassination of Rabin, and Kahane); Islam (the World Trade Center bombing and Hamas suicide missions); Sikhism (the assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Beant Singh); and Buddhism (Aum Shinrikyo and the Tokyo subway gas attack). Juergensmeyer interviews participants in and advocates of violence (notably Mike Bray, Yoel Lerner, Mahmud Abouhalima, Simranjit Singh Mann, and an anonymous ex-member of Aum Shinrikyo), but he is less interested in individual psychology than in the "cultures of violence", broadly construed. A particular focus is on the theological justifications for violence and the bases for its authorisation. Overall the treatment is not, except perhaps in the area of theology, much deeper than that of (quality) newspaper reporting, but it is enlightening to have the different religious traditions treated side by side.

The second part of *Terror in the Mind of God* looks at common themes and patterns in the cultures of violence described in part one. One is the idea of violence as performance, with symbolism often taking precedence over more strategic considerations in such matters as choice of targets and dates. Here there are obvious connections with religious ritual. Another theme is the placing of violence within the context of a cosmic war, a symbolic and transcendent conflict; accompanying this, the movement's casualties become martyrs and their opponents are demonised:

> [Religious violence] has much to do with the nature of the religious imagination, which has always had the propensity to absolutize and to project images of cosmic war. It also has much to do with the social tensions of this moment of history that cry out for absolute solutions, and the sense of personal humiliation experienced by men who long to restore an integrity that they perceive as lost in the wake of virtually global social and political shifts.[29]

Related to this is the valorisation of the warrior (religious violence often involves ex-military personnel), coupled with male bonding and an appeal to men "on the margins". (Juergensmeyer comments in passing that only in terrorist groups motivated by secular political ideologies have women taken an active part. Apart from this there is no attempt at a comparison between religious and secular terrorism, something which might have made the common features of religious terrorism clearer.)

Juergensmeyer concludes *Terror in the Mind of God* with suggestions for the future of religious violence that are certain to be controversial, arguing that "the cure for religious violence may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation for religion itself" and in acknowledgement of religion in public life.[30]

Religion vs Science

Another less violent, but equally harmful, aspect of religions is the popular impression that religion is against science. The classic case of such a conflict is Galilee Galileo

The Harvard scientist, the late Stephen J. Gould, showed that the warfare theory between science and Christianity was very much the creation of two late 19th century writers - Andrew Dickson White and John William Draper - to subserve their own personal interests. Many scholars have argued that the "warfare thesis" was more a creation of certain historians with vested interests rather than of historical data. Job Kozhamthadam shows that the interaction between Christianity and modern science passed through three different stages: encouragement, estrangement and engagement.[31] Today we are arriving at a stage where science and religion can criticise, dialogue with and enrich each other.

But there are still some centres which fosters the counter view. The creation-evolution controversy that still rages in some parts of the world gives the impression that religion is other-worldly and God is involved only in the spiritual dimensions of human beings.[32]

2.2 Positive Contribution of Religion to Life

Against the Culture of Death

Without doubt, religion has mitigated the sufferings of humanity. Right from the beginning (be they shamans, magicians or prophets), religions have been agents of healing and wholeness. It is in this context that we can understand the Church's stand against euthanasia and for the rights of the unborn. The Church has always stood for the rights of human beings and has stood against the "culture of death."

Meaning and Salvation

Further, religion gives its adherents a sense of identity and purpose. providing them with meaning, religion makes their lives worthwhile. And the greatest solace and comfort that religion gives is in terms of the divine assurance that "everything is well with oneself and with the universe." Thus religion gives its adherents "salvation" or "freedom from bondage."

Science-Religion Dialogue

Today we are facing renewed interest both in science and religion. Numerous attempts have been made to foster cooperation and dialogue between them without trespassing on their legitimate boundaries. Many centres in India and abroad have sprung up fostering creative and promising areas of dialogue between science and religion.[33]

I can very well sum up this section by affirming that in spite of all the good intentions of religious leaders, there has been harm done in the name of religion. In spite of the ennobling religious experiences of the followers of one group of religion, in spite of the compassion and love that religion promotes, there have been tragic cases of abuse of power. Similar to science, religion too is ambiguous in its relation to human well-being and growth.

3. Collective Venture of Life in Abundance: Personal Fulfilment and More

Confronted with the ambiguous situation provided by both religion and science in fostering life, we are reminded of the words

of Fritjof Capra: "Science does not need religion, religion does not need science; but humans need both."[34] Since both are ambiguous in dealing with life, a critical, contextual and creative interaction will reduce their ambiguity and force them to be more transparent and open. In this process humanity will be the winner. Hence I believe that a mutually critical and creative interaction between science and religion can help us to promote life, in spite of its fragility.

Today we have become sensitive to the harmony or order (*rta*) needed for the preservation of life and for the well-being of a human individual. An individual can feel whole (salvation) only when one is at home with oneself, with others and with the larger cosmos (including the Divine). Only when one can maintain this balance, can one feel well and whole. This is the uniqueness of life and the unique role played by religions.

Similarly religion has been instrumental in purifying us of our "sinfulness," or tendencies to evil and death. By creating a sense of value and vision and helping us to overcome the sense of guilt and offering us forgiveness and reconciliation, religion affirms and promotes deeper life. Most of the religions offer us "personal salvation", which is narrowly understood as the "survival of the individual soul."[35] Without belittling the survival of the soul, true religions provide us with an ambience to flourish and live our lives to the full. By promoting human solidarity and cooperation, by promoting a sense of cosmic wholeness and well-beings religions do enhance our self-image and thus counters the culture of violence and inauthenticity.[36] True religions provide us with a deep experience of God and take us to the people in need of us.

Similar to religion, science too can promote life and counter the forces of evil in its own way. It is true that the domains of science and religion may be different.[37] Science can very well be an extremely powerful tool to improve our human situation and to foster the life on planet earth.

Briefly I can claim that just as science is not the cause of the violence in the world, though science has caused it to some extent, so too science can foster life and prosperity. Just as religion is not the cause of the deadly sins of the world, though it has played a part

play in it, so too religion can also be part of the solution that humanity is searching for.

The ultimate questions of human beings are so profound and multifaceted that religions and religious vision would be involved in the answer. Our religious vision gives us perspectives that take us beyond ourselves. It helps us to reach out to others and to widen our horizons so that our interest goes beyond our own personal salvation. It urges us to commit ourselves to this world and seek for solutions that are more than life-extension techniques. It urges us to focus on issues even larger than life after death. In such a way we would be living the values of the Kingdom of God or *Ramarajya.*

Such a life gives us a sense of fulfilment that comes also from self-emptying. It provides us with a sense of identity that involves joyful sacrifices and enhances our life even through pain. Such a life enlarges our vision to include others (even enemies), so that we can love our enemies and be respectful of others who are different from ourselves.[38]

4. Conclusion: Contribution to Life

Such an attitude of creative openness helps us to take life seriously and play with it. It also

enables us take death earnestly, and not run away from it. In this process, we shall be relishing every moment of our lives and even death. We can try to capture a healthy and holistic response to it through the classical Indian ways of relating to God and world: *Jnanamarga, Bhaktimarga* and *Karmamarga.*

Jnanamarga (The Way of the Head)

Jnanamarga realises the fragility of life and responds to the threat and "evil designs" that are very much present in our contemporary culture. The deep rooted craving for *thanatos* must be faced with ruthless intellectual honesty and rigour. We may have to admit at times that we do not have the ultimate answers, but can live with these questions. This makes us people of ruthless honesty, ready to realise the deep-rooted causes of sin, violence, terrorism and inequality and injustice in the world and in our own hearts.

Bhaktimarga (The Way of the Heart)

Bhatikmarga urges us to be involved in these life and death issues with passion and devotion. This calls for affective maturity and readiness to live with uncertainty and insecurity.

pray. In this sense, we can "fight against" death by befriending it. We need to accept death as part of life and learn to grow old gracefully.[39] With a sense of transparency and innocence that comes only from spiritual depth, we can pray and surrender ourselves unconditionally into the hands of God. This makes us people of genuine openness, enlarged consciousness, and great sensitivity to the concerns of our neighbour and of the cosmos.

Karmamarga (The Way with the Hands)

Urges us act disinterestedly and passionately and foster life in its diversity. Going beyond narrow boundaries, we can devote ourselves and work not only for the welfare of the whole world (*loksangraha*) but also of the individual neighbours, who may not be "our own." So when, with a sense of urgency and compassion we act with zeal and indifference, we will accept our own death (and life) and transcend death individually and collectively. Thus we can collectively counter the culture of collapse and catastrophe. This makes us people of unwavering hope: fostering goodness, nobility and holiness (going beyond civility, decency or diplomacy).

So the denial of death is in fact the denial of life. Refusal to acknowledge the fragility of life is refusal to accept its preciousness. Since science and religion can contribute to fostering life, a culture of life could be more easily cultivated by a healthy and critical exchange of ideas and visions between them. This would be today's answer to the existential trauma of death that we all experience in our daily lives. Today's crises require us to respond both personally and collectively by fostering life in its fragility and by countering death, (individual and collective annihilation). In this venture science and religion offer us realistic hopes of affirming and transcending life as well as death.

Notes

1. Earnest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, Free Press, 1973. The quotations below are from this book.
2. Earnest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, Free Press, 1973.
3. Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "Dialogue between Science and Religion for Preserving and Fostering Life," in Job Kozhamthadam, *Science, Technology and Values: Science-Religion Dialogue in a Multi-Religious World*, ASSR Series2, Pune, 2003, 36-37.
4. Bertrand Russell, Science and Religion, OUP, 1997.
5. I do appreciate his deep involvement in social issues, including his crusades for eliminating nuclear weapons and hunger. His scientific and mathematical skills are very admirable.
6. See for instance, Pope John Paul II, Bishops Must Stand Firmly on the Side of Life, Against the Culture of Death - Encouraging Those Who Defend It: Ad limina address of the Holy Father to US Bishops of California, Nevada and Hawaii, October 2, 1998.
7. Since these reasons are well known to the general audience, am not elaborating them. For a Jewish perspective on ecological problem see Rabbi Prof. Yehudah Levi "How Can We Solve the Ecological Crisis?" http://www.dvar.org.il/jstudies/ecolevi.html. He mentions that ozone layer depletion will lead to some three million new cases of skin cancer and over fifteen million new cases of cataracts in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Further I believe scientists and scientists should not take up the moral or religious space.

.8 For more details on the possible nuclear catastrophe, Cresson Kearney, "The Dangers from Nuclear Weapons: Myths and Facts" which is taken from his book Nuclear War Survival Skills, http://www.areyouprepared.com/nuclear-survival/s6.htm. The author claims that "The dangers from nuclear weapons have been distorted and exaggerated, for varied reasons. These exaggerations have become demoralizing myths, believed by millions of Americans." Still he admits that a nuclear war "would be the worst catastrophe in history, a tragedy so huge it is difficult to comprehend." Another more damaging assessment is found in an interview by Don Nordin for Co-op radio Vancouver, "The Dangers of Nuclear War: Interview with Michel Chossudovsky", "I mean down the drain, and that's a self-destructive statement because it presents war as a peacekeeping operation and it presents nuclear weapons as some kind of harmless toy and military analysts are fully aware of the implications. Again they are too 'polite'

to ultimately address these issues in a broad public arena." http://www.globalresearch. ca/index php? context=viewArticle &code =20060119&articleId=1755.

9. Auschwitz, (Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau) the Former Nazi German Concentration Camp, Auschwitz was the largest of the Nazi German extermination camps, along with a number of concentration camps, comprising three main camps and 40 to 50 sub-camps. The name Auschwitz is the German name for the nearby town, situated about 60 kilometers (37 miles) west of Kraków in southern Poland Beginning in 1940, Nazi Germany built several concentration camps and an extermination camp in the area, which at the time was under German occupation. The Auschwitz camps were a major element in the perpetration of the Holocaust; at least 1.1 million people were killed there, of whom over 90% were Jews.The three main camps were: Auschwitz I, the original concentration camp which served as the administrative center for the whole complex, and was the site of the deaths of roughly 70,000 people, mostly Poles and Soviet prisoners of war Auschwitz II (Birkenau), an extermination camp, where at least 1.1 million Jews, 75,000 Poles, and some 19,000 Roma (gypsies) were killed. Auschwitz III (Monowitz), which served as a labor camp for the Buna-Werke factory of the IG Farben concern. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auschwitz.
10. Carter, B. 1983. "The anthropic principle and its implications for biological evolution". *Phil. Trans. Roy., Soc.*, Lond., A310, pp. 347-363.
11. Nick Bostrom, "Investigations into the Doomsday Argument" in www.nickbostrom.com.
12. John Leslie, *The End of the World: The Science and Ethics of Human Extinction*, Routledge, 1998.
13. See also John Leslie.. "Doomsday Revisited". *Phil. Quat.* 42 (166) 1992, 85-87.
14. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science#Science_and_social_concerns.
15. It is here that the recent developments in the Human Genome Project become significant. More than "playing God' HGP attempts to understand life so that we can facilitate the flow of it.
16. For an elaborate treatment see Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "Physical Immortality: Human Longing, Scientific Basis and Religious Response," *Disputatio Philosphica: International Journal on Philosophy and Religion* 3/2001 pp. 93-110.

17. Though I do not personally believe that death will be overcome one day, I cannot categorically deny that science is incapable of doing it. It is noteworthy that there are a couple of bodies kept in "deep freeze" waiting to be resuscitated at the "appointed time." Due to the prevalence of internet, there are many amateurs and scholars who can easily share their information and their dreams. Such an atmosphere will change the human future, though most probably, not in ways planned by us.

18. David Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* 1999, Penguin, 162.

19. David Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* 1999, Penguin, 206-7. See also his Noble, D. F. 1977. America by Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1984. Forces of Production. A Social History of Industrial Automation. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. and 1992. A World Without Women: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

20. J. Robert Oppenheimer (April 22, 1904 - February 18, 1967) was an American theoretical physicist, best known for his role as the scientific director of the Manhattan Project, the World War II effort to develop the first nuclear weapons, at the secret Los Alamos laboratory in New Mexico. Known colloquially as "the father of the atomic bomb", Oppenheimer lamented the weapon's killing power after it was used to destroy the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the war, he was a chief advisor to the newly created Atomic Energy Commission and used that position to lobby for international control of atomic energy and to avert the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union. After invoking the ire of many politicians and scientists with his outspoken political opinions during the Red Scare, he had his security clearance revoked in a much-publicized and politicized hearing in 1954. Though stripped of his direct political influence, Oppenheimer continued to lecture, write, and work in physics. A decade later, President John F. Kennedy awarded him the Enrico Fermi Award.

21. Alfred Bernhard Nobel (October 21, 1833, Stockholm, Sweden – December 10, 1896, Sanremo, Italy) was a Swedish chemist, engineer, innovator, armaments manufacturer and the inventor of dynamite. He owned Bofors, a major armaments manufacturer, that he had redirected from its previous role as an iron and steel mill. In his last will, he used his enormous fortune to institute the Nobel Prizes. (www.wikipedia.com).

22. On August 2, 1939, just before the beginning of World War II, Albert Einstein wrote to then President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Einstein and several other scientists told Roosevelt of efforts in Nazi Germany to purify uranium-235, which could be used to build an atomic bomb. After reading the letter, the President put money into building an American atomic bomb. Einstein thought it would be used to frighten the Nazis. He never thought it would be used. But two months after the Nazis were beaten, the bomb was ready. It was shortly after the letter of Einstein that the United States Government began the serious undertaking known then only as "The Manhattan Project." Simply put, the Manhattan Project was committed to expediting research that would produce a viable atomic bomb. Over the course of six years, from 1939 to 1945, more than $2 billion was spent during the history of the Manhattan Project. The formulas for refining uranium and putting together a working atomic bomb were created and seen to their logical ends by some of the greatest minds of our time. Chief among the people who unleashed the power of the atom was J. Robert Oppenheimer, who oversaw the project from conception to completion. At 5:29:45 (Mountain War Time) on July 16, 1945, in a white blaze that stretched from the basin of the Jemez Mountains in northern New Mexico to the still-dark skies, "The Gadget" ushered in the Atomic Age. Upon witnessing the explosion, its creators had mixed reactions. Isidor Rabi felt that the equilibrium in nature had been upset — as if humankind had become a threat to the world it inhabited. J. Robert Oppenheimer, though ecstatic about the success of the project, quoted a remembered fragment from the Bhagavad Gita. "I am become Death," he said, "the destroyer of worlds." Ken Bainbridge, the test director, told Oppenheimer, "Now we're all sons of bitches." http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa050300a.htm.

23. Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "Dialogue between Science and Religion for Preserving and Fostering Life," in Job Kozhamthadam, *Science, Technology and Values: Science-Religion Dialogue in a Multi-Religious World*, ASSR Series 2, Pune, 2003, 37. I am of the opinion that while religion should not take up the scientific space it has to regain the moral and spiritual space it has sadly abdicated (For example Einstein, Hawking, Dennett or Dawkins should not be the religious spokespersons of our times, just as theologians should not speak on behalf of science.)

24. For an overly critical assessment of crusades see http://atheism.about.com/od/crusades/.

25. Quoted in The Crusades: A History; Second Edition, Jonathan Riley-Smith quotes the above from a report written by Humbert of Romans in

the 1270s. I am not in a position to check the veracity of this statement. If it is true, I would say that it is a tragic statement.

26. Raymond of Aguilers, on the massacre of Muslim and Jewish prisoners of war following the capture of Jerusalem on July 15, 1099. Quoted from the "Holy Horrors."

27. en.thinkexist.com/quotation/the_christian_glories_in_the_death_of_a_pagan/171713.html

28. Mark Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, University of California Press, 2000.

29. www.dannyreviews.com/h/Terror_God.html.

30. Tragically, all major religions can justify violence, and religion has long been associated with terrorism. Ever since there was good and evil, religious people have pondered whether using evil to fight evil is good in the name of justice or self-defense. There may be some kind of connection between attachment to the idea of God and a proclivity toward violence. The most common resort to violence occurs when a religious group feels threatened and thinks of itself as a chosen people. Less common is the compulsion to slaughter others in the name of a deity, and even less common (although not insignificant) is the role of sexuality in the mindset of religious fundamentalists who kill. Religions also spawn sects, cults, and alternative religions, and religious terrorism (terrorism in the name of religion) likewise tends to spawn offshoots and factions. A sect is an offshoot of an established religion (Mormons, for example), and most either die off or expand into a major denomination like the Mormons did. A sect-based religious group is more likely to play the role of the victim, not the aggressor. A cult, on the other hand, is a more dangerous, spiritually innovative group (the Branch Davidians, for example) headed by a charismatic leader who usually has other aims than to become a major denomination. Many cults are harmless, but others are into mind control and some are into mass suicide. Still other cults have a doomsday orientation, and these tend to be ones which engage in religious terrorism (such as Aum Shinri Kyo). Any sect or cult can become involved in religious terrorism or it can just worship terrorism (a terrorism cult). The motives can be wide-ranging, from engaging in psychic warfare to expressive behaviors that are homicidal, suicidal, or both. Cults are usually more dangerous than sects. (http://faculty.ncwc.edu/TOConnor/429/429lect13.htm).

31. "Science and Religion: Past Estrangement and Present Possible Engagement," in *Contemporary Science and Religion in Dialogue, ASSR*

Series, vol. I., ed. Job Kozhamthadamdam. Pune: ASSR Publications, 2002.

32. The Discovery Institute at Seattle is one example. See www.discovery.org.

33. The Indian Institute of Science and Religion (www.iisr.in), located at Pune, is such a centre. The most famous centre abroad is the Templeton Foundation (www.tempelton.org), which awards every year the Templeton Prize for progress in science and religion. Instituted by Sir John Templeton, it is the largest monetary award in the world.

34. See Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "Dialogue between Science and Religion for Preserving and Fostering Life," in Job Kozhamthadam, *Science, Technology and Values: Science-Religion Dialogue in a Multi-Religious World,* ASSR Series2, Pune, 2003, 43.

35. Today we are aware that wee need not merely SOS (Saving Our Soul) but saving our planet, saving our lives, saving our biotic life.

36. See my "Towards a Spirituality for Life," *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*, 7/2 July 2004, 56-72.

37. Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, Ballantine Books, 1999. See his special emphasis on "NOMA" for "non-overlapping magisteria" between science and religion.

38. Even if we die in the process of fighting against death, if we do it joyfully, it is our little contribution to foster life.

39. See my article "Affirming Life Authentically, Accepting Death Gracefully," *Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection*, November 2004, pp. 813-820.

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The Buddhist View of Death: A Critical Study of the Tibetan Book of the Dead

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Abstract: The author bases his study on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, one of the world famous treatises on death, and asks the question: What is it in the Tibetan Buddhist's understanding of death that makes it accept the fact of death with a smile on the face? In *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the whole of life and death is presented as a series of constantly changing transitional realities known as *bardos*.

After understanding the event of death from a Tibetan perspective, the author analyses the experience of death in Buddhism and the salient features of death in Tibetan Buddhism. Then he makes an assessment and critique of the book. Finally, the author shows that Tibetan Buddhism has taken a very pragmatic approach towards death which not only acclimatises the human being, through the process of mediation, to the anxious period of the intermediate state after death, but it also has devised effective methods of accompanying the dying. Its insights offer valuable lessons to humanity for better living.

Keywords: Bardos, Death in Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, The Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Introduction

Let me begin the exposition of Tibetan understanding of death, by narrating an incident told by one of the famous lamas, Sogyal Rimpoche. Once an old monk, who went for his regular shopping in the morning, was brought back to accompany a nun who was dying. When he arrived, he said to the nun:

> I think it is time for you to go. Now you have got to see whatever your teachers have taught you to see. This is the

time to put your visualizations into practice. Whichever form of the Buddha you can best relate to, unite your mind with that Buddha, and don't think about us here behind. We'll be okay. I'm going shopping now. When I come back, perhaps I won't see you, so goodbye.[1]

It is said that during the entire time that the old man talked, he did so with a smile, and when he left the nun laughed. Imagine how any of us could die like her laughing. What a way to die and accept death, which may be not possible for us, modern humans. Let me narrate another story. As a boy I heard about the death of an evangelist's daughter killed in a car accident. The followers of the evangelists kept the dead body out for some days for a miracle to happen. They kept on praying and praying, but only in vain. In my view, this incident clearly reveals our present generations' attitude towards death. For us, death is the most unfortunate and unpleasant thing to happen. The whole industry of modernised hospitals often thrives on the perpetuation of the life-time of the dying and postponement of their death. Hence, the old man and the nun and their behaviour towards death in the above story might appear to be eccentric for us, but they are not. Rather, they were true to their Buddhist practice. They had read, studied, mediated on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and listened to it, at the deathbed of others. They both knew exactly what she should do as she entered her last conscious moments and could accept death gracefully.

What is it in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and in the Tibetan Buddhist's understanding of death that makes them accept the fact of death with a smile? We will seek answer to this question in the following pages.

Why Should One Die Peacefully?

From the Tibetan point of view, it is crucial that a person dies in a wholesome mind-state, with concentrated awareness, so that person's virtuous *karmic* imprint will ripen. If one dies in a negative mind-state, with a strong attachment to this life, with incomplete emotions and needs, an unwholesome *karmic* imprint will develop in the next life-form. Hence it is important that a person dies joyfully so as to be in a state of serenity and wholesomeness.[2] Humans have to be schooled in the process of dying so that they are able to face

the inevitable event of death. Tibetan Buddhism aims at familiarising the Buddhists with the fact of death through its famous treatise, '*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*' — which they mediate upon while living, and which is read while dying and after death. As we proceed, we will see its teaching, which is significant not only for the dying and also for the living.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

The Tibetan book of the Dead, i.e., *Bardo Thodol*, is used in Tibetan Buddhism as a breviary, and read on the occasion of death. It was originally meant to serve as a guide not only for the dying and the dead, but for the living as well. It is regarded by scholars as unique among the sacred books of the world as it significantly contributes to the science of death, of existence after death and of rebirth.

The Structure of the Book

In *The Tibetan book of the Dead, bardo* is divided into three stages, called *Chikai, Chönyidi* and *Sidpa Bardo* and accordingly, the book also has three parts.

I. Chikai Bardo

It consists of two sets of instructions: A) Instructions on the symptoms of death or the first stage of Chikai Bardo, wherein the primary light is seen at the moment of death.[3] B) Instructions given immediately after death or the second stage of Chikai Bardo, wherein the secondary clear light is seen.[4]

II Chönyidi Bardo

This section consists of introductory instructions concerning the experiencing of reality during the third stage of the *Bardo*, called *Chönyidi Bardo*, when the karmic apparitions appear.[5] This *bardo* is known as the *bardo* of the experiencing of reality as the dead get a glimpse of reality. These instructions have to be read over a period of fourteen days after death.

III. Sidpa Bardo

This section is made up of instructions on the intermediate state when the dead seeks rebirth or worldly existence. This section is

also known as 'the profound essence of the liberation by hearing.'[6] It has two parts. Part one is about the after-death world that deals with the *bardo* body; its birth and its supernormal faculties, and speaks about characteristics of existence in the intermediate state, about judgement and about the dawning of the lights of six *lokas*. Part two deals with the details of the process of rebirth, i.e., the closing of the door of the womb and the choosing of the womb. This section on 'the closing of the door of the womb' gives the methods of closing the entrance to another birth. And the one on 'the choosing of the womb' deals with a) Transference into the pure Buddha-realm (to enter the Pure realm of complete joy, one needs to concentrate intensely on it to be born into that realm), and (2) choosing an appropriate womb entrance (to be reborn one needs to concentrate on being reborn in a body which can benefit all sentient being).

The Central Teaching of the Book of the Dead

1. Tibetan Understanding of the Event of Death

Tibetan Buddhism's view of death is marked by three things A) The presence of one's guru at the point of death. B) The reading of the *Tibetan book of the dead* at the death bed. C) The physical assistance rendered to the dying.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, it is desirable that one dies in the presence of the guru who can help the dying to go off joyfully and peacefully. He guides the dying with infinite compassion, wisdom and understanding. If the guru is not present, the dying person becomes aware of the master's presence within himself/ herself, while a learned/elderly person or a monk can substitute the guru and does things that master normally does. During one's last breath, the guru first reads from the book some verses to set the dying person face to face with the clear light, and repeats it many times so as to impress it on the mind. When one is about to breathe the last, the guru turns the dying one over on the right side, which posture is called the 'lying posture of a lion' The throbbing of the arteries (on the right and left side of the throat) to be pressed. Thereby the vital-force (inner-breath) will not be able to return from the median-nerve and will be sure to pass out through the Bahminic

aperture.[7] It is to be noted that even after the last breath, the vital force is thought to remain in the median-nerve so long as the heart continues to throb. When the breathing has stopped, the vital-force will sink into the nerve-centre of wisdom, which is located in the heart. The vital force is thrown backwards and downwards through the right and left nerves (called *Pingâla nâdi and Idâ nâdî*), and the intermediate state (*bardo*) dawns. As the breathing is about to cease, the instructions are given and the arteries are pressed (as mentioned above) so as to keep the dying person conscious with a consciousness rightly directed.[8]

At this moment, some instructions, which are given in the book of the dead, are to be read out, and to be repeated distinctively and clearly three or even seven times. This will recall to mind of the dying person the former setting-face-face (one-to-one instruction so called in this tradition) by the guru, while she/he was living. It will cause the naked consciousness to be recognised as the clear light. Recognising one's own self, one becomes permanently united with the *Dharma-Kaya* and liberation will be certain. This experience is called the first glimpsing of the *bardo* of the clear light of Reality, in its primitive purity, Dharmakaya unobscured.[9]

If unable to hold fast to that experience, one experiences next the secondary clear Light, having fallen to a lower state of the *bardo*, wherein the *Dharma-Kaya* is dimmed by *karmic* obscuration. This second stage dawns upon the thought body. The knower hovers within those places to which its activities had been limited. If at this time this special teaching, which is prescribed in the book, be applied efficiently, the deceased will attain liberation. For the karmic illusions will not have come yet, and, therefore, the dead cannot be turned hither and thither from her/his aim of achieving enlightenment.[10] If not liberated even by the secondary clear light, then the third *bardo* or *Chönyidi Bardo* (the *bardo* of the experiencing of reality) dawns.

2. Tibetan Buddhism's Understanding of Intermediate State After Death

This intermediate state, called *Chönyidi Bardo*, is like a dream state, containing visions and images, wherein karmic illusions come to shine. At this point, the instructions in the book that is meant for

this Great Setting-face-face of the *Chönyidi Bardo* are to be read, which would present the dying with the opportunities for awakening or re-birth. The instructions are to be read over a period of fourteen days after death. The book gives a separate set of instructions for each day. The instructions on each of the first seven days consist of the following: 1) Introductory verses, which refer to the previous stage/day and states that the deceased should have attained liberation at the last stage but lost it due to their karmic impressions. 2) Type of people who have come to that stage.[11] 3) Description of the vision. During the first seven days, there will be a manifestation of one of the five elements, shining as a light whose colour will be different in each case: Heaven as deep blue on the first day, water as white light on the second day, earth as a yellow light on the third day, fire as a red light on the fourth day, air as a green light on the fifth day, a simultaneous shining of all four colours on the sixth day and a varied colour radiance will come to shine on seventh day. 4) Description of gods and goddesses reaching out to the dead as a dazzling, bright light in a particular colour coming from heavens. 5) Description of side by side appearance of dull light in the same colour coming from human world. 6) Advice given: a) not to fear the bright light, b) not be attracted by the dull light c) but to put trust in the grace of God 7) Plea to choose the right path and description of the good consequences if right path is chosen 8) Description of the dull light and the bad consequences of preferring it 9) A formula of prayer to God 10) The result of the prayer.

The instructions given to the dead from the eight to the fourteenth day is different, because the vision is different. During this period, there will be dawning of the vision of blood-drinking wrathful deities, whose colour will be different in each case. They are in all fifty-eight wrathful deities, some of whom will come to receive the deceased in each of these days. But the book exhorts the dead not to be afraid, as these deities are nothing but the embodiments of the intellect of the deceased, issuing forth from some part of the brain. The dead do not have to be really scared of them, as they are the tutelary deities of the deceased themselves. They are asked to believe in them, as in reality they are the manifestation of different Father-mother god-figures (like Bhagavan Ratna-Samhava, Bhagavan Vajra-Sattva and Bhagavan, Vairochana etc...). The book holds that

recognition of them and believing in them will bring liberation. It is interesting to note how Tibetan Buddhism deals with visions after death without fear. It tells us that apparition of reality at that stage is a matter of ones' own mind, and that the best way to deal with these objects of fear is the mere recognition of what they are.

From the Buddhist point view, the actual experience of death is very important. They believe that, though one's karma plays a vital role in one's next birth, one's state of mind at the time of death can influence the quality of one's next life. So at the point of death, in spite of the great variety of karmas one has accumulated, if one makes a special effort to generate a virtuous state of mind, one may strengthen and activate a virtuous karma, and so bring about a happy re-birth. This indicates that Buddhist's view of karma is not all deterministic and fatalistic provided one approaches death with a right and peaceful mind-set.

3. The Experiences of The deceased at Sidpa *Bardo*

At this *bardo* state, the body of the deceased is known as desire-body or mental body. The mind is no longer limited and obstructed by the physical body of this world. In the *bardo* of becoming the mind is endowed with immense clarity and unlimited mobility, yet the direction in which it moves is determined solely by the habitual tendencies of one's past karma. It can go right through any rock-masses, hills, earth and houses. Besides, it has other specific characteristics. It possesses all the senses. It is extremely light, lucid and mobile, and its awareness is said to be seven times clearer than in life. Thoughts come in quick succession, and we can do many things at once. It is also endowed with a rudimentary kind of clairvoyance, which is not under conscious control, but gives the mental body the ability to read others' mind. The body can see through three-dimensional objects. The mental body can see and be seen by other *bardo* beings, but cannot be seen by the living beings, except those who have developed this ability through deep experience of mediation. Because of the presence of the five elements in its makeup, the mental body seems to us to be solid, and we still feel the pangs of hunger. The mental body derives nourishment from burnt offerings made especially in its name.

During the first weeks of the *bardo*, one has the impression that one is a man or woman, just in the previous life. We do not realise that we are dead. We return home to meet our family and loved ones. We try to talk to them, to touch them on the shoulder. But they do not reply or even show that they are aware we are there. However hard we try, nothing can make them notice us. We watch, powerless, as they weep or sit stunned. Fruitlessly, we try to make use of our belongings. Arrangements are made to dispose of our possessions. We feel angry, hurt and frustrated. We are 'like a fish writhing in hot sand', says the book. In the *bardo* of suffering we relive all our experiences of the past life, reviewing minute details long lost to memory and revisiting places of past life. Every seven days we are compelled to go through the experience of death once again, with all its suffering, but with a consciousness seven times more intense than while living. All the negative karma of previous lives is returning, in a fiercely concentrated and deranging way. It is said that three abysses, white, red and black 'deep and dreadful' open up in front of us. However, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* says that they are our own anger, desire and ignorance.

We are assailed by freezing downpours, hailstorms of pus and blood, haunted by the sound of disembodied, menacing cries; hounded by flesh-eating demons and carnivorous beasts. These horrifying experiences, however intense they be, wherever they seem to be coming from, in the final analysis they arise only from our mind, created by our karma and returning habits. Some who have studied the near-death experiences in detail say that the 'life-review' of those who have undergone such experiences seems to suggest that, after death, we can experience all the suffering for which we were both directly or indirectly responsible.

The whole of the *bardo* of becoming has an average duration of forty-nine days, and a minimum length of one week. But some can even get stuck in the *bardo*, to become spirits or ghosts. One has to wait in the *bardo* until one can make a karmic connection with one's future parents. But those have lived extremely beneficial and positive lives, and those who have lived a harmful life do not have to wait in the intermediate state, because the intensity of the power of their karma sweeps them immediately on to their next rebirth.

The *bardo* stage of becoming also consists of a last-judgement, a kind of life-evaluation similar to the post-mortem judgement found in many of the world's cultures. One's good conscience, a white guardian angel, acts as one's defence counsel, recounting the beneficial things one has done, while the bad conscience, a black demon, submits the case for the persecution. Good and bad are totalled up as white and black pebbles. The 'Lord of death', who presides, then consults the mirror of karma and makes his judgement. The judgement scene described in the book has some interesting parallel with the life-reviews of the near-death experience of people. "Ultimately all judgement takes place within our mind. We are the judge and the judged."[12] A woman who went through a near-death experience says, "You are shown your life—you do the judging... you are judging yourself..... Can you forgive yourself? This is the judgement."[13] The judgement also shows that what really counts, in the final analysis, is the motivation behind our actions, and there is no escaping the effects of our past actions, words, and thoughts. It means we are entirely responsible, not only for this life, but also for our future lives as well[14].

As our mind is so light, mobile and vulnerable in the *bardo*, whatever thoughts arise, good or bad, have tremendous power and influence. Without a physical body to ground us, thought actually becomes reality. Hence, the key issue in the *bardo* of becoming is the overwhelming power of thought, which is greatly conditioned by whatever habits and tendencies we have allowed to grow and dominate us during our lives. If you do not check those habits and tendencies now in life, and prevent them from seizing hold of your mind, then in the *bardo* of becoming you will be their helpless victim. Even the slightest irritation can have a devastating effect. That is why traditionally only a person with whom the deceased had a good and loving relationship is asked to read *The book of the Dead*. Otherwise, the very sound of his/her voice could infuriate the deceased, with the most disastrous consequences. The mind of the deceased at this stage is likened to a flaming red-hot iron bar that can be bent in whichever form it finds itself before it rapidly solidifies. A single negative reaction can plunge the deceased into the most prolonged and extreme suffering. Just like a single positive thought in this *bardo* can lead directly to enlightenment. That explains

why *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* tries to awaken the memory of any spiritual practice the dead person may have had while living. The deceased are invited to recall their connection with spiritual practice, remember their master or Buddha or any other god, and invoke them with all their strength. If in life one has developed the natural reflex of praying in the time of difficulty to gods/enlightened beings, then one will spontaneously and instantly be able to invoke their names at this time of suffering too. Hence a virtuous life on earth is a prerequisite for a better transformation into the future.

Next comes the stage of rebirth. As the time for rebirth gets closer, one craves more and more for the support of a material body to be reborn into it. Different signs will begin to appear, warning you of the realm in which you are likely to take rebirth. Lights of various colours shine from the six realms of existence, and one will feel drawn toward one or another, depending on the emotion predominant in one's mind. Different images and visions will arise, linked to the different realms. As one becomes more familiar with the teachings of *Tibetan Buddhism*, one will become more alert to what they really stand for. If one were to be reborn as a god, one will have a vision of entering a heavenly palace with many stories. If one were to have a vision of tree stump, a deep forest, or a woven cloth, one is to be reborn as a hungry ghost. One must be able to identify them rightly. Hence familiarity of the teaching while living is very important so that right identification of the signs become easier in this *bardo*.

As these signs appear, one should be on guard not to fall into any of these unfortunate rebirths. But one will have intense longing for certain realms, and be drawn towards them too instinctively. One will rush to any place that seems to offer some security. The book warns of the danger that one may get confused and mistake a good birthplace for a bad one, or a bad one for a good one or hear the voices of one's loved ones calling, and follow these, only to find oneself being brought down to the lower realms. However, the situation is not all that precarious. One saving factor is that the moment one becomes aware of what is happening to one, one can actually begin to influence and change one's destiny. Swept by the wind of *karma*, one will be attracted to a place where one's future parents are making love; and because of *karmic* connection one

begins to feel strong attraction and desire for the mother, and aversion or jealousy for the father, which will result in one's being born as a male child, and the reverse a female. If one succumbs to these strong passions, that very emotion might draw one into a birth in a lower realm.

Now, in order to avoid being reborn or to direct our next birth, the *bardo* teachings give two specific kinds of instructions: Methods for preventing a rebirth or failing that, for choosing a good rebirth.

First, there are the guidelines for 'the *closing of the door of the womb*' or '*closing the entrance to another birth*'. The best method is to abandon emotions such as desire, anger, or jealousy and recognise that none of these *bardo* experiences have any ultimate reality. If one can realise this and then rest the mind in its true, empty nature, this in itself will prevent rebirth. The next best method to prevent rebirth is to see one's potential parents as the Buddha or your master or clan deity. And the very least, one should be able to create a feeling of renunciation against being drawn into feelings of desire, and to think of the pure realms of the Buddhas. This will prevent rebirth and may cause one to be reborn in one of the Buddha realms.

However, if one cannot do this, then there remain the methods of choosing a rebirth. If one wishes to be reborn, the most desirable thing to do is to choose that kind of human birth wherein one can pursue one's spiritual progress. If one is going to be reborn in a fortunate situation in the human realm, we are told by the teaching, one will feel as if one were arriving at a beautiful house, or in a city, or among a crowd of people.

Otherwise, generally one has no choice. One is drawn toward one's birthplace. However, the teaching of the book gives us hope. Now is the time for prayer. Even as one enters the womb, one can go on praying for liberation to happen. One can visualise oneself as any enlightened being, traditionally known as Vajrasattva. One can bless the womb one is entering as a sacred environment, 'a place of the gods'. Ultimately it is the mind's urge to inhabit a particular realm that impels one towards reincarnation in a particular realm.

Salient Features of Tibetan Buddhism

1. Bardo as a Continuum

In this book, the whole of life and death is presented as a series of constantly changing transitional realities known as *bardos*. *Bardo* literally means 'between' (*bar*) two (*do*)' i.e., 'between two states—the state between death and rebirth—and, therefore, 'intermediate' or 'transitional [state].'[15] The state of '*bar*' can be described as a 'no-man's-land,' and '*do*' to a flowing river which belongs neither to this nor to the other shore, but there is little island in the middle, in between.[16] Though the word *bardo* generally denotes the intermediate state between death and re-birth, but in reality, Tibetan Buddhism believes that *bardos* is occurring continuously throughout both life and death. It takes place all through one's life. It is one continuum that encompasses the whole of one's life and its experiences.

All *bardo* experiences are situations in which we have emerged from the past and we have not yet found the future, but strangely enough, we happen to be somewhere. We are standing on some ground, which is very mysterious. No body knows how we happen to be there. That mysterious ground, which belongs neither here nor there, is the actual experience of *bardo*. It is closely connected with one's experience of ego, including all sorts of journey through the six realms of world, the six *bardo* states, which Tibetan Buddhism mentions[17]: 1. *bardo* between birth and death, which refers to the normal waking state between birth and death; 2. dream *bardo*, the period between falling asleep and awakening; 3. meditation *bardo*, a state of cessation in which the senses are withdrawn from external objects and the mind is focused on an internal object of observation 4. *bardo* of becoming, the period oetween the moment of death and rebirth 5. reality *bardo*, the time of unconsciousness that beings experience when overwhelmed by death, so called because during this time the mind returns to its primordial nature and 6. *bardo* of birth which begins at the moment of rebirth into a new lifetime, immediately after the *bardo* of becoming. Of these six, the first three relate to life (birth to death, sleep to dream, self to nothingness) and the next three relate to death (the moment before death, luminosity

of things-as-they are, and the becoming). The subject matter of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* concerns the last three *bardos*.

Experience of each state is real, potent, impressionable, but generally we do not find that there is any link between those potent experiences. It is like going through air pockets—emotionally, spiritually, domestically, politically.[18] All of us go through all these processes. The six experiences of *bardo* come in—in each moment, each situation.[19] Each of the six types of *bardo* is individual and unique in its own way. Each of this is an isolated situation on the one hand, but on the other hand they have developed and begun to make an impression on us, penetrating through us within that basic space or basic psychological background. Hence it is very important that all of us know about the *bardo* experience. "And in fact it is much more fundamental than simply talking about death and reincarnation and what you are supposed to experience after you die. It is more fundamental than that."[20]

2. Tibetan Buddhism: Good News for the Living ?

A reflection on what death means and its implications for 'life after death' (i.e. the truth of impermanence) can enable us to make the best use of this life while we still have time, and ensure that when we die it will be without remorse or self-recrimination at having wasted our lives, as one of the Tibet's famous poets, Milarepa, puts it "my religion is to live-and die-without regret."[21]

To understand what happens at death is to be aware of the nature of the mind. Realisation of the nature of the mind is the key to understanding life and death. "For what happens at the moment of death is that the ordinary mind and its delusions die, and in that gap the boundless sky-like nature of our mind is uncovered. This essential nature of mind is the background to the whole of life and death, like the sky, which folds the whole universe in its embrace"[22]

If all we know of the mind is that aspect of the mind which dissolves when we die, we will be left with no idea of what continues. We will have no knowledge of the deeper reality of the nature of the mind. It is important to familiarise ourselves with the nature of the mind while we are still alive. We then will be prepared when it reveals itself spontaneously and powerfully at the moment of death. Now

according to Tibetan Buddhism, meditation is the only way we can repeatedly uncover and gradually realise and stabilise that nature of the mind.

Tibetan Buddhism urges us to accept death now, while we are still alive. Otherwise, we will pay dearly throughout our lives, at the moment of death, and thereafter. Besides, we will not be able to live our lives fully. We will remain imprisoned in the very aspect of ourselves that has to die. This will rob us of the basis of the journey to enlightenment, and trap us endlessly in the realm of illusion.

If we are prepared for death, there is tremendous hope both in life and in death. There is a "possibility for an astounding and finally boundless freedom, which is ours to work for now, in life—the freedom that will also enable us to choose our death and so to choose our birth. For someone who has prepared and practiced, death comes not as a defeat but as a triumph, the crowning and most glorious moment of life."[7]

3. Meditation: A Process of Facing Death

Tibetan Buddhism's view of death takes cognizance of the natural fact that human beings tend to avoid admitting death as an immediate threat in their own lives. Indeed, this refusal to acknowledge the imminence and impermanence of death is regarded in Buddhism, in general, as a fundamental cause of the confusion and ignorance that prevents the spiritual journey towards liberation. Progress towards enlightenment is achieved not by cowering back from death, but by encountering it already while you are live. Therefore, to facilitate the encounter with the inevitable, Tibetan Buddhism offers several detailed meditative strategies. These death meditations enable Buddhist practitioners to face seriously the truth of impermanence and, in turn, to comprehend the true nature of human existence. Mindfulness of death engenders both control and freedom; it brings about control in the sense of curbing the desire for permanence and security, and it promotes freedom by offering the meditator an enduring glimpse of the Buddha's liberating wisdom. The clear advantages of regularly contemplating one's impermanence and death make such meditations supreme among the various types of Tibetan Buddhist mindfulness training. Taking the practice seriously

helps to inspire further spiritual endeavuor, overcome the delusions of permanence and immortality, and increase the probability of a virtuous life and subsequently a good experience of death. Besides, as mentioned elsewhere, one's right view of death not only helps one to face death peacefully at the moment of death, and to accept it without fear while living, but it can also guarantee a final liberation or at least a better and a happy rebirth.

For these reasons, Tibetan Buddhism strongly recommends that one seeks to obtain a right knowledge of death through the process of meditation. Through repeated acquaintance with the process of death in meditation, an accomplished meditator can use his or her actual death to gain great spiritual realization. That is why, according to the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, the experienced practitioners engage in meditative practices as they pass away.

Assessment of Tibetan Buddhism's View of Death

1. After Death Experience: A Matter of Mind?: One of the important suggestions provided for one's liberation in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which is not to be found in other religions, is the constant and persistent reminder given to the dead to be aware of projections and unconscious tendencies that emerge. Appearing in the forms of frightening and peaceful deities, these projections arise from one's own mental body. Interestingly, it states that even the Lords of death too emerge from this mental body, have no solid substance and therefore one need not fear them. When such projections arise, the *bardo* body is asked to pray with deep devotion to gods and Buddhas, which can lead one to liberation.[24] Thus Tibetan Buddhism not only reveals to the deceased the real nature of the different forms of apprehension after death, but also provides means and suggestions to overcome them, thus accompanying the dead in their struggles for liberation.

2. Freedom of the Dead: One of the most outstanding parts of Tibetan Buddhism's understanding of the deceased and the life after death is the role, the intellect and the will of deceased can play in determining one's future destiny. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* often exhorts the dead in the *bardo* stage not to be led either by fear towards one form of reality or by attraction towards another form of

reality. Often repeated exhortations such as 'think' 'recognise' 'do not be fond of' 'look not at it' 'avoid' 'believe in' etc. clearly indicates a possibility of choice for the dead as regards the activities of the intellect and the exercise of the will. However, it does not in anyway imply a total voluntary freedom, as the different forms of thought and the propensities of the will that affect the dead at this *bardo* is *very much conditioned* by one's own past life in the world. But what cannot be denied is the range of options before the dead, which makes Tibetan Buddhism's understanding of life-after-death very different from that of Christianity.

3. **The Compassionate Role of Lama**: One of the beautiful things of Tibetan Buddhism is that, a lama or a Guru, unlike a Catholic priest, is a not only spiritual teacher but also a therapist-cum-spiritual healer, who helps and guides the sick and the dying people with infinite compassion, wisdom, and understanding. Christianity, as a religion, has to take a cue from Tibetan Buddhism as to how its religious leaders(the priests) can prepare the people to face death without fear, to accompany the dying into next life with compassion, and to treat the dead with tremendous respect.

4. **Near-death Experience**: The western writers who have studied both *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the account of near-death experiences see tantalizing parallels between the two. Some of the experiences of the so-called dead such as the appearance of light at the final stages of the near-death experience, the out-of-body experience wherein the dead can see their body as well as environment around them, helplessly watching relatives and frustratingly trying to communicate with them, the experience of having a perfect body, uninhibited mobility and clairvoyance, the surprise of meeting others who had died before visions of different realms such as inner worlds, paradises, cities of light with transcendental music, tormenting feelings of loneliness, gloom and desolation, are found, both in the accounts of near-death experiences[25] and in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, as we have seen. This reveals the wealth of experience as regards the reality of death that is contained in this book, which needs to be uncovered.

5. **Psychological Reading of *Bardo*:** As we have seen in the article, *bardo* is usually associated with life after death But it can

also be looked at differently. Some Tibetan spiritual masters, like Chögyam Trungpa,[26] prefer to see *bardo* as the peak experience of any given moment. According to them, our experience of the present moment is always coloured by one of six psychological states: the god realm (bliss), the jealous god realm (jealousy and lust for entertainment), the human realm (passion and desire), the animal realm (ignorance), the hungry ghost realm (poverty and possessiveness), and the hell realm (aggression and hatred). In relating these realms to the six traditional Buddhist *bardo* experiences, they insightfully delineate the familiar psychological patterns of embodied human life, and show how they present an opportunity to transmute our daily experiences into freedom.

A Critique of Tibetan Buddhism's View of Death

1. Description of the *bardo* stage is very mystical and mysterious. It may not make much sense to non-Buddhists and to the rational human beings, if one takes them to be the real state of affairs. However, the book warns us that it is only the projection of one's own thoughts, desires, fears and anxieties with regard to the future. If that is case, why such an elaborate description of something which is not so significant? Is it not disproportionate to elaboration on the process of rebirth on which the book does not have much to say except speaking about the closing of the womb door and choosing of the womb birth.

2. Its account on judgement resembles very much of what is found in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. However, it does not deal with the question of the type of good actions which are rewarded and the bad actions that are condemned, as it is described in other traditions. In particular, one relationship with the others, especially one's duty and commitment towards the poor, the needy and the suffering are hardly discussed in this judgement. Nor do they figure anywhere in the extensive description of the deceased's fears/anxieties in the *bardo* stage. Absence of the social dimension of human life is the biggest lacuna of the Tibetan Buddhism's understanding of death.

Conclusion

The problem of death has been a universal problem for all people at all times. Different cultures, different religions and people of

different historical times have been attempting to theorise on this inevitable dimension of life, and have thus contributed to a more comprehensive understanding death and life after death. One of the most significant approaches towards the reality of death has been gifted to humanity by Tibetan Buddhism. As we have seen, its teaching on death has taken a very pragmatic approach towards death in a manner that not only acclimatises the human being, through the process of mediation, to the anxious period of the intermediate state after death, but it has also devised effective methods of accompanying the dying. Its insights offers valuable lessons to humanity for better living. The age-old Tibetan Buddhism's treatise on death dovetails with the ever-growing modern literature on life after death based on the new findings of near-death experiences. It might perhaps indicate that, when it comes to the ultimate questions in life, what is ancient is infinitely wise and incredibly valuable.

Notes

1. As quoted in Kenneth Kramer, *The Sacred Art of Dying*, New York: Paulist Press, 1988, p. 70.
2. Cf. Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Nodia: Rupa & Co, 1992.
3. Evans Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970. p 89.
4. Ibid., p.97.
5. Ibid., p.101.
6. Ibid., p.153.
7. Cf. Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.*
8. For the nature of the Death-consciousness determines the future state of the 'soul-complex,' existence being the continuous transformation of one conscious state into another.
9. Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* , pp. 92-97.
10. Ibid.,pp. 97-101.
11. For instance, those who have come to the second day are the ones who are overcome by illusions, to the third day are the one's who could not overcome pride, to the fourth day are the ones who have failed in observance of vows etc..
12. Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, p. 292.

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Wentz. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, p.28.
16. Trungpa deems it as the present experience, the immediate experience of nowness—where you are, where you are at. Cf. Chogyam Trungpa, *Transcending Madness: The Experience of Six Bardo*, London: Shambhala Publications, 1992. p. 3.
17. Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* , p.102.
18. Trungapa, *Transcending Madness*, p. 4.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Kramer, *The Sacred Art of Dying*, p.71.
22. Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of the Living*, p.12.
23. Ibid., p.14
24. Kramer. *The Sacred Art of Dying*, p. 75.
25. Cf. Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, pp. 319-336.
26. A stimulating work for this type of reading of bardos is Chögyam Trungpa, Transcending Madness: The Experience of Six Bardos.

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Theology of Death: Experiencing the Fullness of Life Through the Negation of Life in Death

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Abstract: Death confronts us not only as a paradox, but also us as a mystery in that it is experienced as integral to life. Participation in life entails a simultaneous participation in death. This is because life and death constitute a continuum. Death is not something outside life. If it were so, then no one would have bothered about it. Precisely because it is within life, people try to figure out the relationship between life and death. One can grasp this relationship to the extent one is immersed in the mystery of life that envelops the mystery of death. Here the author goes against the position that, "... death is nothing to us, because while we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, we do not exist" and proposes that the mystery of human existence encompasses the mystery of both life and death and that we live our lives in relation to death, i.e. with the knowledge that we will die. This close relationship between life and death implies that we can understand one only in relation to the other. Basing himself on Jewish and Christian traditions, the author tries to understand, appreciate and critique the phenomenon of death and affirms that the promise of new life in Jesus is experienced by actualizing the multi-dimensional relationships here and now. The creative power of God stands over against physical death as a promise of the fullness of life that has already been experienced as part of the unfolding of life. The full realization of the new life remains as a hope founded on God who, as the source of life, "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist"

Keywords: Christian understanding of death, dualism, Jewish understanding of death, fullness of life, mystery of death.

Introduction

The knowledge that we will die and disappear from the face of the earth is frightening and unsettling as it is certain and universal. However, this awareness does not include the knowledge of the reality of death itself. Death remains the great unknown and unknowable. That is to say, while it may be possible to describe the trajectory of the process of death on the basis of biological, psychological or clinical observations, the reality of death as death always escapes investigation. It is because no one can cross over the threshold of death and return to life with exact information. Thus, the certain knowledge about the fact of death and the impossibility of knowing death itself constitute the paradox of death.

Death confronts us not only as a paradox, but also us as a mystery in that it is experienced as integral to life. Participation in life entails a simultaneous participation in death. This is because life and death constitute a continuum. Death is not something outside life. If it were so, then no one would have bothered about it. Precisely because it is within life, people try to figure out the relationship between life and death. One can grasp this relationship to the extent one is immersed in the mystery of life that envelops the mystery of death. Here I am deliberately going against the position that, "... death is nothing to us, because while we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, we do not exist"[1] As opposed to this view, I am proposing that the mystery of human existence encompasses the mystery of both life and death and that we live our lives in relation to death, i.e. with the knowledge that we will die. This close relationship between life and death implies that we can understand one only in relation to the other.

This would explain why different religions seek to dwell on the mystery of life and death in their attempt to generate a deeper appreciation of life. Death provides a privileged standpoint to understand life and vice versa. However, though religions begin with the avowed purpose of enhancing life, the result need not necessarily correspond to the intention. For example, a religion may emphasize the transcendent finality of life beyond death with a view to enhancing the meaningfulness of our earthly existence. But the unintended consequence might turn out to be passivity, lack of

commitment and the neglect of this life with the expectation of a better life in the other-world. This has happened to almost all the world religions. Christianity is not an exception.

The traditional Catholic Christian approach to the mystery of life and death had been, to some extent, instrumental in diverting the attention of the believers from this world to the other. As it happened especially in the Middle Ages, the Christian existence itself was construed as a preparation for death and for the wonderful life that awaited beyond the grave. The consequence of such an approach is that it tends to reduce Christian ethical life into self-seeking; it makes Christian commitment to redress injustice and oppression something nonessential to Christian living; and it conceives action for change and transformation as peripheral to the Christian faith. Though at present such attitudes do not have much currency, vestiges of them are not entirely absent.

This calls for an adequate theological understanding of the reality of death – an understanding that takes the reality of physical death seriously and one that enhances the deeper significance of life on earth while locating and affirming the future dimension of God's promise of the fullness of life in the midst of tendencies and factors that negate life. Accordingly, the central argument of the paper is that the experience of the fullness of life in its present and future dimensions calls for the negation of life in death. In other words, transforming life into a constant affirmation of the promise of life radically challenges the tendency to make death a pattern of life. The courage to reject life in death facilitates the experience of the fullness of life and, conversely, the preference for death as a pattern of life excludes the possibility of life altogether.

This argument is developed in several stages. The essay will, first, analyze the traditional Catholic understanding of death to identify its strengths and limitations as well as to underscore the need for a realistic understanding of death. Second, the starkness of physical death will be analyzed with a view to highlighting the true nature of death. The third section will focus on the understanding of death in the Hebrew Scriptures to delineate the trajectory of the development of the notion of death. The conception of death in the Christian Scriptures will be the focus of the forth section and it will

also highlight the challenge of death for life here and now and its relation to the Christian hope for the fullness of life. I conclude the paper by pointing out that the fullness of life is the Christian option and not life in death. This necessitates a negation of life in death and the affirmation of the possibility of experiencing that fullness as integral to the unfolding of life.

Traditional Approach to Death

Catholic theology is yet to develop a full-fledged and an adequate theology of death. Traditionally, the focus of the theology of death has been on the 'before' and the 'after'. It emphasized the need of repentance and reconciliation, anointing and viaticum before death as a preparation for what follows after death. It also discussed elaborately on what follows death: judgment, purgatory, heaven, hell, parousia and general judgment. Death happens 'in between' the 'before' and the 'after' and it is glossed over by stating that death is the separation of the soul from the body.[2]

In the process the anthropological dimension of death has been sidelined. The tragedy, the absurdity, the darkness and the terribleness of death are covered up. As a consequence, death itself is construed in a truncated fashion. When death is understood as the separation of body and soul and the emphasis is placed on the continued existence of the soul after the dissolution of the body, the reality of death is somehow circumvented as death becomes the death only of the body – the material container of the real person who, in fact, does not and cannot die since the person's soul, because of its immortal nature, continues to exist beyond the destruction of the shell of the body. This view is based on a specific Greek philosophical anthropology.[3] Though historically it has immensely influenced the Christian approach to death, in reality it has little to do with what the Christian faith affirms about death.[4]

Moreover, the contemporary understanding of human persons as an integral unity of body and soul (GS 14) does not allow the simplistic definition of death as the separation of body and soul. If body and soul represent the two dimensions of the single reality of the person, then the separation of one from the other must be considered as the dissolution of the person.[5] Realistically, then, the

definition of death as the separation of body and soul says little about the reality of death and it leaves us with no ground for consolation. In addition, the scientific knowledge we have of the cosmos radically questions the traditional way of conceiving the realities that follow death, especially the continued existence of the disembodied soul. For instance, the metaphors of judgment, purgatory, heaven, and hell presuppose a pre-scientific three-tier cosmology that assigns separate places to humans before death and to the soul after death. Underlying the concept of death as separation of body and soul implicitly is a pre-scientific worldview.[6]

At the same time it must be admitted that the emphasis on the continued existence of the soul after the death of the body has a palliative function as it hides, to some extent, the absurdity, threat and pain involved in death. It makes death acceptable and bearable. The argument could be that 'no cost is too much if it helps dealing with the threat of annihilation and tragedy'. But the question is: what is the understanding of death that necessitates palliative measures to deal with it? Could it be authentically Christian? Is there any possibility of conceiving death with all its darkness, tragedy, absurdity and threat, which, at the same time, enhances the Christian vision of human life?

At the base of the traditional understanding of death one can locate the operation of a dualistic anthropology. As I argued elsewhere,[7] a dualistic understanding does violence to the integral, unified nature of the human persons. It brings about an unhealthy and unnecessary dichotomy between body and soul to the detriment of the total human person. This dichotomy finds its extension in one's relationship with other persons, the cosmos and God. The dichotomous view deviates from the Christian vision of human persons. It is, therefore, necessary to integrate the theology of death into the larger context of the Christian understanding of the human persons. This would entail locating human persons in their pluri-dimensional relationality that is constitutive of the persons and an examination of what happens to these relationships in death.

Reality of Death as Death

A deep insight into the fact of being human in the world is the precondition to understand the reality of death as death. The necessary

insights can be gained by looking at human existence in terms of its essential relationality. Human existence in the world encompasses various relational dimensions. They include the dimensions of embodiment, ecological embeddedness, social rootedness and transcendence. They constitute the reality of being human not as body *and* soul but as body-selves. All these dimensions of human existence are necessary for an authentic approach to death. If human existence is relationality, then death is the end of the totality of relationships that constitute the human person. This is what makes death tragic and absurd. As we shall see, this understanding of death conforms to the earlier strata of the Hebrew understanding of death as well as the Christian understanding of death as the wages of sin where sin is understood as alienation.

Death from the perspective of embodiment has the power to terrorize the prospect of life, for, the bedrock of one's identity is embodiment.[8] One's location in and relation to space and time is determined by embodiment. It is also the source of one's relationships in every form. Thus, from the perspective of a human being as an embodied being, death would mean the death of the whole person. Death destroys a person's identity as a human being, it wipes out a person's history and it shatters every relationship of a person. In this way, the cessation of embodiment is equivalent to a ceasing to be. Here one can locate the root cause that makes death absurd and tragic. It makes life itself absurd. There are not a few philosophers who have emphasized the absurdity of life in the face of death and they do have a point.[9]

Death from the vantage point of human beings considered as ecological beings is somewhat consoling as it underscores the fact that whether we live or die, we belong to the earth and to the cosmos. In life one relates to the cosmos as a living organism. In death this relationship is severed. Human interaction with the environment is torn at one level – often as exploiters of the environment – but, at another level, it is reestablished as a source of life for other life forms. The eco-theologians find in this the intimate rootedness of human life on planet earth as well as the mutual life-giving interdependent and interrelated dimension of existence even in death.[10]

The social dimension of death emphasizes the fact that human persons as social beings are not isolated individuals and, therefore, no one dies in isolation. Death is a social phenomenon just as the human person is a social being.[11] Consequently, death is not only a threat to the individual existence, but also to the social existence. This would explain the elaborate rites and rituals that surround the event of a person's death. Death threatens the solidarity and cohesion of society as well as its continued existence. The funerary or mortuary rites are meant to ward off such threats by reestablishing the social integrity shaken by death. As the individual member is concerned, death brings an abrupt end to all social roles and relationships. It not only affects those specific roles and relationships, but also, and more importantly, questions the very rationale and finality of the roles and relationships in society. The mortuary rites also seek to reaffirm the values challenged by death. Thus, even if it is the individual who dies, it is a travesty to portray death as an individual affair and to treat it as such. This makes it imperative that a realistic approach to death calls for considering the death of a person as a social phenomenon.

The understanding of the death of a person as a transcendent being takes us directly into the sphere of religion. A religion that is silent in front of death may face the same predicament – death.[12] From this perspective, it may also be said that the fear of death and annihilation has a significant function in the development of religions as ways to negate the negation of death through the power of hope. The human being as a transcendent being finds in hope the glimmer of transcendence, which emphasizes one's relationship with the divine and is reinforced by the object of one's faith. Thus, even though death radically threatens one's relationship with God, one's faith in God enables one to challenge death itself with the confident hope of a new life as understood in the light of one's vision of God.

To sum up, the absurdity and the tragedy of death get accentuated when viewed from the perspective of the importance of these relational dimensions for human existence and their destruction in death. However, instead of squarely facing this absurdity, oftentimes death is approached from the vantage point of human beings as transcendent beings and the other three dimensions are relegated to

the periphery of the discussion. This approach provides a theologically truncated view of death that may satisfy theological curiosity without addressing the existential issues that surround death as the death of the total person. It also forfeits the significant anthropological and theological insights that can be gained from the reality of death. It is crucial, therefore, to incorporate the totality of human existence with its multidimensional relationality into the discussion on death in order to gain a comprehensive view of the reality of death.

Though the scriptures and the tradition do not provide such a comprehensive vision of death, a critical approach to the biblical conceptions of death will certainly open up vistas for further deepening of our understanding. In doing so, we shall keep as a backdrop the reality of death as the cessation of relationality and examine the biblical understanding of death in the light of the death of the total person. In the following sections we shall briefly analyze the portrayal of death in the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures with the aim of advancing the view that the end of life is not death but rather it is the fullness of life.

Trajectory of the Notion of Death in Jewish Thought

The Hebrew understanding of death is to be located in the context of life.[13] The supreme value of life is the central motive of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Israelites were not so much concerned about life beyond death as with a long life, prosperity and progeny in this life and this was considered a blessing from God (Gen.15:15; Judges 8:32; Job 42:17). Accordingly, the early strata of Israel's understanding of death represents a unique feature in that it does not manifest much concern for individual life beyond death; it considers death in a matter of fact way as something natural.[14] The Israelites were concerned about the future of the nation as a whole. Consequently, we do not find a unified and theologically significant understanding of death and afterlife in the early stages of the development of Israel's faith. Death, as the natural end of human life, comes at the end of a long life and the dead survive in the progeny. (Gen 25:7-11). Life comes as a gift of God: the human being becomes a living being when God breathes God's life-giving breath into lifelessness (Gen 2:7). The human being dies when God

withdraws the breath of life (Ps 104:29; Job 34:14). The human person comes to an end with death. Nothing of an individual survives death except one's name in the memory of the living.

This understanding of death is in conformity with their understanding of human persons. A human person is an undivided whole who ceases to exist at death. Though they conceived a shadowy existence beyond death, that existence was seen as more dreadful than death itself. While life was understood as relational, death was seen as the end of all relationship and the existence beyond death was an existence without any form of relationship. Though death was perceived to be the natural end of human life, death itself did not offer any meaning as it marked the end of all meaningful relationships.

The Hebrew bible does refer to the underworld (*Sheol*) as a place of the dead. *Sheol*, like the Greek underworld (*Hades*), was conceived as a place of darkness without any joy or pleasure, where the dead exist as mere shadows. However, unlike the Greek *Hades*, the use of the term *Sheol* in the Old Testament could be substituted by "pit" or "grave" implying death. Thus, it is possible to consider the verbal usage such as 'going to *sheol*', 'going down to the pit' and 'going into the grave' as hyperboles for death itself without reference to the notion of survival after death.[15] *Sheol* is the common lot and no one escapes it. It is a place where there is no communion; not even the possibility of communion with God through praise and thanksgiving (Ps115:17; Is 38:18ff). Since *Sheol* is characterized by the absence of any form of communion – the characteristic mark of life – it could very well be an equivalent of death without signifying any form of survival.[16]

However, the later development in Jewish thought, especially as reflected in the Wisdom literature, shows a shift in the focus from the nation to the individual. In seeking guidance for the conduct of human life, the Wisdom literature considers death to be an apt topic to reflect upon, obviously without any hope of afterlife. *Ecclesiastes*, for example, highlights the absurdity of life in front of death: "the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more any share in all that is done under

the sun" (Eccles 9:5-6). However, it did not eschew the possibility of some form of survival in the memory of others (Wis 4:1) or in posterity (Sir 44:10-14; Job 18:17-19). Some of the Psalms, on the other hand, tend to widen the scope of survival beyond the grave on the basis of the faith that the communion with God transcends death (Ps 49:8 ff, 16; 73:23-26). In these and similar passages one could locate the notions of immortality prevalent in Greece and other surrounding nations beginning to exert an influence on the Jewish belief. Even then the predominant sentiment expressed in the Wisdom literature is one of pessimism and resignation in front of the tragedy of death.

A further development in the understanding of death is seen in the apocalyptic literature. The apocalyptic vision that arose in Israel as a response to the experience of the national tragedies and the consequent darkening of the historical hope as expressed in the prophetic literature accentuated the hope of survival of the dead. However, it is important to note that the apocalyptic literature did not base its hope on the immortality of the soul, as the Greeks did. Rather the hope was for the resurrection of the dead, which was based on the fidelity, justice and the creative power of the God of Israel rather than the immortal nature of the soul. While Daniel 12:2-3, Is 26:19, and 2 Mac 12:43-45 clearly affirm individual resurrection, Ezekiel 37:1-14, through its vision of the dry bones, highlights the hope of national restoration.[17]

Resurrection as an apocalyptic metaphor underscores the universal scope of salvation. As the expectation of the victory of God's justice over the unrighteous turned out to be unrealizable in history and, at the same time, the faith that nothing can negate the promise of God impelled the oppressed groups among the Jewish population to hope for God's vindication of the just beyond the grave.[18] If everyone is to participate in the victory of God, then those who have suffered persecution and died for the cause of Yahweh are to be brought back to life. The justice of God demands that all – the living and the dead – experience the judgment of God in terms of reward and punishment. In this way, the development of the belief in resurrection is intimately linked with the universal lordship of the God of Israel.

Thus, the belief in the resurrection, which specifically aimed at rejecting the notion of the immortality of the soul and challenging the negative attitude toward the material creation as maintained by the surrounding nations,[19] emphasized the creative power of the living God. The apocalyptic literature presented resurrection as a universal event that affected the entire created order at the end of history that was expected to be imminent. It represented, for them, the universal restoration that God would bring about in the life of Israel, the entire humanity and in the entire creation. (Is 65: 17ff). The belief in the resurrection, thus, presents a radically different theological perspective on the survival of the dead from that which is expressed by the immortality of the soul.

This brief overview of the notion of death in the Hebrew Scriptures shows that there is no unified view of death in these Scriptures. The early strata of Jewish thought considered death the end of the life of a person. It was looked upon as tragic and absurd and yet natural and inevitable. This perspective assigned supreme importance to the earthly life of the people. Gradually, the hope for survival beyond death entered into the Jewish thought especially under the influence of the surrounding nations. However, there is a conscientious effort to reject the notion of the immortality of the soul as held by Israel's neighbors probably to avoid the danger of deifying the deceased as happened in Egypt where the pharaohs were deified,[20] as well as to ward off the danger of denigrating the material creation. In Jewish thought preference was given to the notion of the resurrection of the dead, which emphasized the creative power and fidelity of Yahweh. Even then, the notion of resurrection was not accepted by all. It was the popular belief among the persecuted and disenfranchised apocalyptic millenarian groups. Probably, the Jesus' movement as the movement of the disenfranchised subscribed to and accepted the apocalyptic vision,[21] albeit with major modifications as we shall see below.

Fullness of Life as the Christian Option

The understanding of death in the New Testament is in continuity with the later development of the Jewish apocalyptic thought and is determined by the experience of the death of Jesus. Jesus preached the nearness of God's reign and he, like the apocalypticists, expected

the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God and understood his role as the prophet of the end times. Jesus, along with the Pharisees of his time, accepted the belief in the resurrection and refuted the Sadducees who rejected it. He did not add anything new to the prevailing views on the resurrection or the survival of the dead.

This prophet was executed by the Roman authorities in collusion with the Jewish leaders. If we were to follow the passion narrative of Mark, it doesn't seem that the hope of the resurrection provided Jesus with much consolation to face his horrible death on the cross. He was frightened in front of death and he was greatly distressed and troubled in the garden of Gethsemane. He died in abandonment, in despair, in excruciating pain and with a loud cry (Mk14-16). The followers of Jesus also perceived his death as absurd and meaningless as they, abandoning him, ran away from the scene. However, the experience of the execution of Jesus and its subsequent interpretation effected a radical transformation in the understanding of death and resurrection. Belief in the resurrection, which was till then held, particularly by the apocalyptic millenarian groups and remained in the periphery of the religious thought, began to occupy a central place in the faith of the community gathered in his name.[22] In the process, contrary to the early Hebrew thought which did not base the demand for living an ethical life on the survival of the dead, the hope for resurrection became the ground for ethical life in Christian thought.

The New Testament does not show that the immortality of the soul, and especially the soul of Jesus, proved to be a source of consolation for his followers. For them, Jesus was crucified and he was dead totally. But when they began to proclaim that Jesus is alive, this preaching was not based on the belief in the immortality of the soul. They did not preach that Jesus came back to life on his own. The core of their faith was that God raised Jesus from the dead. That is to say, the resurrection faith is an affirmation of God who receives a new identity in the event of the death of Jesus. The Exodus experience created an identity for the Yahweh God as the one who liberated the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery and who would liberate people from all forms of slavery. Similarly, the resurrection experience generates a new identity for God as the one

who raised Jesus from the dead and who will raise the dead to life. The Hebrew scripture preferred resurrection when it wished to express the survival of the dead in opposition to the Greek understanding of the immortality of the soul. The New Testament follows this tradition and emphasizes resurrection as revealing the identity of God as the God of life (Rom 4:17). Thus, the resurrection faith establishes a new divine identity that becomes the determining factor in the Christian understanding of life and death. This line of thought needs to be taken seriously in order to properly understand the specific Christian perspective on death and the survival of the dead.

In accordance with the changed identity of God, the understanding of the death of the Christian also undergoes a radical change in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. If the death of Jesus was interpreted as a self-donation unto the God of life and the resurrection was seen as God's response to this self surrender, then the Christian views one's life and death as a life and death unto God concretely lived and died in the normal course of one's life. The resurrection of the Christian is God's response, as the God of life, to the life and death of the Christian.[23] This response, in conformity with God's nature, takes the form of an offer of the fullness of life even beyond physical death. This offer does not presuppose the immortality of the soul, which was rejected as the ideology of the elite.

This change in perception is particularly seen in Paul who thoroughly relativizes death in the light of the resurrection experience.[24] According to him, in baptism a believer has already died with Jesus and is raised with him (Rom 6:3-11). In this way the believer lives a new life in Christ. As far as the believer is concerned, death is in the past and the death that comes as a natural end of human life is something awaited in future not with fear and trembling but with eager longing (Phil. 1:21ff). According to Paul, whether we are alive or dead we belong to Jesus (Rom 14:7 ff). It does not mean, however, that life and death have equal significance. Death has importance only in relation to the new life in Jesus. All that matters is life with Christ. The life of the believer is a living with Christ always and everywhere and this new life manifests itself in ethical behaviour in the personal and social spheres of one's

existence. Physical death, as a natural end of life, is a transition to the full participation in the life of Christ.

Physical death is not presented as the consequences of sin in the bible. Human persons are created as finite beings subject to mortality. Whether there is sin or not, as finite beings human life naturally ends in death.[25] Just as in the process of birth so also in the process of death, there is certain passivity. Death happens. It doesn't depend on whether one wills it or not. It is not a punishment of sin imposed by God on the sinner.[26] This point needs to be taken seriously because St. Paul's statement that death is the wages of sin (Rom 6:23) is commonly taken to mean that *physical death* is due to sin.[27] The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World also puts forward this perspective on physical death (GS18). However, it is doubtful whether this point of view is tenable on the basis of the scriptures.

At the same time, St. Paul's affirmation of the connection between sin and death sheds light on the Christian understanding of life as well as death. Human life is relational. It is enhanced through relationships. Pluri-dimensional relationality is the law of life. Sin, on the other hand, denotes a radical negation of the law of life. In other words, sin alienates one from all life-giving relationships. Thus, cut off from the sources of life and turned on oneself, the sinner lives a life in death. Death, from this perspective, is not merely the wages of sin. Sin is death. It cannot be otherwise because the negation of the law of life is the negation of life itself.[28] The remainder after this negation is death.

Jesus' victory over death is to be understood as the victory over this fearful, self-annihilating death. It is not a victory over the natural physical death. In union with Christ, the believer has also died to this death. That is to say, the believer has accepted the life made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the new life that the Christian lives (1 Cor 5:17). This is the life that passes through death and approaches us as the resurrected life. This life is characterized by its openness to God, the ultimate source of life, openness to other persons who make the ultimate source of life an experienced reality in our lives and openness to the world that, as the substratum of all life, sustains and enhances human life as

well. In other words, the new life in Christ is a new life of relationships. These relationships continue beyond physical death because they are reestablished by God in Jesus Christ and they are not created by finite human beings.[29]

In this context the question of personal involvement in death comes to the fore. Are the dying persons actively involved in the event of death? There is an impressive body of literature that presents death as a final personal act of freedom, a final decision.[30] The foundation for this argument is more philosophical than theological. Accordingly, persons as conscious and free subjects decide their destiny at the moment of death. The end of consciousness and freedom is not the destruction of death, but rather it is their full flowering in a definitive decision for or against God at the moment of death.

This approach is laudable insofar as it is an attempt to deal with the reality of death as death. This perspective has applicability especially when death comes in the course of life as a natural process. However, its relevance for the cases of sudden death remains questionable. For example, it cannot be applied to persons blown up in a fraction of a second in a bomb blast, or to people accidentally run over by a speeding truck. In such cases it becomes mandatory to bring in exceptions to the rule. On the other hand, we need great ingenuity to apply it to the death of infants and severely handicapped persons. One way to circumvent the problem is to argue that no one dies as an infant or a handicapped person. In death all will reach full maturity of reason. This argument is contrary to experience. For we see even adults losing their mental capacity as they grow older and very few are lucky enough to maintain their consciousness till the last moment. This is because the consciousness and the mental capacity of the humans function through embodiment. As body disintegrates, the mental functions also begin to fall apart. These are serious issues that make the hypothesis of death as a final decision questionable.

There are even more serious issues to be considered. First, the hypothesis propounds an individualistic approach to the death of a person as if the person exists in a social vacuum. Secondly, it actually avoids the reality of death as death because, according to this view,

only a part of the person dies. The most important aspect of the persons, the soul, does not face the threat of death. Thirdly, this hypothesis accepts a subtle body-soul dualism that sees soul regaining supremacy as body disintegrates. Thus, the application of the philosophical notion of human freedom to the event of death raises more problems than resolves them.

However, the notion of human freedom in relation to death is significant from a theological point of view. Human freedom is operative in the choice of life or death in the course of life. The decision to live a new life or a life in death is the decision one makes in the process of living.[31] As the Pauline baptismal theology shows, the life of the believer is a gradual unfolding of this decision for a new life made as a free subject in response to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The decision contrary to it is a choice of life in death. This freedom is exercised in life as long as one lives. The believer lives with the knowledge of faith that one has decided for the new life offered as a free gift. Both the believer and the one who opted for life in death, undergo the same physical death. The believer lives and dies in the firm hope of the fullness of life. The latter dies with no such hope as he/she lived a life in death. Both of them die passively – one with hope and the other without hope. Thus, in death there is no freedom and there is no possibility of a final decision either this way or that. Freedom is prior to death and it is manifested in the existential attitude toward God's offer of life in Jesus and is actualized in living out the new life.

Since the Christian understanding of death is founded on the death of Jesus, it is necessary to refer to it in order to determine whether this view is scripturally tenable. The core of Jesus' message of salvation was the closeness of God's love, especially to the disenfranchised, and the imperative of the human response to this love in terms of loving one's neighbour. However, in proclaiming this specific message of salvation Jesus had to face the forces of sin/death. He chose to remain faithful to God in his announcement of the nearness of God's love and, in the process, he defied sin as life in death.[32] This is Jesus' active decision. It ensured his victory over death as the consequence of sin.

Apart from the triumphalistic interpretation of the death of Jesus presented in the light of the resurrection experience, the New Testament generally paints a sober picture of his death as something he suffered passively, crying out in utter despair. It is probable that he did not will it on his own; it was imposed upon him against his will. Nor did he attribute any salvific significance to his death. His physical death is the price he had to pay for this victory. He suffered it as something imposed upon him from the outside and he suffered it passively.[33] This perspective is crucial to the understanding of the salvific significance of Jesus death on the cross as well as for the Christian understanding of death. Jesus' death is salvific not because it transmits some magical power. Its salvific significance is in manifesting the love of God in the midst of life in death. Salvation, in Jesus' view, consists in the reestablishment of the broken relationships. It is death of sin and death of death. Jesus announced the closeness of God's love that is capable of putting an end to the life in death. In his death, which he suffered passively and helplessly, this love is manifested as an incarnate reality revealing, in the process, that life in death is the denial of the offer of God's love. And this denial perpetuates the life in death and is sealed in physical death. Conversely, a turning toward God's love in response to this revelation is the path toward a new life, toward the fullness of life. This is confirmed in the resurrection of Jesus: he remained open to God even in the face of a violent death. God affirms his stand as the true path to life by offering him new life.

Thus, God is active in Jesus' death while Jesus remains passive. In the Christian understanding of death primacy needs to be given to the activity of God, the creator and the re-creator who raises and gives life to the dead. Passivity in death is inevitable for finite beings, as they do not have mastery over life and death. However, this passivity is unto God whose creative power leads to the fullness of life. The certainty of new life has its experiential source in the actual rejection of life in death and the affirmation of the promise of life through the establishment of life-enhancing relationships. These existential endeavours definitively come to an end in physical death. But the hope generated by the experience of new life in Jesus Christ together with the faith in the God of life enables the believer to negate and transcend the threat of annihilation.

Conclusion

The Christian perspective on death derives from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. These events reveal Jesus' struggle against life in death marked by sin or absence of relationality as well as his victory over it. His struggle and victory paves the way for a new life of relationships to be lived and experienced in the course of one's life. Jesus' victory does not eliminate physical death. It comes as the natural end of human existence on earth. But physical death does not negate God's promise of life in its fullness. In fact, the believer's life is a gradual unfolding of this life in constant struggle against life in death. Thus, the fullness of life is not expected to take place in an ethereal world beyond the grave. The promise of the new life in Jesus is experienced by actualizing the multi-dimensional relationships here and now. It is this very life lived and died that is redeemed by the creative power of God. The creative power of God stands over against physical death as a promise for the fullness of life that has already been experienced as part of the unfolding of life. The full realization of the new life remains as a hope founded on God who, as the source of life, "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4:17).

Notes

1. Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus 126. Quoted in Simon Tugwell, *Human Immortality And the Redemption of Death* (Springfield: Templegate Publishers, 1990), 64. See also Eberhard Jüngel, Death: The Riddle and the Mystery, Trans. Iain and Ute Nicol (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 13, 15.
2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1005 (Vatican: Liguori Publications, 1994). Cfr. Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 3-4; George A. Maloney, *The Everlasting Now: Meditations on the Mysteries of Life and Death as they Touch us in Our Daily Choice* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1980), 14-16.
3. Terence Penelhum, "Christianity," in Life After Death in World Religions, ed. Harold Coward (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 44.
4. For a detailed discussion on the Platonic idea of death and its influence on Christianity, cfr. Jüngel, Death, 41-55.
5. Penelhum, "Christianity," 44-45.
6. Ibid., 39.

7. Mathew Jayanth, "Body Spirituality: Incarnation as an Invitation to an Embodied Spirituality," *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 7, No.2 (July 2004): 112-135.
8. Penelhum, "Christianity," 46.
9. Prominent among the philosophers who emphasized the absurdity of life are Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Cfr. Rene Latourelle, "Death" in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. Rene Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 1995).
10. For example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), 251-253
11. Jüngel, *Death*, 30-31.
12. As we shall see, the Hebrew thought in its earlier stages did not pay much attention to finding an answer to the question of death and accepted it as natural to human persons. Death did not play any significant role in the development of the Hebrew religion.
13. Jüngel, *Death*, 62.
14. Penelhum, "Christianity," 36.
15. Eliezer Segal, "Judaism," in *Life After Death in World Religions*, ed. Harold Coward (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 14.
16. For a detailed discussion on the notion of death and afterlife in the early stages of Israel's faith and life, Cfr. Alan F. Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 120-170.
17. Alan Segal in his book traces the development of the notion of resurrection during the Second Temple Period. Cfr. Alan Segal, *Life After Death*, 248-281. See also Eliezer Segal, "Judaism", 17.
18. For a comprehensive view of the development of the notion of death and afterlife in Israel, see Alan F. Segal, *Life After Death*. Cfr. especially see Chapters 3, 6 and 7.
19. Eliezer Segal, "Judaism", 18
20. ibid., 16
21. Alan Segal, *Life after Death*, 387-88.
22. Jüngel, *Death*, 80
23. Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 108-109.
24. Paul may be considered as the first Christian theologian who dealt with the death from the perspective of the death of Jesus Christ. For a study of Paul's interpretation of the death of a Christian in the light of the

resurrection faith, cfr. Jüngel, Death, 80-94. See also Alan Segal, Death and Afterlife, 399-440

25. Penelhum, "Christianity," 42.
26. Jüngel, 87 88
27. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Liguori Publications, 1994), 1008.
28. ibid., 88.
29. Jüngel, 90.
30. Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death.* London: Burns and Oates, 1961; Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death.* New York: Herder and Herder, 1965; Roger Troisfontaines, *I Do Not Die,* Trans. Francis E. Albert. New York: Desclee Company, 1963.
31. Hayes, *Visions of a Future,* 84-85.
32. Jüngel, Death, 99ff.
33. Ibid., 105.

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The Significance of Jesus' Resurrection for Humans and the World

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Abstract: Christian faith is born out of two foundational experiences: "This Jesus of Nazareth is Lord and God" and "This Jesus was dead but rose again". The Christian faith-experience of God in Jesus Christ begins with the encounter of the first apostles and other disciples with Jesus as alive after he was crucified, died and was buried. This existential encounter transformed their entire lives that they began to experience God, other humans and the world in a way hitherto unknown to them. In the beginning they had no categories to articulate who Jesus was and what was his new mode of existence. Since they shared with their co-religionists the hope for an eschatological resurrection of all believers they interpreted their unique experience of Jesus as alive after his death as resurrection. In their encounter with Jesus they realized that he is the beginning and the end of their lives, the absolute meaning of their lives and, therefore, their Lord and God. In his resurrection they recognized the beginning and guarantee of the resurrection of all and the transformation of all things. Jesus' resurrection revealed that he is the Alpha and the Omega of the entire creation. The authors show that the resurrection of Jesus gives us an insight into the mystery of God, humans and the world. It demands from humans take responsibility for the world and that they confront structures and systems that attempt to thwart the actualization of the effects of resurrection for the entire humanity and for entire creation.

Keywords: God, Lord, Meaning and Mystery of Human Beings, Resurrection, Significance of Resurrection.

Christian faith is born out of two foundational experiences: "This Jesus of Nazareth is Lord and God" and "This Jesus was dead but rose again" (cf. Rom 10:9). The whole edifice of Christian Tradition is built on these foundations. Paul would emphatically assert that if there was no resurrection of Jesus, the believers in Jesus Christ are the ones most to be pitied (I Cor 15: 19). The proclamation about Jesus' resurrection is the most prominent feature of Paul's *gospel* (Rom 1:3f; 4:24f, 8:34, 10:9; I Cor 15:3-11; I Thess 1:10; II Tim 2:8)[1] Both human history and the entire creation enter into a new mode of existence because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That was the heart of the Christian proclamation. However, from the apostolic times there were people who could not accept the truth of resurrection. They would even ridicule those who believed in it and committed themselves to Jesus Christ and made claims that they had experienced him as alive after his death.

The anti-Christian propaganda since the birth of the Christian Church directed all its forces against proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord and God and that he was murdered but overcame death and is alive. It continues even today! However, the Church understands and proclaims that the mystery of humans and their destiny in this world and beyond this world in relation to the mystery of God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. Therefore, any theological reflection on the mystery of resurrection continues to evoke interest among all sections of the Christian believers.[2] The reality of the historical Jesus - his life, death and resurrection - is not only the hermeneutical principle to interpret the meaning of human existence here on earth and its ultimate destiny but also to have access to the Reality of God, "in whom we move, live and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead reveals who God is, what humans are,

what the world is and what the final destiny of humans and their world is.

I. Resurrection of Jesus Reveals God

Theological reflections on Jesus' resurrection from the dead oscillate between the so-called reasonably safe theological positions to presumptuous affirmations about the nature of God and popular misconception of identifying resurrection with resuscitation. Resurrection must reveal to us who God is. If resurrection is so fundamental to Christian belief it must be grappled with that it must lead us to an insight into the mystery of life and death that can be reasonably articulated. Therefore, the truth of resurrection lies between the two extremes: one that empties the meaning of resurrection and the other exaggerates it in such a way as to make it a happening of dubious nature.

There are theologians who would explain away the reality of resurrection or interpret the event in such away that their theological opinions do not conform to the content of faith in resurrection, something that is believed as certain, lived and proclaimed by the Church. Rudolf Bultmann, for example, would not deny resurrection but affirms that the New Testament witness about resurrection is in a mythical language and therefore it is difficult to reach the reality expressed by it. The Easter event, according to him, is *not a historical event.* What can be understood and affirmed as a historical happening is the paschal faith of the first disciples.[3] Resurrection is the experience of being liberated from sin and being existentially open to God and thus finding meaning in one's life. Therefore, Bultmann would affirm that "Christ is resurrected in the Kerygma". It is in the preaching about him that he is proclaimed to be alive so that people can choose to commit themselves to God and find the meaning of their

lives or close themselves against God and remain in the world of sin and meaninglessness.

It must he admitted that the resurrection of Jesus could not have been a historical event like that of the crucifixion. An historical event is a time and space bound occurrence. It was the obsession of the Western mind since the Enlightenment to recognize and accept something to be true only if it is historically verifiable. Since the resurrection of Jesus does not fall into a category which can be rationally verifiable, the tendency was to explain it in a way that makes some sense. But they lacked a world-view to experience and categories to explain a reality that is true but not historically verifiable. So they tried to explain it as a myth as understood in common parlance. Bultmann's attempt to demythologize NT narrations about Jesus was itself probably coming from this Western pre-occupation to reach the historically verifiable truths about Jesus' life and mission that it can be scrutinized by all and sundry. It is an illusion that one can historically prove the event of God becoming human and Jesus rising from the dead. What is historically verifiable is the consequences of the same. Against such a one-sided understanding of reality we must affirm that everything real need not necessarily be historical.

Willi Marxsen's theological reflection on resurrection went a step further to explain away the reality of resurrection by affirming that what is historically verifiable is the faith of the disciples as what happened to them in their personal life and as the continuance of 'cause of Jesus'[4] in the functional level. Any charismatic leader or any revolutionary reformer continues to live after his death through his followers who are espoused to his ideals or what he stood for. They find their identity and meaning for their existence by totally committing themselves to the same cause. Here

again the problem of the reality of resurrection is not confronted. What was the event of resurrection, which is of utmost importance to the believers in terms that are different from what happened to themselves and the continuance of the cause of Jesus?

Wolfhart Pannenberg[5] begins from the pre-supposition that the historicity of faith of the disciples cannot be basis for the affirmation of the historicity of resurrection. Anything of importance to theological reflection must be a historical event or a fact that has three characteristics: it must be embodied in a tradition; it must be expressed in some language and finally it must respond to a metaphysical need or expectation of humans. According to him all these characteristics are found in the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Resurrection is experienced as the anticipation of the fulfilment of history by those who were waiting for the eschatological fulfilment of their lives. So Jesus' resurrection has a universal significance. For E.Schillebeeckx,[6] resurrection can be explained as the disciples' interpretation of the Old Testament belief in the continued life of a just man, for example, like that of the innocent and just man of Wisdom 2:17 – 3:4, whose life of intimacy with God as his father and whose just life challenged the wicked who condemned him to a shameful death. What happened to the disciples after their encounter with the risen Jesus and the content of their proclamation about the person and message of Jesus shows that the resurrection of Jesus is more than a mere reflection of the disciples on the fate of a just man as Schillebeeckx claims.

For Leonardo Boff,[7] resurrection of Jesus is the answer to the question whether death is more powerful than love or whether death or life is the final word of God on Jesus and all human beings. It is the realization of a hope that is present in all aspects of human life. It is the realization of the utopia,

which is not just an ideal but that which is realized here and now in our world, overcoming everything alienating, suffering, pain, hatred, sinfulness and death.

For Jon Sobrino, who makes a critical appraisal of some contemporary theological positions on resurrection proposes his own understanding of resurrection. He affirms that resurrection is the event that reveals God.[8] Like the cross of Jesus reveals a God who suffers because he is love, resurrection reveals a God, who is just. If in the OT God is known not through his attributes but through his action of liberating his people from slavery, in the NT God is revealed through his action of raising Jesus from the dead. God's fidelity finds expression in the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples who encountered Jesus alive after his death understood the reality of resurrection from the horizon of the eschatological hope they shared with their people that finally God would vindicate the just and raise them from the dead. The disciples and those who recognized Jesus as a prophet with a difference, someone who is not just ordinary and committed themselves to follow him and his message, affirmed that God raised Jesus, who was unjustly condemned to a shameful death. In their encounter with the risen Jesus they realized that their whole life was transformed in such a way that they found the absolute meaning of their existence as the one who were experiencing their oneness with the risen Jesus and the entire universe. No wonder, then, they begin to believe and proclaim that his resurrection is the beginning of universal resurrection. "He is the first born from the dead" If he is risen we will also rise' etc. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus reveals the justice of God and it gives us hope in a world of suffering caused by injustice, oppression and dehumanization. The justice of God that is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus and the hope that is real

must be realized by hoping against hope in situations that call the resurrection of Jesus into question. This is possible only by a committed praxis sharing in God's concern for transforming this world into his kingdom.

If Boff's theological reflection on resurrection revolves around the inner certainty that humans have about the triumph of love and life over death and the surety of hope against hopelessness, for Sobrino it is the revelation of God's justice. Resurrection must reveal to us more than the fulfilment of that eschatological hope that gives meaning to human existence and the absolute certainty about the justice of God that challenges systems and structures of the world that attempt to thwart or destroy God's plan for humans. Resurrection must reveal to us who this God is who is involved in human history that affects God himself.

I propose an understanding of resurrection that hopefully responds to the question about this God who is involved in human history because I believe that all the aspects of the Christ-event must reveal to us who God is. If we believe in the radical relationship or the absolute inter-relatedness of God, humans and the world, the resurrection of Jesus reveals that this inter-relatedness of the entire reality is both historical and trans-historical. One can affirm that the resurrection of Jesus is not a historical event like his crucifixion. But resurrection happened to the historical reality of Jesus. In their encounter with him after his resurrection they recognized that there was a sort of continuity and discontinuity between the reality of Jesus in his historical existence and his trans-historical existence. He is alive but not the same way he was alive before his death. The recognition of him is not easy. The disciples' encounter with Jesus during his earthly life and their encounter with him as alive after his death were partly same and partly different. Yet they began to proclaim

boldly that he is alive and explained the same in categories of thought and language through which both the Jews and the Greeks could have access to the content of their proclamation. For Jews if one is alive he must eat and drink and have external marks which can identify him because the body-soul dichotomy is not a part of their anthropology. So the disciples would communicate to them about the risen Jesus in a language and idiom that would make the Jewish hearers understand that Jesus is a living reality. From the narration they would know that Jesus walked with the disciples after his resurrection, talked with them, ate with them and he showed them the marks of his wounds. So it is clear to the listeners that he is not only alive but also has an embodied existence. But for those who hold a Hellenistic world-view or for those who are influenced by this world-view it would be absurd to think that one who has transcended death and finiteness would live again in the limitedness of space and time. He is alive but he is beyond space and time. He lives but he is immortal and infinite. He might 'appear' as an embodied being but he is a spirit who could enter through the closed doors and would suddenly 'disappear' from the sight of the disciples. Paul, while comparing our new existence in Christ with our old existence in the flesh without him, speaks about the transition of Jesus from his historical existence to his trans-historical existence, distinct but not separate, not one mode of existence but also not two. This transition also affects our judgement about Jesus as the people regarded him from a human point of view during his historical existence. "Even if we did once know Christ in the flesh, that is not how we know him now" (II Cor 5: 16, trans. Jerusalem Bible). The evangelists integrate both the Hebrew and Hellenistic world-views to communicate the truth of their encounter with Jesus after his death and burial

that Jesus is alive. They proclaimed that anyone who is open to him can encounter and experience him as the absolute meaning of their lives and indeed the Lord and God of their lives and the universe, 'the alpha and the omega' of the entire creation and everything is created 'through him and for him'(Col 1:16).

Both the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus reveal the radical inter-relatedness of God, humans and the world. If in the incarnation God reveals that his inter-relatedness with the creation and humans is historical and existential, the resurrection of Jesus reveals that this inter-relatedness is not limited to history but also transcends history. Both incarnation and the resurrection affect God. They affect our pre-conceived notions about God. It confronts systems and structures, whether religious, social, political or economical which manipulate the notions of God to destroy humans and the world.

The mode of God's being is in radical relationship with humans and their world. Therefore, God is not the Absolute Other, but the Ultimate in a radical relationship with all that exists. Everything that is human and everything that is material are different from God but not separated from him. God, being the ultimate source of everything, is distinct from everything that has existence (*ex-sistence*) from him. However, God and his creation are *not one* but also *not two*. Both the incarnation of the Word and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead are the manifestation of this unique relationship between God and his creation. If God were to be absolutely different from the entire creation, incarnation would not have been possible. It would be the same with the resurrection of Jesus.

II. Resurrection Reveals the Meaning of the Mystery of Humans

The transformation of Jesus from his embodied human existence with its space and time bound limitations to the ultimate horizon of the Lord of the Universe is the re-affirmation of God's plan of uniting everything in Christ who is the Alpha and the Omega of the entire creation. Can we not then recognize and understand the resurrection of Jesus from the dead as the anticipation of the fulfilment of God's plan of leading humans and the universe to their final unfolding as intended by God? Does it not reveal to us that dimension of the mystery of God who created humans with the capacity to become and unfold in history and thus obtain deification to have eternal communion with him as Irenaeus of Lyons' anthropology would indicate? Neither the death of Jesus is the end of everything for him and for the world nor his resurrection the end , but the end is when God becomes all in all (II Cor 15:28) as Paul would affirm. Are not both incarnation and resurrection the once and for all manifestation of the mystery of God's plan for humanity and the world? The Letter to the Ephesians expressing Pauline theology would lead us to believe in such a plan of God (Eph 1: 9-10).

The Resurrection of Jesus reveals that the destiny of humans and their world is intrinsically related to God's being as God in relationship with everything that exists .In the resurrection of Jesus it was revealed that whatever is concrete and visible in history would be transformed into a trans-historical reality and that is the deeper dimension of the entire creation, both the material world and humans.

The early Christian community believed and proclaimed not only that God raised Jesus from the dead but also that

his resurrection was the beginning of the universal resurrection of all (I Thess 4: 15, 17; I Cor 15: 51). Jesus, as the resurrected, is the 'first born of many brothers' and 'the first fruit' (Rom 8:11, I Cor 15: 20, Col 1:18; Acts 3:15; Rev 1:5). This implies that all will be resurrected because he was resurrected. It is not just an eschatological event to be realized in future but it has already begun as an experience of the 'newness of life' for those who have faith in him and what God as accomplished through him. And this faith is expressed through baptism (Rom 6: 4-5). Paul says that in baptism one dies with Christ, is buried with Christ and rises with Christ. The existence of the believer is *in him* and *with him*. The Hebrew theology of "corporate personality" might give an insight into this mystery of our being in relation to the risen Christ. The corporate personality is an inclusive personality in whom all humans who lived before this person and all humans who would live after and all those who are contemporaneous with this person are included in this person. If Jesus Christ is the absolute, decisive, definitive and unique manifestation of God's relation to humans and the world, the absolute symbol of everything that *exists*, then resurrection like incarnation reveals the mystery of the inter-relatedness of God, humans and the world. Thus, it reveals not only who God is but also the meaning of the mystery of humans and the entire creation.

The resurrection of Jesus gives us an insight into the mystery of humans because the one who rose from the dead is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, who was truly human besides being truly God as the council of Chalcedon (C.E. 451) confesses. The resurrection of Jesus reveals that humans and the world have not only a temporal existence, but they have an existence beyond history. Their existence cannot be thought of as separated from their ultimate source, namely, God, though humans can choose to alienate themselves from

him and find devices to destroy their world. Further, resurrection reveals the possibility of the ultimate unfolding of humans. It reveals that humans become truly humans to the extent they actualise what they truly are, through right relationships among themselves, with God and with the universe. If in resurrection what happened to one who was truly human could affect God himself, the entire humanity and the world itself because they are inter-related, it brings home to us that each human existence is valuable because it belongs to and affects the whole of reality. Precisely, because of this inter-relatedness, oppression, injustice, dehumanisation, discrimination in the name of religion, caste, class, gender, age etc. make those persons who practise these anti-kingdom values in their personal life or through systems and structures, less human as they become instruments of death and not resurrection. Therefore, in any decision of humans to unfold themselves as humans, in any struggle to fight against systems of dehumanisation and oppression, in any cross suffered as a consequence of standing for the values of the Kingdom the meaning and challenge of the resurrection of Jesus are revealed. An empowering insight into the mystery and destiny of humans as well as the hope that lets them have meaning to their suffering for others and for the well-being of the world is provided by the resurrection of Jesus who is the actualisation of the radical relationship of God, humans and the world.

III. Resurrection of Jesus and the Mystery of the World

Does the resurrection of Jesus reveal to us something about the mystery of this universe? Beyond the scientific explanations about what constitutes the material reality of the universe, are their other dimensions of the universe which are significant to humans for their own self-understanding

and for their relationship with the universe? The biblical testimony from the first book Genesis about the creation of the universe (Gen 1:1) to the last book Revelation which speaks about the coming of the 'new heavens and the new earth' (Rev.21:1) affirms that the universe is related to God and humans and its destiny is inseparably connected with the destiny of human beings. If the Word became flesh (Jn 1:14) and dwelt among us, and if 'everything is created in him and through him' (Col 1:5- 17) the cosmos or the material dimension of the cosmos possesses a God-given quality to be related to God and humans in such away that humans can have an embodied existence in this world and God can become human in the God-created world.

When Paul attempts to explain the question about the resurrection of the body, he speaks about a physical body (I Cor 15: 44) and a spiritual body. By his assertion that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom' (I Cor 15:50) probably he was opposing the earlier crude understanding of resurrection yet at the same time trying to synthesise the Hellenistic and Hebraic understanding of Jesus' bodily resurrection. While not denying that Jesus' resurrection was a bodily resurrection he attempted to show that this body was a spiritual body because Jesus is raised to another mode of his being. According to J.D.G.Dunn, Paul seemed to have been influenced by certain Gnostic categories of thought which the Fathers of the Church later tried to overcome. The Fathers affirmed that 'it was the physical body, precisely the flesh that was raised'[9] But it is reasonable to conclude that the Fathers are speaking about the transformation of the physical body, the flesh. Paul himself speaks about the longing of the creation for its liberation and affirms that the creation will be graced to share the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:21).

The resurrection of Jesus inaugurates that liberation of the entire cosmos. The radical inter-relationship of the world

with humans and God is thus revealed in the resurrection of Jesus because Jesus in his humanity as a 'microcosm' is resurrected. The significance of the entire creation is that it is radically related to God and humans. The fact of the 'empty tomb' - which is a confirmation of resurrection because the disciples believed in the resurrection not because they found the tomb empty but because they encountered Jesus as alive – probably indicates the destiny of the material reality to be transformed by God. Already because of incarnation and resurrection material reality has received a new dimension to its being as matter. It has become an essential element of the sacraments.

The revelation of the meaning and the mystery of the universe through the resurrection of Jesus places tremendous responsibility on humans to care for creation and to approach universe with a contemplative attitude and recognize it as revealing God and the destiny of humans. In any wanton destruction of the resources of world one can detect an inhuman and ungodly attempt to break the inter-relationship of God, humans and the world. And in all movements that struggle through just means to protect the earth and its resources we can detect the presence of hope in the resurrection..

Conclusion

The Christian faith-experience of God in Jesus Christ begins with the encounter of the first apostles and other disciples with Jesus as alive after he was crucified, died and was buried. This existential encounter transformed their entire lives so that they began to experience God, other humans and the world in a way hitherto unknown to them. In the beginning they had no categories to articulate who Jesus was and what was his new mode of existence. Since they shared with their co-religionists the hope in an eschatological resurrection of all believers they interpreted

their unique experience of Jesus as alive after his death as resurrection. In their encounter with Jesus they realized that he is the beginning and the end of their lives, the absolute meaning of their lives and, therefore, their Lord and God. In his resurrection they recognized the beginning and guarantee of the resurrection of all and the transformation of all things. Jesus' resurrection revealed that he is the Alpha and the Omega of the entire creation. Thus the resurrection of Jesus from the dead gives as an insight into the mystery of God, humans and the world. It reveals who God is, what humans are and what they can become, and what the world is. It challenges humans to live the radical inter-relationship with God and the world and create situations in which humans can unfold themselves as humans experiencing wholeness offered by the resurrection of Jesus. It demands from humans that they take responsibility for the world, and confront structures and systems that attempt to thwart the actualization of the effects of resurrection for the entire humanity and for the entire creation.

Notes

1. J.D.G.Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testamen, 2nd Edition, London: SCM Press, 1990, p. 22.
2. For a summary of the contemporary discussion on the theme of Resurrection with relevant references see A. Pragasam, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Theology," Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection,, 70/4 (April, 2006):249 -259.
3. R. Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate, ed. H-W Bartsch, tr., R H Fuller, London: S.P.C.K., 1972, pp.35 -42
4. W. Marxsen, Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, pp. 147-148.
5. W. Pannenberg, " Dogmatische Erwagnugen zur Auferstehung Jesu," Kerygma und Dogma, 14 (1968): 105- 118
6. E.Schillebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology, New York: Crossroad Publ., 1979.
7. L.Boff, Jesus the Liberator, New York: Orbis Books, 1978.
8. J.Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American View, London: SCM Press, 3rd Impression, 1984, p. 240.
9. J.D.G.Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament, 2nd Edition, London: SCM Press, 1990, p. 290.

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The Funeral Rite: A Celebration of Life in its Fullness

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Abstract: Analyzing the new rite of Christian Funerals of the Roman Catholic liturgy, the author sees Christian death as an event of transformation of life rather than and event of destruction of life. It is a transition to a new way of living which inevitably includes bidding farewell to the old way of living. Consequently it is the celebration of the pain of a departure and the joy of an encounter. The new rite the emphasis is more on the interpretation of Christian death than on the liberation of the dead person from the pains of purgatory. Another characteristic of the new rite, according to the author, is the communitarian dimension of Christian death which it highlights. Death is the culmination of our relationship with Christ and the community which took place at Baptism. In the light of these considerations the author traces three aspects of death which the new funereal rite of the Roman Catholic Church: a. Christian death, a Paschal event; b. Christian death, a Gospel proclamation and c. Christian death, an event of communion. The Church celebrates the Mystery of faith in the funeral services in order to make us realize the full meaning of the events that has taken place, namely death and resurrection of Christ. Funeral rite is, therefore, not merely an act of suffrage for the dead, but it is the celebration of our faith in the Paschal Mystery in light of which we have to understand all that happens to us in our life.

Keywords: Suffrage, death and resurrection of Christ, paschal even, Christian death, proclamation of Gospel, death as communion.

The new rite of Christian funerals according to the Roman Catholic (Latin) liturgy has notable elements which indicate the specific meaning of Christian death. It does not consist merely in

some ceremonies and prayers meant as suffrages for the deceased person. It gives a new significance to death and its celebration. The simple and most apparent change in the colour of the vestments used by the priest indicates this: black, which symbolized the absence of life, is replaced by violet, which indicates the transition from one state of life to another through a process of kenosis. It is seen as an event of the transformation of life rather than an event of the destruction of life; it is a transition to a new way of living which inevitably includes bidding farewell to the old way of living. Consequently it is the celebration of the pain of a departure and the joy of an encounter. The violet colour is symbolic of this mixed feeling which the Church experiences at the death of a Christian. We may say that x although this latter is still present in it. This was the understanding of death in the early Church as is evident from the funeral art found in the catacombs. For them death is a victory over sin and bodily corruption as well as the fulfilment of the longing for the second coming of Christ, expressed in the frequent invocation 'Maranatha: Come Lord Jesus'. In the middle ages the joy of the personal encounter of the Christian with the risen Lord is replaced by the fear of the encounter of the soul separated from body with the judge whom it was not easy to appease. The hymns and prayers such as *'Dies irae'* and *'libera'* bear witness to it. Another characteristic of the new rite is the communitarian dimension of Christian death which it highlights. Death is the culmination of our relationship with Christ and the community which began at Baptism. In the light of these considerations we shall deal with three aspects of death which the new funereal rite of the Roman Catholic Church puts in evidence:

1) Christian death, a Paschal event.
2) Christian death, a Gospel proclamation.
3) Christian death, an event of communion.

1. Christian Death: A Paschal Event

a) It is the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ. The Paschal event of Christ is described by St. John as a passage from this world to the Father (John 13, 1-2). His death and resurrection which constitute this event are considered by the Church to be one act; they are the two sides of the same reality. The Christians

enter into this paschal journey at their baptism (Rom. 6, 1-10). What was symbolically realized in their lives when they received this sacrament has to be actualized in their lives throughout their journey in this world and has to reach its climax when they will hand over their lives into the hands of the Father as Christ did on the cross in total obedience to His will. When this happens the divine life fully permeates their persons and they share in the resurrection of Jesus. Just as Jesus, descended from David according to the flesh, was declared son of God according to the Spirit (Rom. 1, 4), the Christian will be acknowledged as son by the Father at his death We shall see now how this is expressed in liturgical symbols in the new rite of Christian funerals in the Roman Rite: The liturgical Constitution which gives the doctrinal foundation of the renewal of liturgy after Vatican II says explicitly: "Funeral Rites should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death." I .[1] The Eucharistic celebration is an integral part of the funeral rite precisely for this reason. It is not a mere act of suffrage for the dead, but it is a celebration of the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ in which every human being was personally included, by virtue of the fact that Christ at his incarnation assumed the whole human race in their existential reality. The death of a Christian is the historical re-enactment of the death and resurrection of Christ in the course of time. By celebrating the Eucharist on the occasion of his or her death the Church ritually interprets it as a paschal event. It is for this reason that the Church prays at the funeral liturgy: "You turn the darkness of death into the dawn of new life.[2] The Church recommends that the paschal candle alone may be placed the head of the deceased.[3] This is to show that the body of the deceased person is illumined by the light of the risen Lord. The sprinkling of the body with holy water and the incensation of the body are symbols that remind us of baptism. The singing of 'alleluia 'which is a paschal song is permitted in the funeral Mass for the same reason. The burial of the Christian is interpreted not merely as a return to the dust, but as the planting of a seed which will germinate into the fullness of life in eternity: "In your presence, Lord, those who die still live, and our bodies do not perish in death, but are transformed by your power.[4] Paschal Mystery is at the core of our Christian life. To proclaim our faith in this Mystery, interpreting

death as entrance into life, in the midst of a world in which the stark reality of death seems to take away the meaning of life, is not an easy task. As the philosophers of Athens laughed at Paul when he proclaimed this Mystery (Acts 17, 16-21), some men and women of today look at our claims regarding resurrection as a mere product of imagination or they look at life as something to be lived and enjoyed only in this world. Celebrating the resurrection at funerals is a challenging proclamation of our faith. "There is no greater threat to faith in the paschal mystery than the phenomenon of death. In the face of human death to proclaim life founded on the death and resurrection of Jesus is one of the Church's strongest affirmations of faith in that Christ-life, for there is nothing in the experience of death itself that even hints at the viability of such a faith. It is for this reason that the Christian funeral is above all else a celebration of the paschal mystery."[5]

b) **It is the proclamation of the resurrection of the Christian.** The proclamation of the death and resurrection is not merely a recalling to mind of an event that took place in the past. It is the realization of the Christ-event in the person of the deceased. When the Christian dies he rises from the dead. The words of Jesus to Martha are already verified in the case of the deceased person: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" (John 11, 25). There are innumerable references in the funeral rite which proclaim the death of the Christian as his resurrection. We shall just quote one prayer which seems to express this truth clearly: "Lord God almighty Father, our faith testifies that your Son died for us and rose to life again. May our brother (sister) share in this mystery; as he (she) has gone to his (her) rest believing in Jesus; may he (she) come through him to the joy of the resurrection.[6] Our baptism, the symbolic act by which our faith in the resurrection of Jesus is expressed makes us members of his risen body, will be fully realized in our body at our death; our bodies will be transformed by the Spirit of Jesus. What we see in the coffin is only the mortal remains of a person who has already been born with an immortal body. What we celebrate at the funeral is this transformation, the resurrection of the Christian.

2. Christian Death: A Gospel Proclamation

The Gospel is the Good News of God for the human community. Its content is Jesus, the risen Lord, who destroyed our sins and restored to humanity the new life from death. It is the ultimate answer to all the bad news in the world. It has to be proclaimed wherever sin, the cause of death, is present. It is the story of the transformation of human history into salvation history. It is proclaimed throughout the world and at every epoch until the complete victory over sin and death will be realized. It was proclaimed for the first time at Christ's death and resurrection. It is proclaimed by the Church whenever she gathers together as a community in the name of Christ especially at the Eucharist. The liturgy of the Word is the proclamation of the Word of the Lord, the risen Jesus. When we celebrate the Christian funeral, the Church proclaims it in a special manner. Let us see how this is done:

a) The recitation of the psalms. The psalms are the songs of the people of Israel who remembered, reflected and prayed over their history. They acknowledged the God who entered into their lives in order to lead them into the Promised Land. The life of every Christian is a journey towards his ultimate destiny which is to enter into communion with God and His people. In this sense we may say that every Christian life is a journey towards the Promised Land. All that has taken place in this journey can be understood in its full significance only if they are interpreted in the light of God's plan. When Christians have completed their journey through life and reached its culmination in death, the Church offers this interpretation through her liturgy. That is why the psalms have a very prominent place in the funeral rite of the Christians. This is shown in the selection of psalms used in the funeral liturgy:

I) Psalm 22: *The Lord is a shepherd and a host.* This a psalm which is very much used in the Funeral Rite in order to indicate that Christian life is one that is constantly guided and taken care of by the Lord who is the Good shepherd; through death he makes his sheep enter into the security of his final abode and makes them participate in the eternal banquet

2) Psalm 23: *The Lord's solemn entry into Sion:* Death is the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus who said: "Do not let your hearts

be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14, 1-3). At our death we meet Christ who has completed his journey through history and has entered into his Father's house. At the death of every Christian he returns to take him or her into his home.

3) Psalm 41: *Desire for God and His temple* expresses the same

4) Psalm 113 (1-20) which describes God's wonders at the Exodus is used in the funeral liturgy in order to show that the Christian life is also an Exodus under the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus towards the Promised Land of eternal life.

Besides, the psalms also express the sentiments of grief and hope that animate the event of death. "The Church employs the prayer of the psalms in the office for the dead to express grief and to strengthen genuine hope. Pastors must therefore try by appropriate catechesis to lead their communities to understand and appreciate at least the chief psalms of the funeral liturgy"[7] (Psalms 50, 129, 122etc).

b) It is the proclamation of Christian hope. The Church is entrusted with the message of the death and resurrection of Christ so that she may proclaim it to the nations as a response to the search of humanity for fullness of joy and life. Christian faith is not so much a collection of truth about God or set of rituals to pay homage to the divinity as the proclamation of the promises of God for humanity. When we celebrate the funerals of Christians this aspect is highlighted. We proclaim our hope. In this sense every celebration of the liturgy of the dead is an act of evangelization. What we say at every Eucharistic celebration: "We proclaim your death O Lord until you come" is verified in a special way in the funeral liturgy. We announce the coming of the Lord in the life of the Christian whose death we are celebrating. It is the event of Parousia in the case of the deceased brother and sister. That is why the celebration of the death of the Christian is a joyful event, in spite of the fact that there is an element of absence and sorrow in this departure. We know that this is only temporary; we shall all meet with our departed brothers and sisters in the fullness of relationship and communion

in the company of the Lord whose second coming we have celebrated in the funeral liturgy of our brothers and sisters.

c) Funeral Rite, an occasion for evangelization. The Rite of Funerals says: "Priests should be especially aware of persons, Catholics or non-Catholics, who seldom or never participate in the Eucharist or who seem to have lost their faith, but who assist at liturgical celebrations and hear the Gospel on the occasion of funerals. Priests must remember that they are ministers of Christ's Gospel to all men."[8] The occasion of death is a time when people irrespective of their creed and other ideological belonging express their solidarity with their friends and acquaintances by being present at the funeral celebrations. A Christian interpretation of death can be a very good means to communicate the message of the Gospel to all those who are present for the occasion, not with a view to proselytization, but to give greater meaning to their presence, by sharing our faith vision with them and thus deepen their sense of solidarity with the deceased. It could be also an occasion for them to reflect on their lives.

3. Christian Death: An Event of Communion

Apparently death is a moment of separation. In fact we all experience the absence of the person who has passed away. To speak of communion on this occasion seems to be unreal. And yet, in the Christian vision of faith, death is a moment of a deeper solidarity and personal communion. In the new rite of Funerals this aspect of death is expressed very clearly.

a) Death is the culmination of communion with Christ. In Baptism the Christian is joined with Christ in his passage from the world to the Father by participating in his death and resurrection symbolically. The whole life is a constant struggle to give full meaning to this symbolic action. The participation in the Eucharist makes the Christian grow in this communion because through the reception of the body and blood of the Lord, the Spirit of Christ transforms the body of the Christians; they gradually become a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led person. They become capable of living and acting like Christ. Their death is not to be seen merely as a separation of the soul from the body, but a transformation of the whole person in such a way that they, like Christ, are capable of

saying "Into your hands I commend my spirit", thus becoming truly the son of God in the Son Jesus. "Today you will be with in paradise" (Lk. 23, 43) That is why the Church considers the death of the Christians their birthday. This idea of communion is expressed very beautifully in the new funeral rite. Death is considered to be response to a call from God, the Father, to His children to enter into communion with Him: "Lord hear our prayers and be merciful to your son (daughter) whom you have called from this life. Welcome him (her) into the company of your saints."[9] "Lord, may our brother (sister) whom you have called to yourself, find happiness in the glory of your saints" (antiphon to be sung during the procession to the Church with the dead body).[10]

b) **Death is the culmination of our ecclesial communion.** The Church is not a mere juridical or doctrinal body; it is a community that is gathered together around Christ the risen Lord, in communion with him and with one another in the power of the Spirit. The ecclesial community that lives in the world is not yet fully yet a community of the Spirit, nor is it therefore in full communion with Christ and his members. At the moment of death, freed from all types of alienation, the Christians enter into this communion in such a way that the Church that is formed is beyond all institutional, juridical, religious expressions. It will be the ecclesia *ab Abel,* that is, a community in which all human beings will be united. The funeral rite of the Roman Rite expresses this very well when it prays as follows: "Almighty Father, eternal God, hear our prayers for your son (daughter) whom you have called from this life to yourself. Grant him (her) light, happiness, and peace. Let him (her) pass in safety through the gates of death, and live for ever with all your saints in the light you promised to Abraham and to all his descendants in faith."[11] The promise of Abraham that he would possess the land and be the father of many nations is fulfilled at our death. The Church is the community which has shared the faith of Abraham and found its fulfillment in Christ (Rom. Ch. 4). At our death this faith becomes a reality, for then we will all be gathered together in the land of Promise with Christ as the centre and His Spirit as the unifying link. The Church as communion, beyond all juridical, doctrinal, religious groupings, will be realized.

c) Death as an event of birth from the womb of the local community. The local community of the Church is the womb in which the Christians are formed to live their lives in its fullness in the great family of God after the event of death. During the earthly life, the Spirit of Jesus, acting in the Church, perfects the limbs of the Christians so that they can function as parts of the risen body of Christ, by relating themselves to all the members of the family of God. It is a struggle with all its pains and tensions. At death the Church, mother of the people of God, in whose womb the Christian has been growing, offers this child to the Father, after having tried her best to shape him or her according to the image of Christ. We find this idea expressed in the new funeral rite in the following text: "Father, we entrust our brother (sister). to your mercy. You loved him (her) greatly in this life; now that he (she) is freed from all its cares, give him (her) happiness and peace for ever. The Old order has passed away: welcome him (her) now into paradise where there will be no more sorrow, no more weeping or pain, but only peace and joy with Jesus, your Son and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.[12]

d) Death as a moment of farewell by the local community. Our earthly sojourn is a life of relationship with persons with whom we have shared our joys and sorrows; they are those with whom we have celebrated our faith, struggled in hope and lived in love. They have become part and parcel of our very being. Death separates us at least for the time being from these persons. The Church is aware of this; she wants to give expression to the feelings of separation which is experienced at the death of our dear ones. Liturgy of death celebrates our human relationships, our pain of separation. The rite of final commendation, which is a new element in the revised funeral rite after Vatican II, is the liturgical expression of these human feelings. It is performed after the Eucharist, before the body is taken for burial to the cemetery. In the old liturgy it was called the rite of final absolution wherein the stress was on the intercession of the Church on behalf of the deceased for the remission of their sins and the speedy entry into heaven. Instead in the new rite this is replaced by the final commendation by which the human dimension of death as a separation and farewell is expressed.[13]

e) Funeral Liturgy, an act of the Christian Community. At times there is a feeling that the funeral celebration is an act of the priest, performed around the body of the deceased person. This is corrected in the new funeral rite by presenting it as an act of the whole community over which the priest presides. "In funeral celebrations all who belong to the people of God should keep in mind their office and ministry: the parents or relatives, those who take care of funerals, the Christian community as a whole, and finally the priest. As teacher of faith and minister of consolation, the priest presides over the liturgical service and celebrates the Eucharist. Here we need to take note of two things. the role of the people and the role of the priest:

i) The role of the people in the funeral liturgy is to express its solidarity with the bereaved family and to express its affectionate communion with the deceased person. The new rite very well provides for it, by requesting the community to keep vigil and celebrate the Word of God in the home of the deceased person [14] This is a custom which the Christian community practised from very early times. Another ceremony of the funerals is the solemn transfer of the body from the home to the church. The community accompanies the person in his last journey to the parish where he used to gather together with the other members of the Church for the celebration of the Eucharist. Finally the community bids farewell to its member through the rite of final commendation. All these show that the funeral rite is the act of the whole community, expressing its relationship with the person who has passed away. The community which has lived and struggled through life now accompanies the person in his last journey towards the attainment of the goal. This community is pained at the departure of its member, but at the same time it rejoices that one of its members has reached the goal. We can compare this to the feeling that parents have when a daughter is married and leaves for her husband's home. They feel the sadness of separation, but they also feel happy that their child is well settled in her life.

ii) The role of the priest in the funeral liturgy is not that of ritualist around the body of the deceased person, but that of the animator of the community. He should act as a minister of consolation

and comfort to the family, as well as a proclaimer of hope to the Christian community. The celebration of the Eucharist which is the centre of the funeral rite is a proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ verified in the person of the deceased. All these aspects of the funeral liturgy must clearly appear in the manner in which he celebrates the Eucharist, in the way in which he says the prayers and perfonns the rituals, in his homily and above all in the human approach which he should show towards the family and friends of the deceased person. He must embody the attitude which Jesus had towards the dear ones of the deceased even though he knew that he was going to raise him from the dead as in the case of the resuscitation of Lazarus: "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'where have you laid him? They said to him, 'Lord, come and see'. Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him" (John 11,33-36). Even when he commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb, he says it with a deep emotional feeling. The priest who is supposed to be the representative of Christ, who performs the liturgy in the name of Jesus, should have the human approach which Jesus had.

Conclusion

No matter what be the event that our Christian liturgy celebrates, it is always the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ. In some of the events the visible element is sorrowful, while in others the joyful aspect has predominance. In other words in some we see more the pain of death while in others we are faced with the joy of the resurrection. But the hidden invisible reality in all of them is the paschal event . When we experience the pain of death in the passing away of a person dear to us, the liturgy presents us with the total reality. We can perceive it only through faith. So the Church celebrates the mystery of faith on these occasions in order to make us realize the full meaning of the events that have taken place, namely death and resurrection. Funeral rite is, therefore, not merely an act of suffrage for the dead, but it is the celebration of our faith in the Paschal Mystery in light of which we have to understand all that happens to us in our life.

Notes

1. SC n. 8J.
2. Rite of Funerals n. 34.
3. Rite of Funerals n. 38.
4. Rite of Funerals n. 174.
5. Richard Rutherford: *The Death of a Christian: The Rite of Funerals*, New York 1980, p. 116.
6. Rite of Funerals n. 170.
7. Rite of Funerals n. 12.
8. Rite of Funerals no. 18
9. Rite of Funerals no. 33.
10. Rite of Funerals no.35.
11. Rite of Funerals no. 167.
12. Rite of Funerals no. 168.
13. Rite of Funerals no. 46, 47.
14. Rite of Funerals no. 26ff.

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Funeral Rites of Syro-Malabar Church: A Liturgico-theological Analysis

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Abstract: The author studies funeral rites of the Syro-Malabar Church are noted for their liturgical and theological significance. In this study the author concentrates on the liturgy and theology of the funeral rites in the East Syrian tradition and see how far the East Syrian tradition is preserved in the Malabar liturgy.

He shows that the East Syrian liturgy of funeral is indeed a treasure house containing the Christian theology of death and the eschatological character of Christian life. These prayers and hymns of the liturgy are presented as earnest appeals to the believing community to respond in ardent faith. The large variety of hymns and prayers for various categories expresses the great concern of the Church towards each and every member. The prayers, hymns and gestures of the liturgy invite the assembly as a whole and the bereaved of the departed one in particular to lead a life worthy of the sacred journey of the believers to the heavenly home. Thus the funeral becomes an opportunity of catechesis. In this manner, the Syro-Malabar text of the funeral is already keeping the fundamental liturgical and theological thrust of the East Syrian tradition.

Keywords: Assyrian Traditions, Chaldean traditions,East Syrian tradition, Ephrem, St., funeral rites, Syro-Malabar Church, theology of death.

The funeral rites of the Syro-Malabar Church are noted for their liturgical and theological elegance. The present liturgical texts of the funeral in the Malabar Church are founded on the funeral service in the East Syrian tradition. However, considerable changes are seen in the Syriac texts and the Malayalam texts of the Syro-Malabar tradition.[1] A comparative study with the liturgical texts of the

Chaldean Catholics and the Assyrian Church of the East will help us to identify the changes made in the Malabar texts. In this study we shall concentrate on the liturgy and theology of the funeral rites in the East Syrian tradition and see how far the East Syrian tradition is preserved in the Malabar liturgy.

I. Ancient East Syrian Tradition of Christian Funeral

From ancient times onwards Christian funeral was a liturgical celebration in the East Syrian tradition. Narsai (399-502) mentions the role of a priest in the funeral. "Without a priest the defunct also is not interred; nor do they let him down into his grave without the priest".[2] *Liber Patrum* considers the burial of the dead as an important duty pertaining to the office of the priest.[3]

The biography of Mar Aba (540-552) speaks of the solemn burial of the body of a saint with great honour, in the presence of different groups of clergy.[4] The Synod of Mar Aba (544) denies a Christian burial to those who were living in unlawful marital relations without repentance. "None of the religious or faithful laymen shall be allowed to accompany them (on the day) of their death or to accompany their biers in the service, or to enshroud them on the day of their departure, either openly or in secret, but as they separated themselves in their affairs from the exalted practice of Christianity and were stained with unlawful marriage like the beasts, without discrimination, so also in their death they should be separated and alienated from any fellowship with the faithful. Let them be given the burial of an ass like the beasts they resembled in their customs."[5]

Canon 18 of the Synod of Mar Giwargis (674) deals with the burial of the departed and those who mourn without order. "Departed Christians shall be buried in a Christian manner and not as the pagans, for it is the pagan custom to prepare the departed for burial with choice and costly raiment, and to make much lamentation for them with faintheartedness and despair as a token of unbelievers. Therefore, we have determined, with the decree of the "Word of our Lord", that Christians are not allowed to bury their departed with silks and costly raiment, but they shall be enshrouded in believing hope with simple vestures which are not very costly. Also, those lamentations which crazed women make in the place of mourning

must come to an end, as well as the great expenses for those women who gather at the place of mourning. Whoever transgresses against these things shall be under the anathema of the "Word of God". The limit of accompanying of women with the bier shall be as far as the place in which consolation is spoken. Beyond this place they shall not be permitted to go."[6] Canon 19 grants some freedom with regard to the choice of the garments: "Concerning the canon which was established concerning the simplicity of garments for the burial of the departed: because there was a little resistance by some, we have committed freedom of administration to the bishop of the diocese, that according as he sees and understands is expedient he may arrange for and allow the vestments of burial. However, no costly or very choice vestments shall be allowed for internment." [7]

While referring to the rite of burial, Synod of Mar Giwargis in 674 speaks about the participation of women who once separate themselves to the title of virginity and the chaste garb of standing: "They may sing hymns following the biers of the departed on the day of burial, as also they may sing hymns on the day of vigil for days designated as memorials of the departed. However, they are not allowed to go to the graveyard in order to sing hymns there." [8]

There are documents referring to the details of the liturgical practices in connection with funeral. For example, Ishoyahb IV speaks about the two distinct traditions of reciting and not reciting the Lord's Prayer during the funeral liturgy.[9] Timothy II too gives reasons for not reciting the Lord's Prayer. According to him, the Lord's Prayer is not recited for the departed one because the dead man does not require some of the favours asked for in the Lord's Prayer. He does not require any more daily bread. He does not require to be delivered from the evil one. What he requires is to inherit eternal happiness, joining the Just.[10]

Ishoyahb IV speaks about the different practices of reciting the *mawtwa* of the Evening-service over the dead. Some priests simply recite two prayers without the *huttama* (final blessing called sealing) and signing of the assembly and the dead man whereas some priests recite the sealing prayer (*hutttama*) and sign the dead man and the assembly.[11]

II. Funeral Rites in the Chaldean and Assyrian Traditions

The Chaldean Church, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Assyrian Church of the East make use of the same liturgical rite for the funeral, however with occasional alterations. For the burial of the priests all these Churches make use of a common text without substantial changes.[12] The service book of the burial of the dead was printed with a variety of titles basing also on the variations in manuscripts.[13] According to W.F. Macomber, there is a remarkable uniformity in the manuscript tradition from the oldest, of the twelfth century, to those of the nineteenth, and this is faithfully expressed, with but minor variations, in the recent edition of the Assyrian Church.[14] There are separate services for patriarchs, metropolitans, bishops, priests, deacons, laymen, women and children. Macomber identifies the following as the important elements of the East Syrian liturgy of burial.

Washing the body and clothing it in white garments

Vigil office of Prayer: Three Cathismatas (three mawtwe); Each cathismata consists of: Psalmody, Sacerdotal prayers and Hymns

Scriptural Lessons

Funeral Procession with processional chants

Rites at the Grave

The acclamation of the Deacon

Sacerdotal prayer

The lowering of the body during a chanted homily

Casting a bit of the earth into the grave with prayer

Final chant

Two prayers

Final blessing

We shall examine the most important of these elements, especially those which are common to all the three versions of the East Syrian liturgical tradition.

1. Washing the body: Washing of the body is seen already in the New Testament, at the death of Tabitha. It emphasized the reverence with which the bodies of Christians should be treated.[15] In the East Syrian tradition there are rules regarding the washing of the bodies. In the case of monks, nuns, bishops, metropolitans and catholici, only the heads, hands and feet are to be washed; but in the case of secular priests and the laity, the whole bodies are to be washed. The body of the patriarch must be washed by bishops. A layman's body is washed by "grey beards" of noted gravity and goodness; a woman's body by aged women of honour and reverence."[16] The liturgical text requires also the clothing of the body in white garments.[17]

2. Vigil Office of Prayer: Vigil prayer is already reported by St. Gregory of Nyssa at the funeral of his sister St. Macrina in the 4th century. The vigil office in the East Syrian tradition consists of three *cathismata* (three *mawtwe*, roughly the equivalent of Latin nocturns) of psalmody and hymns, plus readings from Scripture. Psalmody of each cathisma consists of only two appropriate sections of Psalms with a single, brief, invariable antiphon: "O Quickner of the dead, glory to thy name." The hymns are of two kinds: one is a meditative chant that expresses in a series of rhythmic strophes, each introduced by a suitable psalm versicle, the theology of death and resurrection; the other is a more popular form of lamentation, two or three stanzas sung slowly and mournfully by a cantor with a refrain for the chorus, that frequently expresses the human tragedy of death and gives an outlet to the pent-up grief of the bereaved.[18] Many of the hymns are dialogues between the departed and the company of those who are already in sheol, or between the departed and the congregation of mourners. There are different anthems appointed for patriarchs, bishops, monks, virgins, priests, teachers, deacons, old men, for "all men", for rich men, murdered men, drowned men, strangers, bridegrooms, young men betrothed, an only son, young men, lads, women, young women, brides, and children.[19]

The funeral rite is specifically didactic and the didactic feature appears more specifically in the doctrinal hymns called *madrasa* which are seen in several places of the rite. The number of these hymns varies from manuscript to manuscript and from printed edition

to printed edition.[20] An anonymous Author finds significant symbolic meaning in the singing of *madrasa* by women. Sometimes women sing the *madrasa* while all are seated. Singing by women signifies death because through women death entered the world. Sitting signifies death whereas standing represents resurrection.[21]

Psalms have a very important place in the East Syrian funeral liturgy. The Anonymous Author (9th /10th cent.) interprets the recital of Psalm (Ps 40.1ff) as referring to those just people who lived in the Old Testament times. Those who conducted themselves will in the Old Testament deserve the happiness of heaven, just as those in New Testament.[22]

There are brief sacerdotal prayers interspersed among the psalms and hymns. Their theme is almost uniquely the glorification of God. These prayers express the desire to glorify God at all times, especially in the face of death.[23] Such prayers point to the East Syrian concern for presenting the funeral liturgy as one of the important occasions for praising and thanking God.

The commentators think that the acclamations and *karozutha* of the deacon in the funeral liturgy are quite relevant. According to Timothy II, the deacon's acclamation, "Let us pray, peace be with us" means, let the dead person be made worthy to join the departed ones in sanctity.[24] In the *karozutha* the deacon prays that the dead person may be joined to all the saints departed from the beginning of time.[25]

3. Scriptural Lessons

There is a large variety of scriptural lessons in the East Syrian funeral liturgy. In the case of lay faithful the scriptural lessons are from the Old Testament. This peculiarity is perhaps due to the fact that the service takes place in the home, for deceased laymen are taken not to the church, but directly to the cemetery. There are different lessons for men, women and children, most of these teach the resurrection in one way or another, e.g., Hezekiah's thanksgiving after his miraculous recovery from the moral illness and the raising of the dry bones in the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezek 37.4-10).

A.J. Maclean and W.H.Browne speak of the prescription of the Synod regarding the lessons from prophets to be read over all laymen

and lay brothers and sisters. For the deacons and the deaconesses the Apostle is to be read and for priests and higher dignitaries, the Gospel. But ordinarily the lessons are read in the house. They differ for the different people. Thus for baptized children the story of Bath-sheba's child is read (2 Sam 12. 15-24) and of the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17.17ff); for women the death of Sarah (Gen 22.1-8, 19) and of Tabitha (Acts 9.36 ff.).[26]

The anonymous Author observes that for lay people there are readings from the Law and Prophets, because they are in the world. The reading of the books of the Law refers to nature. The reading of prophets refers to the laws suitable to nature. Lay people are engaged with the laws of nature, and are carrying them out according to nature. For the deacons epistles are read. For priests and those above priests Gospels are read. However, the anonymous Author himself points to the contemporary practice of reading gospel for the deacons and the religious.[27] Why there are readings at all in the service of the dead? Because the readings show that they led their lives according to the Scriptures. From these Scriptures they drew help for eternal life. According to the anonymous Author, the readings, sitting down, standing up and the *karozutha* of the deacon together symbolize the crucifixion, petition of the thief, and the death and resurrection of the Lord.[28]

4. Funeral Procession

The funeral procession was an ancient usage christianized by the Church. It is mentioned by St. Gregory of Nyssa and other fourth century authors.[29]The funeral procession is a powerful rite revealing the theology of death. The anonymous Author speaks about the nature of the funeral possession: "Christians are carried to the tomb, not with grief and lamentations as in the case of pagans who have no hope, but with songs of joy as if to a banquet."[30] In Urmi there is much in common between marriage processions and funerals. At both the drums beat, and the sad horn sounds; perhaps the same instrument as is referred to in the account of the weeping at the death of Jairus' daughter. Great branches of trees are carried, adorned with handkerchiefs ad apples.[31]

The main difference between the funerals of laymen and ecclesiastics is that only the latter are brought to the church. "The principal reason, however, why laymen are not brought to the church before burial is the conception of the funeral rite as a leave-taking of this world and a journeying forth to the true life of the future world. Accordingly, the ecclesiastic, whose whole life was dedicated to the service of the Church, is brought to the church to which he was attached and there he takes his leave, and again on coming out of the village in which he lived. The layman on the contrary, whose life was spent in the world, bids farewell to it on going out of his home or on leaving his village."[32]

The core of the East Syrian funeral liturgy that gives meaning to the whole is the funeral procession, which is a sensible representation of the journey of the Christian from this world to Paradise. The ancient tradition was to recite Psalms during the procession. Later a series of eleven processional chants substituted the recitation of Psalms. These chants are also found in the Jacobite funeral collection of 823 AD and are attributed there to St. Ephrem. These chants express the idea in various ways that the deceased is not going to the corruption of the tomb, but to the glory and joy of the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is presented as the guarantee for this belief.[33]

The first processional chant expresses the deceased's farewell to this world. "Fare thee well, O temporal dwelling, that cannot save them who possess thee; for I go to see the place of light where the Just who have laboured have their dwelling." The last chant at the cemetery expresses the imminence of resurrection. "Our Lord is coming and is raising the dead; and bringing hope to all the deceased." After three strophes the people pick up the bier and proceed to the grave. The deceased is carried such a way that it seems that he himself leads the procession."[34] The singing of all the chants was not always feasible, and hence there might have been attempts at reducing the number of chants. In the eighteenth century Chaldean manuscripts we notice the practice of anticipating most of the processional chants in the home of the deceased except for the first and the last which were related to specific positions and functions. The Assyrians anticipate all the chants in the house except

the first chant which is chanted as they leave the house of the deceased. The Catholics in the cities usually transfer the vigil office to the church and abandon most of the processional chants altogether.

The anonymous Author tries to find meaning for every minute element related to the service of burial. The sitting and standing postures are of symbolic significance, representing death and resurrection. The two choirs accompanying the bier have symbolic meaning. They represent the two Testaments. The first choir is far from the bier because it signifies the Old Testament, that is seeing the life of the Lord from far. The second choir near the bier represents the New Testament. It starts singing, because the dead person was involved in the law of New Testament.[35]

5. Rites at the Grave

The ceremonies at the grave are dominated by the hope of a glorious resurrection. Such a hope is evident in the acclamation of the deacon: "God, who...has taken him in the true faith, may bring him to the goal of all the just; and when he resuscitates and raises up all who sleep in the dust and allo's a good end to all who have been pious and just, he may call him and set him at his right hand, inscribe him in the Book of Life, include him in the number of the Elect, and join him to the multitudes of them that glorify himself..."[36]

The face of the dead person is placed at the tomb facing the East. It is expressing the expectation of the coming of the Saviour who would appear from the East and raise our bodies and save our souls from the East.[37]

There was the practice of the priest standing turning towards the head of the departed one, signing him from feet to head and from left to right and throws dust on him in the form of cross.[38] Badger mentions the practice of the priest taking soil in his right hand and putting it in the sign of cross, invoking the Trinity.[39] While throwing the dust, today the priest says the following prayer: "May God the Lord of all, who gave the commandment concerning thee, 'Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return', himself call thee and set thee at his right hand resplendent in the glory of the resurrection; and may the Holy Mysteries that thou hast received plead thy cause and win thee pardon at he judgment seat, Amen."[40]

Emmanuel Bar Shahhare mentions the anointing of the deceased ones before putting the body into the tomb. He compares this anointing with the anointing of the candidate for baptism before the immersion into the tomb of the baptismal font.[41] This tradition is not seen any more in the East Syrian tradition.

The final chant echoes in various ways the hope and prayer for a glorious resurrection. The following two collects emphasise the same thought. The same theme reappears in the final blessing of the grave and the bystanders. Thus the theme of resurrection penetrates the entire funeral rite.[42]

Maclean and Browne mention the rite of consolation. At the end of the burial the near relatives stand on one side, and all present give them their condolences or "heal their head". Each of the bystanders passes by touching the hands of the bereaved relatives, and saying, "May your head be pleasant". [43]

In many places there is the custom of washing after the defilement of touching-only metaphorically- a dead body. On leaving the grave, all go down to a stream nearly; and after a considerable number of prayers, the water is blessed with the sign of the cross, and all wash their face and hands.[44]

6. Commemoration of Dead

The East Syrian tradition attaches great importance to the commemoration of the dead. The anonymous Author explains the relevance of the commemoration of the dead. Because the bread and wine our Lord gave in propitiation of the living and the dead. "Whoever eats my body...shall not die."[45] *The Order of the Service of the Dead* (*Aneeda Susrusha kramam*) of the Assyrian Church of the East gives reasons for making the commemoration of the dead on the third, seventh, fifteenth or thirtieth day after death.[46] The liturgical text of the Assyrians contains special office for the commemoration on the third day. According to the anonymous Author, the commemoration of the dead on the third day has a special symbolic significance. Number three is of great significance in the Old and New Testaments. When we celebrate the commemoration on the third day we imitate the resurrection.[47] In the Syro-Malabar

Church there is the practice of commemorating the dead on the 7th, 8th, 9th, 13th or 41st day.

Memorials of departed friends and of the saints may be made on any day, whether Sunday or not, even if there are several memorials together, except only on the festivals of our Lord: Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, the Passover (Maundy Thursday), Easter Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost and the Holy Cross Day; and also on the two festivals of the apostles (the Seventy, and the Twelve, the seventh Friday and Sunday after Pentecost) and the "Hallowing of the Church", the last but three Sunday before Advent.[48]

III. Burial Service of the Priests

The service for the priests is quite different from that of the lay faithful. According to the Anonymous Author, the ecclesiastics are taken to the church because they are attached to the church. Lay people are not taken to the church because they are attached to the world, not to the church.[49]

In the burial service of the priests, the first part is at the place where the dead body is kept. This first station has one or two *mawtwe* (called "of washing"). After that there is a procession towards the church. In the earlier tradition only ecclesiastics were taken to the church. The second part is celebrated at the church.

The bier of priests is put in the centre of the nave, and only that of a patriarch may be brought into the sanctuary as far as the lamp. It is carried by bishops and priests. According to some, the bier of a metropolitan may be brought into the sanctuary, but not so far as that of the patriarch. All members of the threefold episcopate are to be buried in their ecclesiastical vestments.[50]

For the burial of the priest there are around three to ten *mawtwe* in the church. There is also the celebration of the Holy Qurbana with procession inside the church at the end of communion. When the hymn "Abide in Peace" is intoned, the procession shall stop and the bier is borne only when the response is chanted. The first verse of the hymn is to be sung at the step of the chancel, the second at the door of the bema where the priest received ordination, the third at the north side of the nave, the fourth at the south side of the nave, and the fifth at the main entrances of the church. If the deceased be

a priest, he shall be carried by the priests and if he is a deacon he shall be carried by deacons.[51] In the Syro-Malabar tradition for this ceremony priests carry the coffin and make it touch the edge of the altar, the two side doors and the main door when the hymn *Edta Poosle* is sung. The third part of the service is the funeral procession with *Qale d Urha* (chants for the way). The last chant is called chant of approaching. The final station is the cemetery and there the burial takes place.[52]

According to the ancient East Syrian tradition, in the church itself no one may be buried, except the martyrs, whose bones are to be "put in the churches to help those in need". But bishops may be buried in the summer chapel attached to the church, and monks may be buried in the special cemetery inside the monastery.[53] However, Timothy II speaks about the burial of priests in the church. According to him, the priests may be buried in the church in front of the haykla, before the sanctuary. The body of the priest may be placed in front of the sanctuary. The body of the one belonging to monastic order is put close to the sanctuary near the door of the sanctuary.[54]

IV. Particular Characteristics of Malabar Tradition

The first Malabar ritual of the East Syrian funeral service was edited and published by Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara in 1882.[55] The same book had later editions in 1921, 1945 and 1954. The Office of the Dead was published from Mannanam in 1921 and the Thumsa was published from Puthenpally in 1929. The Bishops Conference of the Syro-Malabar hierarchy decided to publish the book of the office of the burial of priests editing and making short the 1921 text of Mannanam and the 1929 text of Puthenpally. The revised text was published in 1947. This revised edition was reprinted in 1949, 1953 and 1960.[56] The Malayalam text of the rites of funeral was edited and published by Fr. Abel CMI. There are Malayalam texts for the burial of lay people, children, priests, bishops, and religious.

1. Structure of the Rite of Funeral of Lay Faithful in the Malayalam Version[57] and Common Elements in the Mannanam Syriac text of 1960.

1. Blessing of water, Blessing of joss-stick; Sprinkling of Holy water on the corpse [not in Mannanam 1960]

2. Sign of the Cross; Glory to God; Lord's Prayer; [Mannanam has *Puqdankon* too. p.3]
3. Slotha (Sacerdotal prayer)
4. Ps 103 [Mannanam has instead Ps 88 with the title *Surraya d Qdam*]
5 Slotha [Mannanam has a parallel prayer having same idea. pp.7-8]
6. Ps 39
7. Slotha
8. Onitha: *nripanam mishiha karttave* [Mannanam p.8: *Onitha d kahne u gawre*]
9. Apostle (1 Thess 4.3-18, or Rom 8.10ff or 1 Cor 15.19ff)
10. Ps 88 [It is the abbreviated form of *Surraya d Qdam* in Mannanam p.5]
11. Gospel (Jn 5.24ff or Jn 11.17-45; Mt 25. 31ff; Jn 14.1ff; Mt 25.1ff)
12. Karozutha [Mannanam, pp.57-59]
13. Creed
14. Madrasa (separate for men and women): *Maranam varumorunal orkkuka marttya nee* [Mannanam p.52.]; *Annorudivasam besaniyayil* [Mannanam p.42.]
15. Coronation: Words of deacon and celebrant
16. Farewell Song: *Vidavangunnen* [Mannanam p.19. *Poosh bashlama*]
17. Procession; Processional hymn: *drushyadrushyangal sakalam theerthone*
18. Rite in the church: (Qurbana optional)
19. Hymn: *Anayunneesho mrutaramakhilrkkum* [Mannanam p.55]
20. Deacon's acclamation; Deacon's karozutha with people's response 'Amen' [Mannanam p.57]
21. Slothas [Mannanam p.59]
22. Deacon: Farewell to the church

23. Procession to cemetery; Processional anthem: *vayalilppularum pulkkodipole*

24. Priest's prayer and people's response

25. Blessing the tomb: sprinkling holy water on the dead body and the tomb; incensing the dead body and the tomb.

26. Celebrant casting earth (frankincense) on the dead body; all people cast earth (frankincense) in to the tomb. [Mannanam p.61]

27. Body is placed in the tomb

28. Hymn: *mahimayodantima vidhi nalil*

29. Two slothas

30. Madrasa (separate for men and women) *nathanananjidum antima nalil; mishiha karttavin dasi vidhi nalil* [Mannanam pp.52-53]

31. Psalm: for men Ps 51; for women Ps 41

32. Two slothas

33. Huttama

34. All depart after venerating the cross.

The Malabar liturgy of the funeral is basically East Syrian, however with lot of adaptations. The liturgy as a whole is appealing because of its hymns, prayers and gestures. It seems that there was no special concern to maintain fidelity to the structure and theology of the original East Syrian texts. Only some of the theologically rich hymns are taken into Malayalam. Many of the hymns are abbreviated. There are new prayers composed in Malayalam. The Malayalam texts have a substantial change at the final part of the sacerdotal prayers. Mannanam text and all East Syrian texts have the expression "Lord of our death and our life" (*mara d mawthan wad-hayyayn*): Christ is qualified as the one who permits death and one who gives life.[58] The expression 'life' here does not mean the earthly life prior to death. It is the eternal life after death. Christ is the Lord of death and life after death. The Malayalam version of Fr. Abel has ignored this theological import of the expression and gives always the alternative expression 'Lord of life and death'.

There are new rites like the blessing and sprinkling of holy water at the beginning. The attractive rite of coronation is not seen in the

Chaldean and Assyrian tradition. It seems to be appearing for first time in the Malayalam text. It very well agrees with the dominant theological theme of the celebration, namely resurrection. The solemn covering of the face of the deceased by the eldest son is typically an Indian element. It reminds us of the right of the eldest son in the Hindu tradition to do the last rite for his father or mother. Throwing frankincense instead of soil is not a better alternative. The East Syrian insistence on using earth is meaningful.

Unlike in the East Syrian tradition, the bodies of all faithful are brought to the church, except of those who are not given an ecclesiastical burial. The Assyrians in Kerala do not bring the body of the lay persons inside the church. Instead they put it near the church. In Iraq the Assyrians bring the bodies of all faithful inside the church. Sometimes the funeral liturgy begins in the church only. In the ancient practice of Thomas Christians the dead were buried around the church building. There was the blessing of the tomb. Vicar Apostolic Prenter Gast (1821-1827) ordered that all cemeteries be fenced with walls. That was the origin of today's cemeteries. The prayer for blessing the cemetery was translated into Syriac from Latin. An area of the cemetery was kept without blessing, in view of those who do not get an ecclesiastical burial.[59]

With regard to the celebration of the last rites there has been a steady influence on the Thomas Christians from the part of the Hindu brethren. The following practices like washing the body; not preparing food in the house of the deceased; the manner of keeping the body in the house of the deceased; the immediate relatives of the departed one keeping abstinence for a fixed period; the post-burial rites of commemoration like *adiyantaram*, *pulakuli*, *chattham* (anniversary); blessing the house of the deceased along with the *adiyantaram* celebration; the members in the house of the deceased abstaining from making the "pesaha bread" on the Pesaha (Passover) Thursday reflect Hindu influence.

V. East Syrian Theology of Death

The East Syrian liturgy of the funeral with its highly appealing prayers and gestures proclaims the East Syrian theology of death. The whole liturgy is a celebration of our participation in the death

and resurrection of the Lord The anonymous Author makes this theological truth manifest when he says that we bury the dead with the hope of resurrection. Since we connect our death and its celebration with the death of Christ, we maintain rightly the hope of his glorious resurrection.[60] The prayers, hymns, diaconal acclamations and actions like processions enable the faithful to understand the meaning of death as a participation in Christ's death. The directive given in the liturgical text before the beginning of the liturgy of the funeral sets the tone of the entire East Syrian funeral liturgy. "And they clothe him in white garments as on the day of his wedding."[61] For a Christian, death is the passage from this world of suffering and sin to the true life of sinlessness and incorruptibility in the resurrection."[62]

On the occasion of death, one of the most important turning points of human life, the liturgy makes the maximum effort to comfort the community especially through the faith of the Church. The prayers and hymns make the assembly convinced of the terrible reality of death. The liturgy is not an escapism from the truth of death. The prayers, hymns and gestures prepare the sorrowful ones to accept the reality of death as the will of God. Some of the hymns sung slowly and mournfully express the human tragedy of death and give an outlet to the pent-up grief of the bereaved.[63] Only after enabling the bereaved to face the sad reality of death, Church's liturgy does invite them to the joy of resurrection.

As in the case of any other liturgical celebration in the East Syrian tradition the whole celebration is thoroughly communitarian. It is indeed an affair of the community. The departed one is going away from a community; he is bidding farewell to that community; he is trying to help that community through his words (there are many hymns through which the departed one is addressing the community) to grow in its faith. Some of the processional hymns serve as a dialogue between the departed one and the faithful, comforting and encouraging each other. Very strong hope of resurrection is expressed in these hymns.

The intimate relation existing between the departed one and the community finds expression in the detailed rites of prayers and actions. The procession to the cemetery from the house and the

village or from the church celebrates the departed one's journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem. The community is fully conscious of this glorious journey of the departed one toward his heavenly home. The departed ones are on their way to their kingdom. While nearing the cemetery the bier is held in such a way that symbolically the dead person is leading the procession to his tomb, the entry point to heaven.[64] The whole celebration is a solemn bidding of farewell in joy. We bury our dead with joy. The anonymous Author gives the reason for his joy. "Because of death they are liberated from all sufferings connected with the body. Now they can have a peaceful sleep without any suffering and will rise later and will be worthy of happiness. Therefore, it is right that we accompany them with songs of joy. We do not suffer because of their death."[65]

The deacon's *karozutha* says that through his life of faith he is brought to the place of the living. He will be placed on the right side. He will be numbered among the elect. He will be among those who praise and please God.[66] The *karozuthas* of the deacons and the prayers of the priests and bishops teach us that it is indeed a blessing to die in Christ.[67]

The general resurrection of the Last Day towards which the deceased has departed is the primary theme reflected in the prayers, hymns and acclamations of the funeral service. The relation of the expected resurrection of the departed one to Christ's cross and his resurrection is clearly and repeatedly presented in the prayers. However, the liturgy of the funeral gives little attention to the condition of the soul between death and resurrection. Even though the lesson of death, the vanity of this world and the sobering thought of judgment figure in the prayers, they do not submerge the dominant note of Christian hope and joy.[68]

Timothy II points out the relevance of the prayers for the dead. The prayers for the dead are to praise and thank God for the sake of the sanctity which the dead person had attained.[69] The departed one himself is indeed a great reason for praising and thanking God. The liturgical assembly join the departed one in praising and thanking God. These prayers are of immense help for the departed. Our prayers would be of help to those who were weak in this life. These prayers would cleanse them of the stains caused by their worldly deeds.[70]

Conclusion

The East Syrian funeral liturgy is indeed a treasure house containing the Christian theology of death and the eschatological character of Christian life. There is a vast collection of hymns and prayers suiting the burial of various categories of people. These prayers and hymns are presented as earnest appeals to the believing community to respond in ardent faith. The large variety of hymns and prayers for various categories expresses the great concern of the Church for each and every member. The prayers, hymns and gestures of the liturgy invite the assembly as a whole and the bereaved relatives of the departed one in particular to lead a life worthy of the sacred journey of the believers to the heavenly home. Thus the funeral becomes a wonderful opportunity of for catechesis. The very title of some hymns as *madrasa* verifies this point. The Malabar text of the funeral is already keeping the fundamental liturgical and theological thrust of the East Syrian tradition. However, it has not fully preserved the liturgical and theological richness of the East Syrian funeral liturgy.

Notes

1. The Syriac printed texts are *Ktaba d'Kurastad'annide bnay 'alma,* Trichur 1954; *Taksa d'annide ak ayada d'edtha qaddistha d'suryaye Madnahaye d'hennon Kaldaye,* Mossul 1907.
2. "Homily (XVII): An Exposition of the Mysteries", in *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai,* R.H. Connolly, trans., Text and Studies VIII, Cambridge 1909, 21.
3. Liber Patrum, J.M.Vosté, ed. & trans., Fonti, serie II, fasc. XVI: Caldei-Diritto antico III, Vaticano 1940, 30.
4. Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten* etc, p.219, Cf. p.274 cited in Wilhelm De Vries, Sakramententheologie bei den Nestorianern, Roma 1947, 251.
5. J.B. Chabot, ed. & trans., *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil des synodes nestoriens*, Paris 1902. English Translation, M.J. Birnie, *The Eastern Synods, Draft Copy, 1*991, 54. See also p. 67, Canon 16.
6. Birnie, *The Eastern Synods*, 181.
7. Canon 19. Birnie, *The Eastern Synods*, 181.
8. Birnie, The Eastern Synods, 178.
9. W.C. Van Unnik, ed. & trans., *Nestorian Questions on the Administration of the Eucharist* by Išo'yahb IV: A Contribution to the History of the Eucharist in the Eastern Church, Haarlem 1937, Questions 115-116. pp.183-184.

10. Timothy II, *The Causes of the Seven Mysteries of the Church*, Malayalam text in T. Mannooramparampil, Pitakkanmarude koodashabhashyangal (Mal.), Kottayam 1992, 184.
11. Van Unnik, Nestorian Questions, 184-185.
12. The English translation of the funeral rite for the priests is given in G.P. Badger, The Nestorians and Their Rituals II, London 1852, 282-321.
13. Bm Add. 14706 (13th cent.), Bm Add. 17260 (12th/13th cent.) and Vat. Syr. 61 (13th cent.) are some of the important early manuscripts.
14. William Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy of the Chaldean Church", Concilium, Vol, 2.4 (1968) 19.
15. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 19.
16. A.J. Maclean & W.H. Browne, The Catholicos of the East and His People: An Account of the Religious and Secular Life and Opinions of the Eastern Syrian Christians of Kurdistan and Northern Persia (known also as Nestorians), London 1892, 281-282.
17. Ktaba d-kurrasta d'annide bnay 'alma, Trichur 1954, p.2. ET: Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 19.
18. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 20.
19. Maclean & Browne, The Catholicos of the East, 284-285.
20. J.Vellian, "Burial of Priests in the East Syrian Rites", Paper presented at the International Liturgical Congress at Santa Clara University, 2001, 3.
21. Anonymi auctoris expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta. Accedit Abrahae Bar Lipheh interpretatio officiorum, vol.II, R.H. Connolly, ed. & trans., CSCO, series secunda, syri 92, Roma 1915 (Expositio II), 126-127.
22. Expositio II, 136.
23. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 20.
24. Timothy II, Causes of the Seven Mysteries, 178.
25. Timothy II, Causes of the Seven Mysteries, 178.
26. Maclean & Browne, The Catholicos of the East, 282.
27. Expositio II, 129-130.
28. Expositio II ,129-131.
29. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 19.
30. Expositio II, pp.123-125. ET Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 19.
31. Maclean & Browne, The Catholicos of the East, 283.
32. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 20.
33. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 20.
34. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 20-21.
35. Expositio II, 133.
36. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 21.
37. Timothy II, Causes of the Seven Mysteries, 185.

38. Vat. Syr. 150, f.65 r-v. De Vries, Sakramententheologie,252.
39. Badger, Nestorians and their Rituals II, p.314.
40. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 21.
41. Memre über die Taufe, Vat.Syr. 182, f.270 r. De Vries, Sakramententheologie, 251
42. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 21-22.
43. Maclean & Browne, The Catholicos of the East, 283.
44. Maclean & Browne, The Catholicos of the East, 284.
45. Expositio II, 139.
46. The Order of the Service of the Dead (Aneeda Susrusha kramam), (Mal.), Trichur 1980, 226-230.
47. Expositio II, 138-139.
48. Maclean & Browne, The Catholicos of the East, 288.
49. Expositio II, 127.
50. Maclean & Browne, The Catholicos of the East , 284.
51. Badger, The Nestorians and Their Rituals II, 303-304.
52. Vellian, "Burial of Priests in the East Syrian Rites", 4.
53. Maclean & Browne, The Catholicos of the East, 282-283.
54. Timothy II, Causes of the Seven Mysteries , 177.
55. Ktaba d'tesmesta dahlap annide, Mannanam 1882.
56. Thumsa d-teshmeshta d-annide, Mannanam 1960.
57. The Malayalam translation of the Syriac text with some new prayers and hymns was made by Fr. Abel C.M.I. There have been various editions with slight modifications. For the present study we make use of the text published in 2002. Marichavarkku vendiyulla thirukkarmmangal (Mal)(Sacred Rites for the Dead), Abel C.M.I., Kottayam 2002.
58. Expositio II, 136.
59. T. Mannooramparampil, Aradhanakramangal, (Mal.), Kottayam, p.106.
60. Expositio II, 123.
61. Ktaba d-kurrasta d'annide bnay 'alma, Trichur 1954, 2. ET: Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 19.
62. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 19.
63. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 20.
64. Order of the Service for the Dead, Trichur 1980, 62.
65. Expositio II, 125.
66. Expositio II, 135.
67. Timothy II, Causes of the Seven Mysteries, 178.
68. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy", 22.
69. Timothy II, Causes of the Seven Mysteries, 177-178.
70. Timothy II, Causes of the Seven Mysteries, 179.

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Ecosophy: An Indian Paradigm of Eco-Spirituality

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Abstract: The global threat to eco-system is intrinsically connected to a universal crisis in spirituality. There are basically two ways of dealing with the things of nature: (i) taking them as *objects* for humans to possess, develop and consume; (ii) to respect them as the matrix, the *subject*, in and through which humans attain integral well-being. The effective antidote to the malaise facing us today is to develop the second perspective: to look at earth as the mother-base out of which we are born, through which we grow and unto which we return; to relate with plants and animals as members of the one family (*oikia*=home) loved and fed by the mother-earth. Then the author traces the move from ecology and ecosophy, deriving insights from various Indian traditions. Finally the author advocates a critical and creative dialogue between Indian spiritual heritage and modern scientific perceptions. He affirms that science without spirituality can be oppressive, spirituality without science can be elusive.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, *bhaktimarga*, Buddhism, Ecology, Ecosophy, *jnanamarga*, *karmamarga*, Primal Cultures, Upanishads, Vedas

The well-being of the ecosystem has become a global concern today. The problems related to the ecological crisis are being analysed from various perspectives, political and economic, cultural and geographical. Ultimately it is a problem related to spirituality. The global threat to the eco-system is intrinsically connected to a universal crisis in spirituality. With this I mean that something has gone radically out of gear in the way most people today look at the beings and systems of nature.

There are basically two ways of dealing with the things of nature: (i) taking them as *objects* for humans to possess, develop and

consume; (ii) to respect them as the matrix, the *subject*, in and through which humans attain integral well-being. With the demands of industrial production and technological development the trend to objectify things of nature and exploit them to the maximum has grown beyond control. Human greed has accelerated this process of unbridled consumption. Globalisation has widened the scope of exploiting the natural resources. The principle of the dominant culture of world-capitalism is: produce and consume and be happy! Everything in nature – including human resources – is being converted to objects of analysis and exploitation, consumption and enjoyment. This has drastically alienated human persons from the life-nourishing eco-system and caused a growing sense of meaninglessness in a consumerist way of life. This is the spiritual crisis that affects individuals and cultures today.

The effective antidote to this malaise would be to develop the second perspective: to look at the earth as the mother-base out of which we are born, through which we grow and unto which we return; to relate with plants and animals as members of the one family (*oikia*=home) loved and fed by the mother-earth. Here the things of nature are not just objects to consume but realities to nourish. Our body is earth, and hence the earth is the extended form of our body. When we poison the earth we poison our own bodies; if we nourish the earth, the earth nourishes us. This is the perspective of an earth-bound spirituality. This demands a certain amount of asceticism in dealing with the things of nature, a contemplative outlook on life and a compassionate attitude to all beings. In this article I want to explore how some of the classical sources of India's spiritual heritage inspire us to develop this integral spiritual attitude to nature.

From Ecology to Ecosophy

Indian sages speak of two faculties of perception: *manah* (mind) and *buddhi* (intuition). *Manasastu para buddhih*, beyond the mind is the buddhi. (Bhag. Gita, 3:42). Mind *objectifies* everything and analyses reality; buddhi enters into reality by uniting it with the perceiving *subject*. Mind explores the structures and qualities of reality and gives rise to knowledge (*vijnana*); buddhi tries to delve into the mystery of reality and attains wisdom (*jnana*); mind pursues the logic of reality, and buddhi intuits the mystique of reality. Mind

speculates on the horizontal level, while buddhi contemplates the depth dimension of reality. Through the mind one is driven to the tremendous diversity of things; through the buddhi one is awakened to the fascinating unity of reality. Mind supplies information while buddhi motivates transformation. Both these faculties are integrated in a harmonious perception of reality. We humans need the development of both these ways of perception.[1]

However, in today's competitive culture and consumerist ethos there is a tendency to develop the mental capacities of analysis at the cost of the intuitive perception of the holistic reality. Even in pursuing the concerns of eco-harmony the socio-political approaches and economic interests seem to take the lead. When we take up the problems of environment from the perspective of science and sociology we tend to objectify nature as a reality out there. We encounter nature within the *I-it* structure and analyse it objectively trying to achieve a conceptual clarity over the problems of the environment. What evolves out of this *mental* process is ecology. It has almost evolved as an autonomous discipline today. It gives clarity of perception, not necessarily commitment to action; it offers information, but not inevitably leading to transformation. "The subject-object mode of thinking is not suitable for the question regarding our dealing with nature."[2]

The Indian sages would demand a contemplative attitude to nature and consequently a holistic approach to the issues of eco-concerns. Through buddhi we experience that we are part of nature, that nature is part of our being. The earth with all that evolves out of that forms our body and hence we resonate with the concerns of the earth. What evolves out of this unitive experience is ecosophy. Ecology is concerned with the logic of the cosmic *oikia*, the rationale of the environment in which we are at home, while ecosophy is alert on the sophia of the *oikia*, the integrity and harmony of the one cosmic home in which we sense a deep bonding with all beings.

Sensitivity of Primal Cultures

Ecosophy is not so much a science as an integral attitude to nature. This is most alive in the primal cultures: among the tribals and aboriginals. In the pre-Aryan Dravidian culture as well as in the

living forms of tribal life today there is a keen sensitivity to the grace and demands of nature. They spontaneously feel with the earth. For them the earth is the life-giving mother, rivers are the veins of the mother earth, forests are the abode of life-giving energies and the trees are the feeding hands of the mother earth. Their rituals take place not in man-made temples but in the God-given groves. Their drums make them dance to the tune of nature. Their festivals are the celebration of the sacred dimension of the earth. Their myths articulate the vital relationship between humans and the cosmic forces. Their life-style resonates with the rhythm of the fertility cycle of the earth. They have a deep insight into the healing power of the natural herbs and on the auspicious moments of the seasons. They are reluctant to codify their perceptions in scriptures because they know that they are dealing with the mystery of life that eludes every written form. Yet they have a perennial wisdom (ecosophy) to convey to the people of today's technological culture: live in harmony with nature!

The World-view of the Vedas

Unlike the primal tribes of India the Vedic people (1200-900 BCE) had a patriarchal world-view. But they could not completely subdue the existing matricentric conception of reality. Their myths and hymns of creation express the basic insight that the entire universe is the body of the Divine. "The Vedas reflect the vibrancy of an encompassing world-view which looks upon all objects in the universe, living and non-living, as being pervaded by the same spiritual power."[3] The Vedic sages contemplated the Divine in the universe, the Vedic poets sang the grandeur of the things of nature, and the Vedic mystics perceived the all-embracing unity of reality. The basic insight in them all is: the entire universe is pervaded and upheld by the power of *Rta*, the endemic stream of cosmic energy of life and harmony.

Before the universe came into being "the ONE breathed without breath, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing else at all." (RV. 10.129.2). Through inner ardour (*tapas*) there emerged a creative impulse within the ONE, a sort of explosion, the birth-pangs of the Divine: the golden Germ (*hiranyagarbha*) was born out of it. Through him and in him the entire universe evolved. He is "the

Lord of creatures, Father of all beings, Father of the earth and of the heavens, God of Gods, pregnant with vital forces; he alone pervades all that has come to birth." (RV.10.121.8-10). The Vedic sages perceived nature around them as a sacred space vibrant with divine vibrations because "the ONE permeates all things like warp and woof". (YV. 32.8). The entire universe is like 'one home' (*ekaneedam*, YV.32.8), in which all beings are intrinsically inter-related. "The earth is the mother and the waters are the life-giving streams of the mother earth" (AV.12.1.17, RV.10.18.11; 10.189.1, Sat.Brahm. 4.4.3.15; 6.8.2.4.). The sky is the father and the air is the life-giving energy (*prana*) in beings (RV.10.189.1; 10.186.2, AV. 11.4.9). The fire is the primal mediator in every ritual and divine guest in every house, the friend of all.(RV.1.1.; 4.40.5; 3.3.2; 5.24.1; 4.1.3.). The sun as the source of cosmic fire is the spiritual master, the eye of God, who enlightens the universe. (RV.3.62.10; 1.50.10; 7.63.1.). The entire universe is one theophany!

Thus all the five elements are seen as permeated by the divine life-giving energies. In this sense they are gods (*deva*). The original meaning of the word *deva(div)* is to shine through. Powers of nature are translucent media of the divine Light. The humans have the responsibility to nourish these cosmic powers, which in turn will constantly sustain human well-being. Human life evolves within the life-process (*yajna*) of the cosmic powers in the universe. Hence only with a sense of the Sacred could the Vedic people deal with things of nature. Rituals were conducted to keep alive this sense of the Sacred.

Take the case of the Vedic attitude to earth. The earth is looked upon as the universal mother:

> Impart to us those vitalizing forces, that come, O Earth,
> from deep within your body, your central point, your navel.
> Purify us wholly.
> The Earth is mother, I am son of the Earth.
> The rain-giver is my father; may he shower blessing on
> us.
> Mother of plants and begetter of all things, firm far-flung
> Earth, sustained by *Rta*,
> compassionate and pleasant is she.

May we ever dwell on her bosom, passing to and fro.
(AV.12.1.12, 17)

This contemplative attitude to the earth gave a new meaning to human labour. Agriculture was pursued in a spirit of reverence and concern for the well-being of all things, not only of humans. Cultivation is cult, an act of worship, participation in the cosmic liturgy (*yajna*). Human labour does not then render the earth sterile, rather it draws out (*krishi*) the generating energies inherent in her, so that the earth becomes fecund and bears fruit.

Hence the prayer of the farmer:

Whatever I dig up of you, O Earth, may you of that have quick replenishment.

O purifying One, may my thrust never reach right unto your vital points, your heart. (AV.12.1.35)

Human labour is not to be geared by greed (*kama*) but by a concern for universal harmony (*dharma*), for it is participation in the cosmic rhythm of life (*rta*). (RV. 10.117.1-9). When one is engaged in productive labour without caring for the sustenance of the earth, one is a thief. (RV.10.117.6). Vedic contemplation helps one to perceive oneself within the evolutionary process of the divine presence in the universe. Vedic rituals are meant to make humans participate in the cosmic rhythm of life (*yajna chakra*) and make them aware of the responsibility to deal with things of nature with a sense of the Sacred. Hence the concluding prayer of the rituals:

OM peace,
May there be peace unto heaven, unto the sky let there be peace,
Peace unto the waters, peace unto the herbs and trees.
May there be peace unto all gods, and unto Brahman may there be peace,
May there be peace unto all beings,
Peace verily the peace.
May that peace also come to me
OM *santi santi santih*. (Sukla Yajur Veda, 36.17)

Perception of the Upanishads

Upanishads are the classical source of mystical experience in India. In the contemplative pursuits of the upanishadic sages (900-

400 BCE) there is a relentless quest for the divine Self in all selves: *atmani atmanam pasyan*. However the Atman that one intuits in the depth of one's being is the same as the Brahman that permeates the entire universe. "Brahman is Atman" (Brih. Up. 2.5.19), "hidden in the heart as well as in the highest heaven" (Tait. Up. 2.1). One has therefore to "perceive the Atman in all beings and all beings in the Atman". (Isa Up. 6), for the entire universe is permeated by the Divine (Isa Up. 1). The universe is the body of the Divine:

> Fire is his head, his eyes are the sun and the moon,
>
> The regions of space are his ears, his speech the revealed Vedas,
>
> Air is his life and his heart the world.
>
> Out of his feet the earth is born,
>
> Indeed he is the Self of all beings. (Mund. Up. 2.1.4)

The Upanishads constantly invite us to contemplate the Divine in every bit of reality as the *antaryami* (inner controller):

"He who dwells in the earth, who is within the earth, yet whom the earth does not know, whose body is the earth, who controls the earth from within...,He is your Atma, the *antaryami*, the immortal One." (Brih. Up. 3.7.3.)

In the Upanishadic world-view God is not the Creator Lord seated above, but is deeply immanent in the world, "as oil in the seed, as butter in the curd, as water in the well-springs, as fire in the fire-sticks" (Swet. Up. 1.16).

God is the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings:

"That from which beings are born, that by which they live, that into which they finally merge, that is Brahman." (Tait. Up. 3.1.).

Such a contemplative perception is possible only if one has inner freedom: freedom from greed (*kama*) and selfishness (*ahamkara*). Hence the injunction: "renounce and enjoy!" (Isa Up. 1). By transcending the limiting ego-sense one enters into a transcendental consciousness in which one experiences the Divine as the Ground of being, as the life-breath of all (*pranah*), and as the ultimate subject of everything. With this one deals with things of nature with equanimity (*samadarsana*, Brih. Up. 4.3.21), with a compassionate

heart (*daya*,Brih. Up. 5.2) and concern for the well-being of all (*dharma* Tait. Up. 1.11).

Vision of the Bhagavad Gita

The Gita offers an integrated vision of reality and shows the three-fold path (*marga*) through which the seeker develops an integral way of life. Each path has an ecological dimension.[4]

On the ***jnanamarga*** one develops a contemplative vision of reality: "one perceives the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self". (6:29) . The entire universe is seen as one theophany(11:16). The earth is the body of the Lord (15:13). He is seated at the heart of all beings.(18:61). He is their primal source (15:4), nourishing abode (9:4), and ultimate goal (10:20). God is the Light within human heart (13:18) and in all luminous bodies (15:12). It is the divine presence that makes the earth fertile, the water refreshing, the fire effulgent and the breath life-giving (7:8-9). The entire universe is like a tree that grows from the divine seed absorbing the divine sap of life (7:10, 15:1). With this sense of the Sacred one deals with the things of nature with inner freedom (*nish-kama*, 2:71) and equanimity (*samadarsana*, 6:29).

On the ***bhaktimarga*** one experiences the love of the divine Lord communicated through the things of nature. "One sees the Lord present in all beings and all beings in the Lord." (6:30). There is an intense experience of God's love: "This is the deepest mystery: I love you intensely, you are extremely dear to me." (18:64-65). In response one surrenders oneself totally to the divine Lord taking complete refuge in him (18:62,65-66). This self-surrender takes place in harmony with nature that is now perceived as the temple of the Lord. "Worship me as being present in all beings," (6:31). "Worship me with the perception that I am the source of all beings." (10:8). Gita extols this cosmic devotion as supreme bhakti (*parabhakti*, 18:54). The ethical consequence of this bhakti is a compassionate attitude to all beings (12.13), for one sees "reflections of oneself in all other beings" (6:32).

On the ***karmamarga*** one encounters God active in all beings and in the process of evolution. The entire universe is seen as a dynamic process held in movement by the divine Atman (*yajna*,

3:15). God is incessantly active to sustain the well-being of the world (9:22, 3:24). He is the underlying source of life (7:9) and creativity (18:46). All things are inter-related in this process of divine activity (3:14-15). God is also involved in bringing about *dharma* in human history (4:7). Human work done without greed (3:9) and in surrender to God (9:27) is participation in the divine *yajna* and *dharma*. Work is worship (18:46). One is here motivated to work for the welfare of the world (*lokasamgraha*, 3:25) and the good of all beings (12:4)

A special consequence of pursuing the three-fold *marga* is concern for the harmony of nature. What brings about harmony is *yajna*. Yajna is work done without greed and in surrender to the Divine. (5:10). *Yajna* is that which binds all beings in the one process of life. Work done in the spirit of *yajna* keeps therefore the eco-harmony alive. (4:23) The instruction of the Gita (3:9-13) could be paraphrased as follows:

Any work done except in the sense of *yajna* means bondage to work. Therefore work is to be done without attachment to the ego. The Creator Lord gave birth to creatures together with *yajna* and said: it is through *yajna* that you should prosper. You should protect the life-giving powers of nature, and they in turn will protect you. Thus nourishing mutually you shall attain the ultimate well-being. Fostered by your *yajna*, nature will supply you what you need. If however you consume the gifts of nature without giving anything in return you are a thief. You are freed from your sins only if you eat only what is left over after protecting nature. If on the other hand you cook food only for yourself, you are eating sin.

Gita invites the seekers to enter upon a way of life that protects the sources of life in nature and thus promotes the integral well-being of all. Gita does not justify a life of inaction, nor does it advocate hectic works done with greedy consumerism. (2:47). The entire message of the Gita may be summarised in one phrase: be united with the divine Ground and get engaged in your works (*yogastah kuru karmani*, 2:48).

Ethics of Buddhism

Buddha taught a way of life that leads to universal harmony (*dhamma*), which embraces not only the human world but the entire

realm of beings. Confronted with the question of the cause of suffering he came to the realization that everything is transient (*anicca*) and non-autonomous (*anatta*). In this ontic flux of reality all beings are interconnected, in this evolutionary process all things are interwoven: everything is in everything else. Reality evolves through the interpenetration of relationships (Lotussutra). Bliss comes when one lets things go in this flux of reality. Instead, with greed (*trishna*) when one tends to hold on to something in possession, one disturbs the process of reality and causes suffering. Hence Buddha called attachment as the root cause of all suffering.

The way to bliss in life is to deal with things of nature with an inner freedom from possessiveness (*alobha*). Freedom comes from the right perception (*panna*) expressed in the four basic Truths. The free person lives a life of universal love consisting of compassion (*karuna*), friendliness (*metta*), sympathy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekha*) towards all beings. On the eightfold path towards liberation (*nirwana*) Buddha mentions right livelihood (*samma ajiva*): earn your livelihood without in any way bringing harm to others (*ahimsa*) including trees and animals. "As a mother would be affectionate towards her only child, so too you should be kind towards all creatures: everywhere and everyone" (Khuddakapatha Mettasutta). Compassion is the cardinal virtue in the Buddhist ethics. A person endowed with compassion does not look at other beings as separate entities but as parts of his/her own being which is in constant becoming. Compassion is therefore the response to the realisation that everything is related to everything else in a universal flux. "Loving-kindness and compassion are the two cornerstones on which the whole edifice of Buddhism stands. Harming or destroying any being from the highest to the lowest, from a human to the tiniest insect, must at all cost be avoided."[5] A contemplative awareness of the dynamic unity of all beings leading to a compassionate concern for the good of all beings is the core of the Buddhist ecosophy.

Symbols of Epics and Puranas

Puranas contain the classical myths which have somehow their origin in the collective sub-conscious of the people. More than rational arguments and mystical insights they articulate the primal sense of the people. Mythical images have therefore a complex

symbolic significance which has to be discerned in relation to the ever present moment. Brahmapurana (1.37) offers a myth of creation: Brahma born of itself (*swayambhuh*) created the chaotic waters first and deposited its seed in them. From this was *Narayana* born, out of whose navel all things began to evolve. Narasimhapurana describes the Divine as the root out of which like a tree the entire cosmos unfolds. According the Bhagavatapurana (1.3.1) the Creator Lord expanded himself in the universal form of the *Purusha* through which the primal elements were formed. The Devibhagavatam (3.4.41) describes how *Devi*, the primordial divine Mother, creates the universe out of her own body as a spider weaves its web. *Sakti*, the creative feminine energy, operates at the core of all realities (Kalikapurana, 22.10)

Epics are the dramatic presentation of the cultural ethos of a people. They contain historical and mythical elements clothed in magnificent literary forms. In the conversation between Yudhishtira and Bhishma the origin of the cosmos is discussed: God created the *Purusha* as particle of himself and from it evolved the entire cosmos with all its diversities. Cosmos is therefore the visible form (*virat purusha*) of the invisible Brahman: earth is the flesh, sea is the blood, mountains are his bones, rivers are his nerves, air is his breath, fire is his energy, the four directions are his arms, sun and moon are his eyes. (Mahabharata, Mokshaparava, 182.1-3).

The main insight here is that we are living not just in a material ambience but in a divine space. All realities are like parts of the one cosmic body of the Divine. This insight is powerfully articulated in the central icons. *Nataraja* of the Saivite tradition is a symbolic representation of the divine vibration in the atom and in the galaxies as well, the dance of life in every living cell and in every drop of rain water as well; it is the dramatic articulation of the integral unity of life and death, creation and dissolution, light and darkness, male and female in the ongoing unfolding of the universe. The entire cosmos is a divine dance. *Anantasayana* of the Vaishnavite tradition depicts God as the ultimate subject of all life and evolution. With the divine breath emerges the lotus, the womb of creation out of his navel, and this lotus gives rise to the entire cosmos.

Several customs and festivals of popular religiosity make people aware of the sacredness of the environment. Deepavali, Mahasivaratri, Onam, Pongal and Kumbhamela convey the message of the unity of all beings within the Divine.

Myths about the concern of the divine Lord to protect the earth and uphold universal harmony are made alive during such festivals. Earth and water, fire and light, dance and music become symbols which carry this message to the life of the millions. In the folklore and local stories devotion to mother earth and compassion to animals and plants are extolled. All these contribute to create an eco-consciousness in the masses.

From Ecosophy to Eco-concern

Ecosophy as emerging from these sources is the awareness of the constitutive interrelatedness between human beings, things of nature and the Divine. It is the consciousness that we humans live and move and have our being in a sacred ambience. It gives us the realization of the universal symbiosis: all beings are bound together in a cosmic-divine web. The universe is a theophany. In this realization human labour is no more a manipulation of the powers of the universe or exploitation of the resources of nature, but a creative involvement that brings the inherent potentialities of nature to full blossoming. Human creativity is endowed with a "passionate concern to bring about the welfare of all beings". (Bhag. Gita, 12.4)

Ecosophy is basically a contemplative attitude to reality. But this alone is not enough to ensure the protection of the environment. Though the Indian spiritual heritage offers such a sublime vision of human bonding to nature, somehow it could not withstand the onslaught of modern technological civilization. Today India is a country that struggles with acute problems related ecological degradation. Our forests are devasted, water resources are depleted, rivers are contaminated, air-space is polluted: our earth is dying! To face this ecological crisis we need to develop a world-view that is spiritually nourished by the ecosophy of our heritage and at the same time well integrated with an effective civic sense. A contemplative view of nature can turn to be a romantic past-time if it is not related to social sensitivity. Perceiving the divine presence

in nature can become a flight from reality if it does not resonate with the struggles of life. The intuitive consciousness of the sacredness of nature has therefore to be enriched by the courage to analyse the problems and seek effective solutions. It is here that eco-sophy has to be integrated to eco-logy. The insights of *buddhi* and the reflections of the mind have to be intertwined. Ecosophy with its mystical insights and ecology with its scientific perspectives can nourish each other in the formation of an integrated Indian approach to the challenges of promoting eco-harmony. An uncritical glorification of the golden Vedic age is not a solution to modern problems, nor can a total trust in the analytical methods of science and technology be helpful. A critical and creative dialogue between Indian spiritual heritage and modern scientific perceptions is the call of the hour. Science without spirituality can be oppressive, spirituality without science can be elusive.

Notes

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Book Review

Ministers and Ministreis in the Local Church – A Comprehensive Guide to Ecclesiastical Norms by Sebastian S. Karambai. ST. Paul's Publishers, 2005. Pp. xxix-451. Rs. 220. ISBN 81-7109-725-1.

This publication is a welcome compendium in the field of canon law. For a long time we read about laws that are terse and additional norms or guidelines in separate documents and it becomes very cumbersome to get hold of laws and guidelines in one book. But Karambai, being a man of practical experience has in a masterly manner conjoined the two.

There are references to a number of instructions, directives, complementary legislations to the two codes, which become important in understanding and interpreting the law. The emphasis is on the Latin Church and the Latin Code, but it has many references to the Eastern Code and that makes it an even handier kit. In particular the Syro-Malabar church can profit considerably.

The book consists of two parts. Par I consist of six chapters and deals with the Ministers, both persons and bodies, that serve the diocesan and parish level. Karambai moves from diocesan leadership to leadership at the parish level. The roles of persons in the executive and judicial sections of the diocesan curia and the various consultative and e4xectuive bodies of the diocesan curia, their qualification, appointments, responsibilities and powers are spelt out. The functions, rights and obligations of the parish priest, parochial vicars, deacons and vicars forane are clearly outlined. He also tells us of offices that are obligatory and those that are optional. The Bishops, not too familiar with making appointments to these offices, will find this a handy resource.

Part II, consists of nine chapters that focus on the ministries of teaching and sanctifying. It begins with a chapter on the Word of God and proceeds to the sacraments and sacramentals. While in Part I there are only two chapters that have frequently asked questions, here each of the chapters end with this sub title. Karambai has picked up these questions from his years of experience in the field. His scholarly responses stem from his learning and experience as a canonist and consultor. The seven sacraments, its nature, requirements, its celebration and the minister are taken into consideration and given good emphasis. Here again the ecumenical provisions and the references to documents and CCBI regulations make it informative. To a certain extent it can serve as a manual for catechesis of these ministries.

Karambai is clear in his explanations and cites examples to explain a point. He does not give us a commentary on each canon, but his study is broad based, taking into consideration the historical background, the reasons behind the law, the changes from the old code to the new code. He occasionally applies it to situations in India and points out what is lacking in the Indian context, making it more contextual. He provides us with useful appendices. Definitely there I an enormous amount of research, and reflection done to arrive at this compendium. One cannot by pass this book as one to be read and set aside. It is a useful guide to every official and pastor in the church. It gives us a proper understanding of the current discipline in the church regarding ministers and ministries and will help in effective pastoral ministry. Michael Fernandes

Mother Teresa: A Saint from Skopje. By Hiromi Josepha Kudo Ph.D. Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2005. Pp xxiii-216. Rs 250, $ 25.

This book is the doctoral thesis of Hiromi Kudo under the guidance of Fr. Cyril Veliath, SJ of Sophia University. Miss Kudo received her Ph.D from the University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, Macedonia. She is a tenured member of the teaching staff of Urawa University in Japan and also teaches part-time at Sophia University in Tokyo.

Hiromi Kudo has done an admirable research on Mother Teresa and her works. The author has visited Mother's birthplace and interviewed many people to get accurate information about her parents, family members, relatives, etc. She along with her mother has visited Mother Teresa in Calcutta several times and worked as a volunteer at the motherhouse. She and her mother were so much taken up by Mother's faith and dedication to the poor that they eventually received baptism in the presence of Mother Teresa. The author has interviewed Mother many times. She has high regard for the Jesuit contribution in the spiritual guidance of Mother and in the discerning of her second vocation and eventually the founding of the new religious congregation. The five Jesuits who influenced Mother very much are Fr. Franjo Stefano Jambrekovic, Archbishop Perrier, Cardinal Lawrence Picachy, Fr. Julian Henry and Fr. Van Exem. She feels that many authors on Mother Teresa have not given enough importance to the role played by these Jesuits, especially Fr. Van Exem.

he book contains four chapters. The first chapter deals with the early life of Mother Teresa in the city of Skopje, where she was born and brought up. The second chapter deals with Mother's religious life in India and her second vocation. The third chapter gives an account of various activities of the Missionaries of Charity. The concluding chapter is about the factors that led to the state funeral for Mother Teresa something on the lines of the state funeral for Mahatma Gandhi.

The author has taken pains to show that Mother had a special love for her birth place. This is shown by the fact that she had started her work in Macedonia already in 1976. Her mother's ethnic homeland was Albania, where her mother and sister died and were buried. In 1989 Mother Teresa received permission to start a house in Albania and in 1991 Mother went there along with four sisters and started a house. Mother was recovering from her heart attack and it is reported that she struggled against her illness in order to be well enough to visit Albania. Mother's fluency in language must have come from her father who was proficient in many languages such as Macedonian, Serbian, Turkish, Albanian, Italian, and French. Mother had a very good command of Bengali. She was even nicknamed 'Bengali Theresa' because she was teaching in Bengali at the Loretto school. She was also fluent in Hindi, Serbian, Croatian, Albanian and English.

Mother had experienced so much of ethnic conflicts in her homeland that she insisted on working for peace. She did her best to bring about peace between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal especially in Calcutta. She was accepted both by Hindus and Muslims. On 6th December 1992 when there was a big religious riot in Calcutta, in spite of the curfew, having got special permission from the army, she went in a truck along with the truck driver to buy food materials from a distant part of the city. Her truck was allowed to move freely both by the Hindu and Muslim groups who were attacking vehicles and setting them on fire. Thus she was able to bring enough provisions for the inmates. Her concern for world peace is evident from the fact that she sent a petition to both the presidents of USA and Iraq before the gulf war began in January 1991. It is no wonder that she was honoured with the Nobel prize for Peace.

Both the parents of Mother Teresa were very generous to the poor. At the same time her mother was quite strict with her children. Once the children were sitting around their mother engaged in childish talk. This went on for quite some time and their mother remained silent. Finally she left the room and switched off the main switch saying that there is no need to waste electricity on useless talk. The same type of strictness is found in the life of Mother Teresa too. Once she happened to notice a nun admiring herself looking in a mirror. After scolding the nun for such inappropriate behaviour, she painted the mirror. Mother believed in total dependence on God for the functioning of different houses. She insisted on having no regular income or bank accounts. She also believed that serving the poor is equivalent to serving God. She told one of the sisters who had kept watch over a patient overnight without sleeping, "You have done 24 hours of adoration".

The author's great love for Mother Teresa and her works is very evident all through the book. She tries to communicate this enthusiasm to the readers also. This book is historical in nature and very informative. The author's studied reflection and critique of Mother's works are very minimal.

Jose Thayil, SJ

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