

## **Paul and Baptism: Paul's Understanding of Baptism and its Relevance for us in India Today**

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*Abstract:* In this contextual article, the author explores the significance of Baptism for Paul and its contemporary relevance for India today. He concentrates precisely on the profound theological teachings of Paul on baptism and ponder its relevance for us in the socio-politico-religious and cultural context of India today. Asserting that there is radical newness and equality provided by baptism, the author pleads that in the present Indian situation of multi-faceted opposition the Church must end the present situation of crisis and face the challenge posed by them by clarifying her mission and the place of baptism in it. With prudence and sensitivity, on the one hand, and with apostolic courage and clarity on the other, it must define its mission of evangelization, part of which includes the administration of baptism with full readiness to pay the price for it. The present situation of increasingly violent persecution, instead of intimidating the Church, should reinforce its resolve and motivation for its mission, knowing that it is led by the Spirit of God who strengthens it in its mission against all odds.

*Keywords:* Baptism, radical newness, equality, Pauline theology, Indian context.

### **I. Introduction**

#### **Paul and Baptism: A Paradox**

The apostle Paul, in a context of dealing with the partisan divisions in the Christian community of Corinth which were threatening to tear it apart, wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "...Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel...". On the face of it, the statement would seem to mean that Paul

considered baptism to be of little or no consequence and hence dispensable. In fact this is how some people take it and even some theologians belong to this group.<sup>1</sup> As the full text of Paul's statement in its context (1Cor 1:10-17) reveals<sup>2</sup> he is not saying this because he is in principle against baptism since he himself mentions in the same text a few people he has baptized in the Corinthian community itself, but because people were using the reception of baptism from a person of importance in the Church as a basis of division and factionalism in the Corinthian Church.<sup>3</sup> Hence he observes that he has not baptized many in the community and his personal mandate is to proclaim the gospel.

This mandate to proclaim has nothing to do with the lack of importance of baptism but with the specific charge that Paul is convinced as having been given in his extraordinary transformative encounter with the risen Lord in the Damascus experience which is the fundamental source of his mission and theology. Paul considered himself under a necessity or compulsion (*anagke*, 1Cor 9:16) to preach<sup>4</sup> and moved around in the contemporary Graeco-Roman world (of mainly Asia Minor and Greece) like a whirlwind proclaiming the gospel and founding/initiating Christian communities in this way. He considered his mission to proclaim the gospel to the whole world (the then known world) and this with an eschatological urgency before the return of the Lord which perhaps he considered to be not too far away. Hence he concentrated on this aspect of the mission single-mindedly, leaving the subsequent steps of baptizing and building up the numerous communities he founded to his disciples/co-workers even as he hastened on with the work of proclamation. Thus Paul's statement when seen in its immediate context and in the context of his actual mission history as we know it from his Letters and the Acts of the Apostles as well as his wider teaching in his authentic Letters, does not show that he considered baptism to be unimportant or dispensable. The contrast in the text at this point between proclamation and baptism is simply defined by the context of factionalism in the Corinthian community which Paul wanted to tackle by his letter.<sup>5</sup>

This becomes even clearer when we see that Paul has given us in his authentic Letters, including 1 Corinthians, the most profound

theology of baptism in the New Testament. It strikes us at least as odd and paradoxical if not down-right contradictory at first glance. But it appears this way only when we read the above statement of Paul on baptism out of the contexts just mentioned. In reality Paul had a high regard for baptism as his great theological teaching about it amply testify.

In the following discussion we shall concentrate precisely on these profound theological teachings of Paul on baptism and ponder its relevance for us in the socio-politico-religious and cultural context of India today.

## **II. Pauline Texts on Baptism**

### **Paul and Baptism**

Paul's teaching on baptism stands related to his teaching on the role of faith in the human response to the Christ-event. As J. Fitzmyer emphasizes, the response of faith to the Christ-event is adequately understood only when it is linked to his teaching on baptism.<sup>6</sup> For Paul there is an intimate relation between faith and baptism. The first is, as it were, ordained to the second for its fullness and completion. Although baptism existed before Paul in early Christianity,<sup>7</sup> Paul developed its significance greatly by his teaching.

### **Baptism and Sonship**

Paul teaches that the condition of Christians as "sons of God through faith" is actually owing to their baptism "into Christ" (Gal 3:26-27). This understanding establishes a firm connection between these two moments of the one divine gift of sonship/daughterhood. Justifying faith begins this process and it is realized in baptism. Baptism is understood by him as giving us the great gift of sonship/daughterhood.<sup>8</sup> The faith-baptism reality<sup>9</sup> here by making us children of God in this way gives us also the basis of true equality across all differences based on ethnicity, social status, and sex.<sup>10</sup>

### **Incorporation into Christ (Rom 6:3-6)**

Probably the heart of the baptismal teaching of Paul is his understanding of baptism as the identification of the baptized with

Christ. This involves the identification of the person with the crucial phases of Jesus' salvific ministry, that is, with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It expresses the profound character of the baptized person's identification and participation with the Christ-event, the impact of the Christ-event on him. It is much more than the vicarious nature of Christ's death as the following statement shows:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Through baptism we have been buried with him in death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom 6:3-5).

The conception here is related to the statement in 2 Corinthians: "one died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor 5:14), an expression that reflects Semitic anthropology which implies that the fate of the progenitor of the race or tribe affects that of the whole of which he is the head.<sup>11</sup>

### **Nature and Effects of this Incorporation**

Paul's characterization of baptism with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is often considered to refer to the rite of immersion. Though it is difficult to affirm with certainty the existence of this form of baptism in the first century AD, Fitzmyer thinks that the symbolism can stand if the baptized person is thought of as somehow below water. As a result of his identification with Christ in his death the Christian dies to law and to sin (Gal 2:19; Rom 6: 6.10; 7:4). Similarly identified with Christ in his resurrection he shares a new life that comes from the risen Lord and his Spirit (1 Cor 6:17). The baptized person "grows together" with Christ through the likeness of his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:5). Through the death in baptism one becomes a "new creation" (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). Deutero-Pauline letters develop this idea further asserting that through this the Christian already enjoys a new "heavenly" existence

(Col 2:12-13). In similar vein, Ephesians (Eph 2:5-6) affirm that "Though we were dead because of our offenses, God has made us live again with Christ Jesus and made us sit down with him in the heavenly realm."<sup>12</sup>

## **Incorporation into the Community**

The incorporation of the Christian through baptism is not only an individual experience but also a corporate one in that a special union of Christians is formed through it which "forms one body" (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Gal 3:28).<sup>13</sup> The process of salvation initiated through baptism thus means that human beings attain salvation not only individually but by identification with a salvific community as well by incorporation into the "body of Christ".<sup>14</sup> Fitzmyer considers this to be the reason why Paul compares baptism to Israel's passing through the waters of the Reed Sea (1 Cor 10:1-2). As in the case of Israel which was formed through this foundational experience, in passing through the waters of baptism the new "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16) is formed.<sup>15</sup>

## **Washed in Christ**

Paul also speaks of baptism using certain telling images which are designed to express its impact on the baptized. Thus he speaks of it as a washing. It is a ritual washing in which the recipients are sanctified and made upright (1 Cor 6:11). Their sins are washed away in this baptismal washing and they are made children of God. Their being sanctified and made upright in this way are consequences of their gift of sonship/daughterhood.<sup>16</sup>

## **Putting on Christ**

Paul also speaks of baptism involving a "putting on of Christ", (Gal 3:27) as a new garment which, according to Fitzmyer, may be an allusion to the baptismal robe worn by the recipient for the ceremony, or as others think an image of the new Christ-centred righteousness mediated in baptism.<sup>17</sup>

## Paul and the Trinitarian Nature of Baptism

Although Paul does not quote an early baptismal formula like Mt 18:19 yet he seems to reflect a Trinitarian understanding of baptism in his writings. Thus 1 Cor 6:11 pointedly states: “You have been washed, sanctified, and made upright in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Elsewhere Paul affirms that the baptized person is a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19). He is also an adopted child of the Father because of the gift of the Spirit (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:9). The Spirit thus given becomes “the constitutive principle of filial adoption and the dynamic source of Christian life and conduct”. As Rom 8:14 states: “All who are led by God are children of God”. There is here the basis of the later teaching about the relation of the baptized person with the persons of the Trinity.<sup>18</sup>

### Baptismal Formula

The use of the baptismal formula, “in the name of” (*eis to onoma tou...*, 1 Cor 1:13.15; 6:11) is attested in Paul only indirectly. While this formula expresses proprietorship and means that the baptized person becomes the property of Christ and belongs to him, Paul prefers the expression baptized “into Christ” (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27), which has the meaning of being symbolically plunged into Christ himself.<sup>19</sup>

### Incorporation: in Prepositional Phrases and in “the Body of Christ”

For a further detailed and perhaps deeper understanding of the effects of faith and baptism in the theology of Paul one must consider his ideas on the intimate union of Christ and Christians, expressed by certain significant prepositional phrases as well as by the figure of the “body of Christ”.

#### (a) Prepositional Phrases

Paul uses mainly four prepositions, namely, *dia*, *eis*, *syn*, and *en* with “Christ” as their objects to express the different aspects of Christ’s influence on the life of the Christian. Since the use of each

of them is complex and often highly nuanced, we shall confine ourselves to indicating some of the most important implications of them.

The preposition *dia*, “through”, normally expresses the idea of the mediation of Christ in a statement of which the subject is the Father. It may denote Christ’s mediation in some activity of his earthly ministry (1Thess 5:9), of his present function as Lord (Rom 1:5) or of his eschatological role (1Thess 4:14). This phrase can be seen as opening up the path that leads to the Christian’s experience *en Christo*, (“in Christ”) and eventually *syn Christo*, (“with Christ”).<sup>20</sup>

The second preposition is “*eis*,” *into*”, especially in the phrase “*eis Christon*”, which has sometimes been taken as a short version of *eis to onoma Christou*, “into the name of Christ” which is possible when it is found with the verb *baptizein*. However *eis Christon* is also used with *pisteuein*, “to believe”. Actually, the phrase mainly occurs in these two contexts of belief or baptism in Christ. The phrase clearly indicates the movement toward Christ that these important initial Christian experiences contain and represent (cf. 1Cor 10:2). Liberated from the limitations of one’s original condition (“in Adam”, 1 Cor 15:22), from one’s natural inclinations (“in the flesh,” Rom 7:5), and from one’s ethnic background (“under the law,” 1 Cor 9:20) one is led “into Christ” in faith and baptism. Thus *eis Christon* denotes the movement of incorporation<sup>21</sup> through faith and baptism as mentioned above.

The third preposition *syn*, “with”, in addition to its use with the object “Christ” is also compounded with verbs and adjectives and can in these usages express a double relation of the Christian to Christ. It can, on the one hand, suggest an identification of the Christian with the preeminently salvific acts of the Christ-event<sup>22</sup> and, on the other, denote an association of the Christian with Christ in eschatological glory.<sup>23</sup> Thus the preposition *syn* pregnantly expresses two poles of the Christian experience, identification with Christ at its beginning and an association with him at its end. In between the Christian is *en Christo*.<sup>24</sup>

The last preposition *en*, “in” occurs with the object “Christ” 165 times (including *en Kyrio*, in the Lord, and *en auto*, “in him”) in Paul’s letters, and connotes different nuances.<sup>25</sup> The commonest

use of *en Christo* expresses the close union of Christ and the Christian, a union that connotes a symbiosis of the two. "If anyone is in Christ one is a new creature" (2 Cor 5:17). The same union is also expressed by the phrase "Christ in me" (Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 13:5; Rom 8:10 [Col 1:27; Eph 3:17 (2 Cor 10:7) or the phrase "of Christ" which is a "mystical" genitive embodying the same idea (Rom 16:16). It is not limited to a spatial dimension, for it often implies a dynamic influence of Christ on the Christian who is incorporated into him. This is of significance to our discussion. The Christian thus incorporated becomes a member of the whole Christ, the body of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

### **(b) The Union between Christ and Christians**

To express the union between Christ and Christians involved in the incorporation into him Paul uses the expression *soma Christou*, "body of Christ". Actually Paul uses this term in different senses. Thus it may mean his historical, crucified body (Rom 7:4); or his Eucharistic body (1 Cor 10:16; cf. 11:27). He uses it also of the Church (1 Cor 12:27-28; [cf. Col 2:17; Eph 4:12). In this last sense it is a metaphorical way of expressing the corporate identity of Christians with Christ. Though absent from his early Letters (1Thess; Gal; Phil) it seems to appear in 1Cor, the Letter wherein he deals with divisions in the Corinthian Church. Here the figure of the body with its members functions as the symbol of unity. Although the origin of the figure is disputed, Fitzmyer thinks that it is probably derived by Paul from contemporary Hellenistic notions about the state as the body politic. In this case it expresses the moral unity of members (citizens, soldiers) working together to achieve a common goal such as peace, prosperity and well-being. In 1 Cor 12:12-27 the figure can be taken in this sense of a moral union of members. Thus the spiritual gifts received by the Corinthians such as wisdom, faith, healing, prophecy, tongues, etc. are to be used for the common good (12:7), not for its disruption. As all the members of the body work together for its well-being, so it is with the body of Christ.<sup>27</sup> This thinking is similar to the exhortational context of Rom 12:4-5.<sup>28</sup>

However in 1 Cor 6:15 Paul means more than this by the body where he warns against the defilement of the human body by sexual



sins. The union implied here goes beyond the moral; somehow Christians here share in a union that connotes "one flesh". Here Paul is not speaking merely of the members of a society united by a common objective but of members of Christ himself, their union being not only corporate but also somehow bodily. Something similar is meant in 1Cor 10:16-17 where Paul insists on the union of all Christians brought about by their sharing in the one Eucharistic bread and cup. This unity is thought of as one resulting from their physical consumption of the one loaf. It goes beyond the extrinsic unity created by working together to attain a common goal. To this one can add Eph 5:22-33 which also points to a similar transcendent union.<sup>29</sup>

The ontological reality which forms the basis of this union is the possession of the Spirit of Christ. As Paul says: "We have all been baptized in one Spirit to form one body" (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Rom 8:9-11). The possession of this Spirit results from the incorporation of believers through faith and baptism.<sup>30</sup>

Thus the Church is constituted by them. The Church in fact is the concrete manifestation of those who have been baptized "in one Spirit to form one body" (1 Cor 12:13).<sup>31</sup> Fitzmyer considers the unity of these believers in one body, that is, the church that transcends all local barriers, to be Paul's great contribution to Christian theology. It is a unity that issues forth from the single purpose of the plan of God for the salvation of human beings in Christ Jesus. Paul came eventually to consider the "church of God" as a unit transcending both Jews and Greeks, yet incorporating them both when they became believers (1Cor 10:32).<sup>32</sup>

### III. Origins of Christian Baptism

After having seen the basic theology of Paul on baptism we shall clarify its origins since the origins of Christian baptism are hazy in the thinking of many<sup>33</sup> which in turn also affects their understanding of it and attitude to it. It would therefore be to the point to clarify these before we reflect on its value and relevance for us in India.

Researching the origins of Christian baptism, as Gerhard Lohfink observes, has first of all to confront the datum that while Jesus does

not seem to have baptized, baptism became part of the early church's ecclesial and theological self-understanding. The Synoptic gospels nowhere mention that Jesus baptized. While in the gospel of John there are two references to Jesus' baptizing (3:22; 4:1) these may reflect an attempt by the early Church to underline Jesus' superiority in regard to salvation over John the Baptist. To the point in this connection is the absence of a commission to the disciples to baptize when they are sent out on a mission by the historical Jesus, although they are asked to preach and to heal (Mk 6; Mt 10; Lk 10).<sup>34</sup> This situation thus raises the question as to how to account for the origin of Christian baptism.

In the past there have been attempts to seek the origin of Christian baptism in the ritual washings of mystery religions. Lohfink finds these unsatisfactory and thinks it more profitable to look to Judaism in this regard because here there have been washings with clear similarities to Christian baptism. Thus there are such washings found in the Old Testament (Ex 29:4). Similar washings are also found in Qumran community (1QS, Ch 3). Although these do not give us a complete solution they do provide a general background for the origin of Christian baptism.<sup>35</sup>

Some earlier scholars like E. Schürer, P. Billerbeck, J. Jeremias found parallels between Jewish proselyte baptism and Christian baptism. But Lohfink, while admitting to certain similarities between the two, disagrees with them and thinks that Christian baptism does not originate in Jewish proselyte baptism for a number of reasons. These include: (1) While Jewish proselyte baptism was a self-baptism, Christian baptism is never self-administered.; (2) Jewish proselyte baptism was given only to the Gentiles and never to the Jews, while early Church called even Israel to be baptized in order to be saved (Acts 2:14.2.36.38.41); (3) More importantly, Jewish proselyte baptism does not have an eschatological motivation while Christian baptism is strongly characterized by it.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, we find the baptism of John the Baptist closer to the baptism practised by the early Church. Thus in his baptism John played an active part in that people were baptized by him (Mk 1:5). It was directed to Israel (Lk 3:7). Besides John's baptism was a

once-for-all event and not a recurrent one. These elements connect John's baptism to that of the early Church.<sup>37</sup>

But if this is so the question arises as to why the early Church went back to John's baptism when Jesus did not? Lohfink answers this by an analysis of the tradition history of the antithetical statement regarding water baptism and the coming Spirit baptism (Mk 1:8) or the Spirit *and* fire baptism in the Q tradition (Mt 3:11; par Lk 3:16). Although within the Synoptic tradition the Q tradition is older, still it too is the result of a combination of two traditions.

The baptism of fire points to the wrath of God that would come on Israel in the form of Judgment. This is clear from John's question: "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come..."? (Lk 3:7-9). John's baptism in water was Israel's last chance. The judgment was imminent and this baptism was the seal against judgment by fire. The motifs of baptism by water and baptism by fire are thus antithetical. While the former is a seal against the coming judgment by fire, the latter connotes that judgment (cf. Mt 3:10 par Lk 3:9 and Mt 3:12 par Lk 3:17).

But did John in addition to speaking of baptism by fire also speak of the Spirit baptism? Actually, in the tradition of Mt 3:11 par. Lk 3:16 there is no saying concerning the motif of the Holy Spirit, certainly where John is concerned. Besides, John's proclaiming a Spirit baptism assumes that he preached not only judgment but also salvation for which there is no evidence. Additionally, it is unlikely that John saw himself as the forerunner of a coming Messiah or eschatological figure "who would baptize with the Holy Spirit" since in the Jewish conception the bestower of the Spirit is God and not the Messiah or the Son of Man. On these grounds Lohfink believes that John proclaimed a fire baptism which is the sign of coming judgment but not a Spirit baptism. Nevertheless Christian tradition tended to see John as the forerunner of Jesus and there was a strong tendency to borrow John's baptism. In the antithetical statement "I have baptized you with water, but one comes after me who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (cf. Mk 1: 7f), both these tendencies are brought together."<sup>38</sup>

The question still remains as to why after Easter Jesus' disciples went back to John's baptism. Lohfink gives two theological reasons

for it. The situation of John the Baptist closely resembled that of the early Church. John's baptism was a onetime reality because of its eschatological significance. John's baptism was the final chance and call for Israel. The early Church saw this final call in the person of Jesus. The early Church like John perceived that it was sent to the "house of Israel". Like John it was also eschatologically oriented. Along with this it manifested also an ecclesiological consciousness. The early Church thus waited for the end and gathered together the true Israel before that end.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus did not baptize because John's baptism was constitutive of divine judgment while divine salvation was constitutive for Jesus. While John called for repentance because judgment was near, Jesus called for repentance because salvation was near. The early Church could take over John's baptism because it could modify it by giving it a new content with all that is new in the proclamation of Jesus in this regard.<sup>40</sup>

There are also other differences in Christian baptism from John's baptism. A fundamental difference is that it now becomes a baptism in the name of Jesus and no longer involves a confession of sins but a confession that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and later that Jesus is Lord. Baptism in the name of Jesus thus involves a soteriological significance which establishes a relationship of salvation between Jesus and those baptized in his name. Through baptism thus Christians become part of the salvation and redemption Jesus has achieved.<sup>41</sup> In conclusion underlining the specificity of Christian baptism Lohfink states:

Early Christian baptism was not simply a continuation of John's baptism. It moved from being a sign of God's coming (future) judgment to the proclamation that in Jesus salvation had already broken into history.<sup>42</sup>

#### **IV. The Discussion on Relevance of Pauline Teaching on Baptism in India**

After having seen the origin and specificity of Christian baptism we shall now turn to the way Christian baptism has been discussed and evaluated as part of Christian existence and mission in India in contemporary theological writings as this must form part of the

context of re-appraisal and possible rediscovery of its significance for us today.

### **Positions on Baptism in India: Largely Negative with some Positive Ones**

Much debate has taken place on baptism in the Indian Church in the last few decades which has produced conflicting opinions on them, most of them being negative. Thomas Mar Athanasius, gives us a summary of these views<sup>43</sup> mostly basing himself on the N.C.C.I. Consultation in Nasrapur in 1966 on the mission of the Church in contemporary India as well as on the outcome of the Biennial Council of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society Consultation in 1977 on the meaning of conversion and baptism in the cultural context of India both of which are important in this connection. Many of these views have continued to be voiced in the ongoing debates on the issue in India especially in theological circles. A brief consideration of these would be pertinent for our discussion on the relevance of Paul's teaching on baptism in the Indian context today.

We shall list below the more important of the divergent positions that emerged in the above consultations. Speaking generally, although some of the interpretations of the Pauline baptismal texts are based on sound exegesis there are others which contain one-sided approaches. These particularly concern those which fail to see the intimate connection between faith and baptism in justification and salvation as well as those which deny the role of baptism in effecting membership in the Church.

Thus it is stated correctly that baptism is participation in Christ. We carry out baptism with water in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. For the washing away of sins, we are baptized by one Spirit into one body. It brings Christians into the life of the universal Church and into the visible community of the local Church. Baptism is a commitment and witness to Jesus Christ. It is both God's gift and human commitment.<sup>44</sup>

There are some who consider Christ's death as the ground of Christian baptism. What is of importance in baptism is not the act of water-rite, nor the elements, but one's identification with the death

and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> The believer's union with Christ in baptism is clearly indicated in terms like 'into Christ', 'with Christ' 'in the name of Christ'.<sup>46</sup> Baptism is also incorporation into the Church; it is closely linked with God's redemptive work in Christ.<sup>47</sup>

Most seem to affirm that Christian baptism is different from Jewish baptism and pagan rites.<sup>48</sup> It is the expression of the universal dimension of the Christian gospel, a symbol of the missionary charge of the Church.<sup>49</sup> St. Paul relates baptism with the dying and rising with Christ. It manifests a point of turning. It is not the rite that is important in baptism but the conversion experience of which it is an expression.<sup>50</sup> It is mobilization in the service of Christ. To live a life of death and resurrection in the world for the sake of the world is the vocation of a Christian. The place of baptism is within this call.<sup>51</sup> The acceptance of Christ involves the acceptance of the Church as well.<sup>52</sup> As the instrument of Christ's salvation, the Church is to present Christ and to bring the world to faith in him.<sup>53</sup> One's faith in Christ is sealed by baptism. It is necessary to recapture the deep significance of baptism as the sign of conversion to Christ, as the sacrament of faith in him, and our sharing in the paschal mystery of Christ. This calls for a thorough preparation for it. For this the Second Vatican Council's decision to restore the Catechumenate (*Ad Gent.* 14) must be implemented which should be seen not only as a time of instruction but of formation in the living according to Gospel teaching.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to these conflicting positions several of which are based on somewhat one-sided exegesis of NT texts concerned, this literature highlights several questions that the practice of baptism has produced in the Indian context which need to be dealt with.<sup>55</sup> These include:

1. Whether conversion and becoming a Christian should mean ceasing to be a member of one social community and joining another?
2. Whether the convert should leave the religious group to which he belonged
3. What aspects of his culture and social life the convert should be asked preserve and be helped to use as the means for the expression of Christian faith?

4. Is it possible for one to be a Hindu Christian or a Hindu disciple of Christ?
5. What are the fruits of conversion for the individual who undertakes it?
6. How the renewed life of the convert must effect a change in his or her environment?<sup>56</sup>
7. Can we conceive of a Hindu Church which confesses Jesus?<sup>57</sup>

Some of these questions have been discussed and responded to and may be mentioned. The radical proponents of certain of these positions take baptism as a corollary to the question of conversion. These theologians invariably consider baptism to be the rite of initiation into a new religious community. Hence the pertinent questions for them about baptism are these: (1) whether a convert should be asked to join a church; and (2) whether it is necessary to have such a rite as baptism for admitting one to a church.<sup>58</sup> One can distinguish at least two groups among these thinkers: (1) Radical rejecters of baptism; (2) Theological rejecters of baptism for social harmony.

### **(1) The Radical Rejecters of Baptism**

The first group is made up of the following figures who have a visceral dislike of baptism and the resultant Church as a separate institution which they consider a distortion of the gospel. While there are differences in their conceptual opposition to conversion-baptism all are characterized by a negative attitude to it.

1. Thus, Dr. A. J. Appasamy basing himself on the experience of Sadhu Sundar Singh rejects baptism and emphasizes that the road to conversion should lead from the longing for God, not feeling of guilt. More than the experience of forgiveness of sins it is peace that should be emphasized in a conversion. Appasamy also thought that there are many teachings and ideals in the ancient scriptures of India "which have to be zealously assimilated and carried on to their natural culmination in Christ."<sup>59</sup>

2. V. Chakkarai, along similar lines, says that the conversion should be the result of the fascination of the personality of Jesus and stresses the direct experience of Jesus in conversion and in

Christian life. He believed that salvation happens in all religions but at the same time he considered Jesus to be the only saviour. To the question why Christ should be preached if people could be saved in any religion his answer is that no one should be asked to prefer Christianity to Hinduism unless God himself gives a call for change of religion.<sup>60</sup>

3. P. Chenchiah, going further, has stated that “Christianity took a wrong gradient when it left the kingdom of God for the Church. Christianity was a failure because we made a new religion of it, instead of a new creation”.<sup>61</sup>

4. Kaj Baago who is manifestly the most extreme in this group advocated a reversal of the process of conversion to Christianity. He thus speaks of voluntary conversion of Christianity to Hinduism.<sup>62</sup> The missionary task for him is to leave Christianity and go into Hinduism and Buddhism<sup>63</sup> accepting these religions in so far as they are not at variance with Christ, “regarding them as the presupposition, the background and the framework of the Christian gospel in India.”<sup>64</sup>

## **(2) Theological Rejecters of Baptism for Social Harmony**

There are however other theologians who though they do not go to the extent of most of the above writers in their rejection of baptism still deemphasize it in the interests of social integration and harmony and for this purpose look for a new way of conceptualizing ecclesial existence.

They fight against the interpretations of baptism that have contributed to the image of Christians as a people with a separate communal identity. Since baptism, according to them, is incorporation into the one new humanity which Jesus has brought into being, it must mean identification with the new humanity which eschews all kinds of exclusiveness. It demands commitment to belong to the whole humanity redeemed by Christ. Hence there should be no exclusiveness or divisiveness associated with baptism.<sup>65</sup> The traditional understanding of separation which has created the impression of the ‘baptised’ being a loss to his original Hindu or Muslim family or community calls for radical rethinking. Separation



from one's community will be required only if by belonging to that community the person lives in sin or participates in evil....This requires a reinterpretation and re-structuring of the Church. The Christian congregation has to develop the form of a more open community with traits of belonging to the whole community. This also calls for a rethinking of the Indian Church's attitude and relationship to the cultural, social and religious legacy which has shaped the people of India.<sup>66</sup>

If the baptized Hindu or Muslim is lost to his or her original Hindu or Muslim family as happens, this raises the need for radical rethinking on baptism as part of the fulfilment of the mission of the Church in India. In our cultural context, baptism has tended to become a social rite which is considered by many as objectionable and unnecessary. It is as if baptism has become in the Indian Church like circumcision in the early Church. Some point out that conversion as a movement from one social community to another is peculiarly Indian.<sup>67</sup>

In this connection Richard W. Taylor opines that on the assumption that Baptism *has* become tainted in our culture, we should look at and think about acknowledging the lordship of Jesus Christ in Hinduism.<sup>68</sup> In similar terms M.M. Thomas pleads for "the need for accepting the total milieu of Hindu religious community with the secular impact made on it as the contemporary context for the formation of fellowships of Word and Sacraments 'linked explicitly and decisively with Jesus' but remaining religiously, culturally and socially part of Hindu community."<sup>69</sup> He continues: "The Church in India can extend into the religious and secular communities of India only if we are prepared to recognize partial formation of Christ-centred fellowships as valid beginnings of the form of church life itself in these communities."<sup>70</sup> It is the only way in which the form of church life in India could be renewed. Otherwise the rigidity in the name of plenitude in a situation which is far from having plenitude will continue to pervert the Church into a closed religious community."<sup>71</sup>

### **(3) A Summary Assessment of these Positions**

I have given above a brief overview of the revolutionary thinking of a few thinkers on conversion and baptism and their implications in India. Their thought has been largely influenced, if not conditioned, by the context of religious pluralism and the 'resurgence' of non-Christian religions in our country in the last century. They have raised questions rather than answered or created or imposed patterns of belief or styles of living on Christians. In fact, by and large, their thinking has yet to affect the official policies of the churches in India or the opinions or attitudes of the generality of their members with regard to conversion and baptism.<sup>72</sup>

There are common features in the thinking of these people but also great differences. They all agree that conversion should bring about a renewal in life and that it should be a continuing process, even if it has a beginning in a specific experience or situation. For them conversion should facilitate access to a greater power of the Spirit and the yielding of its fruits.<sup>73</sup>

There are however several differences among them too. Some of them would regard conversion merely as turning to Christ and not relate it with baptism or membership of the Church. They would leave it to the convert to choose whether he should join any Church at all. Others would demand the convert to join the Church as the proper orientation or identification of purpose which must follow conversion. At the other extreme there are advocates of "Churchless Christianity" who think of the Church as the greatest liability for the gospel in India. But all are agreed that the convert should not become denationalized or cut off from his culture or lose his social identity.<sup>74</sup>

In this connection there are many who acknowledge Christ and believe in him, but reject baptism in their Hindu cultural context. Thus without becoming a non-Hindu, we find Hindus accepting important doctrines of Christianity. In evaluating these we cannot resist the conclusion that some of them have fully accepted Christ. They have experienced a drastic reorientation of their lives and values. Yet baptism is seen as inappropriate by them in the Hindu cultural context.<sup>75</sup>

Figures like Keshab Chandra Sen, Brhmabandhab Upadhyaya, Sadhu Sundar Singh were important as pioneers of such thinking. All these were drawn to Jesus and were devoted to him but did not feel the need to become a Christian in the sense of belonging to a Church. Although Brhmabandhab Upadhyaya, received baptism from the Church of England and was later re-baptized as a Catholic when he joined the Catholic Church, yet he did not fully belong to it in terms of his understanding of Christianity and remained a controversial figure vis-à-vis that Church. But he developed an understanding of Christianity and Christian theology that enabled him to remain within the Hindu fold. Sadhu Sundar Singh who did not believe in baptism still considered Christianity as the fulfilment of Hinduism. He clearly believed that the living Christ reveals himself to and illuminates the minds of non-Christians also.<sup>76</sup> To these one may add Subba Rao and the movement led by him which consists of many who accept Christ and believe in him but reject baptism in their Hindu cultural context.<sup>77</sup>

### **(3) Other More Recent Objections to Baptism**

In addition to the above categories which repudiate baptism for social-cultural reasons we must add the more recent objections against baptism coming from secular-minded theologians who either promote social liberation or inter-religious dialogue.

Thus there are extreme secular-minded theologians who pour scorn on both evangelization and administration of baptism as irrelevant and emphasize on the work of social liberation and upliftment. Similarly, those who promote inter-religious dialogue pressurize the churches to abandon or redefine its evangelizing mission for the sake of dialogue in a context of religious pluralism as they believe that the two cannot go together.

## **V. These Positions vis-à-vis the true Nature of Pauline Teaching**

While all these positions and reactions regarding the relevance of baptism in India raise certain concerns which must be taken into account in a fresh appraisal of it in the Indian context today, they have also to be scrutinized regarding the exegetical foundations on

which they are built. As mentioned above, the understanding and interpretation of the Pauline texts this literature offers, in some respects remain one-sided and hence inadequate. Thus much of the polemics against baptism in this literature, its undervaluing of baptism, are based partly on a misunderstanding of its nature and of the connection between faith, baptism and the Church. As it is, there exists a vital relation between faith, baptism and membership in the Church as our consideration of the teaching of Paul on faith and baptism above has already shown, despite the nuances of certain authors. In these polemical writings against baptism it is also asserted that what is important is justifying faith, and baptism has no connection with membership in the Church. However these can be seen as false in the context of our discussion of the Pauline texts.

In this connection it is significant that this close link between faith and baptism has also been affirmed by the Lima Document, the consensual landmark document among Christian Churches produced by the World Council of Churches in 1982.<sup>78</sup> It says:

Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift. It looks towards a growth into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). The necessity of faith for the reception of the salvation embodied and set forth in baptism is acknowledged by all churches. Personal commitment is necessary for responsible membership in the body of Christ.<sup>79</sup>

It thus affirms the link between faith and baptism. There is need of faith to receive this gift of God. Salvation is embodied in baptism and set forth in it and to receive this salvation faith is necessary. The vision therefore is clear. Faith is ordained to receive baptism and the salvation it embodies and sets forth. Justifying faith reaches its fullness and fulfilment in the reception of baptism.

The document also affirms the role of baptism as an initiatory rite that makes one a member of the Christian community. It incorporates one into the body of Christ and is the sign and seal of our common discipleship. As the Lima Document puts it:

Administered in obedience to our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and

with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity.<sup>80</sup>

Although our exposition of the Pauline texts on baptism and the above statements of the Lima Document of the World Council of Churches thus clarify the authentic nature of baptism against the one-sidedness of several opinions mentioned above, still we need to discuss the question of the relevance of baptism in India raised by a number of them. In this context the challenging statement of the editorial of *Religion and Society* while presenting these different divergent positions is pertinent. It says:

If baptism is to be retained in Indian Christianity, the churches that retain it should be constrained to find in it (or for it) a meaning that is strongly supportive of Christian life and faith. Otherwise, its liability to the Gospel in India can hardly justify its continued practice.<sup>81</sup>

## **VI. The Positive Relevance of Pauline Teaching on Baptism in India Today**

Taking up the pertinent challenge in this statement we shall in the following pages discuss two important considerations in favour of baptism which are not only “strongly supportive of Christian life and faith” as the editorial statement demands but will also richly contribute to the building up of a new society in India.

As just hinted at, it seems to me that there are at least two important aspects of baptism, a proper understanding and appreciation of which would enable one to rediscover the relevance of Paul’s teaching on baptism for us in India. These are: (1) The radical newness that it bestows on the recipient by giving him/her the indelible character of belongingness to the eschatological age by virtue of his/her incorporation into the death-resurrection of Jesus. (2) The radical equality that it creates among its recipients without abolishing the richness and beauty of their diversities. Both these are of great significance in the socio-politico-religious context of India. We shall reflect on these in some detail below.

## 1. The Radical Newness Given by Baptism

There is clearly a radical and significant newness that results from the faith-baptism reality, a newness that comes from the consequent incorporation into Christ which the NT characterizes in various ways. Through this reality God has in Christ introduced “a new covenant, a new life of the Spirit, a newness of life and of the Spirit, a new creation, a new lump, a new man born by the regeneration and renewal of the Spirit.”<sup>82</sup>

The newness in question is ultimately due to the Christ-event which introduces a new era in the world which reaches the individual who has encountered Christ in faith-baptism. Thus one enters the new era by faith and baptism which involves the historical and visible acceptance of the grace of redemption that happens there. As G. Gispert-Sauch clarifies, there is here a grace in the life of the Christian which one not only receives in the measure of his faith but which is characterized by a historical, eternal insertion into the mystery of the resurrection of Jesus. This reality is identified in traditional theology as the baptismal character. The catechumen who has already known the love of Christ for long and believes in him deeply is thus affected as something absolutely new when he undergoes baptism, the sacrament of faith. He receives the baptismal character. This marks him with a mysterious *spragis* sealing him as a member of the eschatological community (2Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14).<sup>83</sup> He is thus consecrated to God in a radically new way in the Spirit.<sup>84</sup>

This sacramental event, like the death and resurrection for Jesus Christ, of which it is a sort of tangible participation, is for the newly baptized his entrance into the eschatological era. All are called to this final definitive era and they will all experience it at the moment of their death by being sealed by a conformity to the death-resurrection of Jesus Christ, “whereby irrevocably and indelibly they are conformed to the image of the Son of God.” While in and beyond death all the elect are equally saved by being “baptized” into the death of Christ and the newness of the resurrection era will shine out in all the redeemed human-kind and the redeeming grace of Christ will pervade the total human personality of all and they will be totally transparent to the Spirit of God and will be invaded by him,<sup>85</sup> this same reality is given to those baptized in a mysterious but real sense.

According to Gispert-Sauch thus in the baptismal event this same eschatological and ultimate grace is given mysteriously, though tangible only to the eyes of faith yet really, to those called to be part of the community of the baptized. They are thus meant to be witnesses in this world of the eschatological event of the resurrection of Jesus. They thus possess in the darkness and imperfection of our pilgrim situation the grace that belongs essentially to the eschatological age. Although it is a sacramental possession of eschatological state which cannot be simply equated with its final consummation since a physical death which alone allows the fullness of the Spirit to work this consummation has not intervened, still in the sacrament the grace has radically affected the total personality involving the conscious and unconscious aspects of it.<sup>86</sup> It enables the baptized to experience the essential grace of consummation already now.

As Gispert-Sauch further explains:

The baptismal character expresses a new form of living God's new life, its eschatological *teleiosis* whereby the visible and total reality of man is made to enter into the final fulfilment of God's plan, the recapitulation of all things in Christ. This is done finally not by a secret or hidden allegiance, but by open profession and through a bath of regeneration."<sup>87</sup>

Regarding its presence and action the author thinks that above all this new reality in the baptized is manifest in the celebration of the Eucharist since it is here that the Christian relives his/her baptismal grace day after day. Here he/she proclaims the death and resurrection of Christ in the company of others, he/she experiences himself/herself as called to a definitive fellowship that is stronger than natural blood-brotherhood or sisterhood, a fellowship sealed in the blood of Christ. One knows oneself as forever called to this fellowship, which is also a real sharing in the body and blood in so far as it is a sharing in the sacrificial attitude of Christ whom one professes by one's belonging and whose death and resurrection one proclaims. Even if one's life of faith is a struggling one, one also experiences in one's life the strengthening power of the Lordship of Jesus and of his victory over evil forces. Both the Lordship of Christ over all and this sense of belonging definitively to him accompany one throughout one's life with all its struggles. One also knows that

one shares in this profession of the Lord with the fellowship of all the baptized of which one is part.<sup>88</sup>

Thus as Gispert-Sauch emphasizes:

“...his experience of grace is the experience of a God met in a divine friendship lived historically, eschatologically and in a community of faith and redemption” This experience, the author believes, “is essentially the expression of his baptism.”<sup>89</sup>

This is living out the sacramentally received final reality already here on earth and in this life which also sends the baptized to witness to it in love among one's brothers and sisters proclaiming to them the Good News of salvation.<sup>90</sup> This reality of the sacramental character understood correctly thus bestows a newness to the one who receives baptism which deeply affects him and gives him both a fellowship with the community of those who are similarly graced and a witnessing and proclaiming role of the eschatological reality to which all are called. His/her being graced in this new way also adds a new dimension of dignity to his/her personhood which is a sheer divine gift. It is therefore a gift that one may wish for all, one for whose realization one may work, out of gratitude for the divine gift one has received on the one hand, and out of love for one's brothers and sisters who have not yet received it in this way, on the other.

## **2. Baptism as the Provider of Equality**

The second consideration for the rediscovery of the relevance of baptism in India is its capacity for creating in its recipients a radical equality without abolishing the riches of their diversities and differences.<sup>91</sup> We shall consider this below.

Paul's conception of baptism sees it as constitutive of the Christian community which creates a unity of disciples who are equals out of diversities based on differences. As Paul tells the Galatians:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:27-28).



For Paul this was a fundamental Christian reality. It expressed the essence of the gospel and was implemented in the different Christian communities in embryonic ecclesial form.<sup>92</sup> It really meant liberation into a new humanity for them in which barriers of division whether of sex, race or social status are transcended.

Roger Haight, following Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,<sup>93</sup> uses the phrase “a discipleship of equals” to describe this situation. This phrase, as it is understood in feminist theology, is appropriate here because this equality does not do away with differences but builds a unity preserving the beauty of differences and diversity. In recent times this theme of equality in the Church has become very important universally. In our socio-politico-religious context in India it has in fact a particular sharpness, given the inequalities of the caste system which are so much part of India’s socio-cultural setting.

However, the case for equality in the Church must be made in the context of the reality of inequality in diverse areas that is actually a datum of common experience.<sup>94</sup> The Christian emphasis on equality is not blind to these but rests on the boundless love of God the creator. One aspect of God’s love for human beings is especially relevant at this point. This is the fact that God’s love for human beings raises them up to a new status of being the friends, the beloved, of God. Following an analogy that Martin Luther and Soren Kierkegaard<sup>95</sup> employed Roger Haight states that in the marriage of two persons of unequal social standing, the authentic love of one spouse raises the other spouse to his or her level. Here identity is not destroyed, nor the original negated. Instead the whole person is transformed by the love of the other and elevated, so that he or she shares in the dignity that the spouse has. Haight terms this recreative love, since it transforms the beloved. He affirms that the redeeming love of God that is revealed in the Christ-event is similar and in many cases it is realized historically too.<sup>96</sup> This happens in baptism where all irrespective of their identities and backgrounds are made children of God. The recreative love of God raises all up to the level of being God’s children. It thus establishes a true basis of both our identity as children of God and the equality of each. (Gal 3:27-28).

Jesus’ teaching on the love commandment also contributes to this situation. Human response to the love of God is defined by

Jesus in terms of two commandments, love of God and love of neighbour, which are linked together as the summary of the whole law (Mk 12,28-34). Quite in line with the love commandments, in Matthew's judgment parable what is done to the least of Jesus brethren is done to Jesus himself. It thus represents a kind of conflation between the love of God and love of neighbour. Love directed to God involves God's own, all the persons whom he has created and loves. It also means that love of fellow human beings for their sake transcends them and implicitly reaches their creator and Lord. Thus true love of God entails love of neighbor, and authentic self-transcending love of others implicitly includes God as its object.<sup>97</sup>

Based on these conceptions of the love commandments the Church is seen as a community that reflects the love of God for human beings and the return of that love to both God and one's fellow human beings. It is particularly emphatic in John: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13: 34-35). Even though the Christian community has never fully succeeded in realizing this injunction and is a long way from its realization, yet such teaching functions as a conscious part of being a Christian and acts as a judge. Besides, the dynamics of genuine and heroic love of God and neighbour actually manifest themselves from time to time in varying degrees. Thus in many Christian communities often differences among people are affirmed and received as blessings from God and often love transcends cultural, racial, and social barriers either spontaneously or in response to an explicit teaching. When equality is thus recognized and lived out so that it becomes a characteristic of actual ecclesial social life, this is understood and accepted as grace.<sup>98</sup> In every authentic ecclesial community its response to the love of God is proved genuine by love of neighbour. Thus when in this process "equality is affirmed and respected across diversity, when love raises up the other to an equality of personhood, there God is effectively present."<sup>99</sup>

Thus in baptism God's personal love establishes the identity and equality of each member by his or her becoming the child of God.

They are raised to this level which makes them equals. Self-transcending love of neighbour which recognizes this equality contributes to this equality and it becomes a sign of the church's authenticity. From this it follows that an authentic church should overcome differences that signal or lead to inequality.<sup>100</sup> It is thus that the church becomes a discipleship of equals realizing Paul's teaching in Gal 3:27-28.<sup>101</sup>

The discipleship of equals which baptism creates and a church struggling to realize in its ecclesial existence, needless to say, is indeed a great contribution to India. It can contribute greatly to our country by providing the basis for a community of equals in the context of grave denials of such equality in our inherited traditional culture, social system and world-view.

Both these perspectives of the Pauline teaching on baptism thus make this teaching indeed relevant for us in India: the first because of the grace of eschatological newness which bestows a deep dignity and a new fellowship as well as a vital mission to fulfil on its recipients by virtue of the baptismal character or identity that it imparts; the second because it provides the basis for a discipleship of equals that it creates which can greatly contribute to breaking down walls in the way of building a community of equals in India and to hastening its realization. These are thus both pearls of great price for India which the Pauline teaching on baptism provides.

## **VII. The Rediscovery of Baptism as Part of the Legacy of the Pauline Jubilee**

The above considerations which point to the profound and continuing relevance of the Pauline teaching on baptism in India in its socio-politico-cultural context call for the rediscovery of baptism as a divine gift that must be prized and promoted with a clarity of vision. This should be a part of the legacy of the Pauline Jubilee in India. However, this calls for a view of baptism as a compelling theological reality, one firmly belonging to the Church's multi-layered mission. It will demand of the Church firmness and resolve to stand by it in the face of formidable opposition against it which includes not only extra-mural socio-political opposition but also

intramural secular-theological objections both of which in fact have already created a crisis in its evangelizing mission in India.

## **The Present Actuality of Baptism in the Indian Church**

A glance at the present scenario in the Indian Church reveals the following picture in regard to evangelizing mission leading to baptism. On the one hand, there is the intrepidity of the charismatic and Pentacostal churches. They preach and baptize without any regard to consequences. This is not helpful because they are often imprudent in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of baptism which frequently leads to the whole of the Christian movement being branded as aggressive and insensitive. The apostolic courage they show is the positive factor in their activity but it is exercised imprudently and hence it damages the Christian movement. On the other hand, there is the extreme secularism of certain theologians who pour scorn on both evangelization and administration of baptism. As already mentioned, some of them pressurize the Church to abandon or redefine its evangelizing mission in the name of work of liberation and/or dialogue as they think these cannot go together.

Under their increasing impact there exists, in particular in the Catholic communion, a crisis in evangelization leading to the administration of baptism. Sometimes Church personnel bend over backwards to emphasize that evangelization and administration of baptism are simply not on their agenda in the exercise of the Christian mission, especially when some accusation is made against the Church in regard to conversion. All this reflects a certain lack of apostolic courage (cf. *parresia*, Acts 4:13.29.31 etc).

There is also involved in this position over-adaptation to an accusing public. It would seem that here it is the opposition which sets the agenda for the Church, not its own convictions of its missionary mandate or other theological considerations. The VHP, the Bajrang Dal, and the RSS, through their tactics of slander and defamation by trumped-up charges of forced conversions, by physical intimidation, orchestrated violence and destruction often with the connivance of the government are setting the agenda of such over-

adaptation for the Church. This involves apostolic cowardice which must be brought to an end.

The widespread pressures on the Church from secular theologians for abandoning or redefining its evangelizing mission in the name of work of liberation and/or dialogue must also be met. These demands are misplaced. Work of liberation must go on unhindered but it must also recognize the Church's mandate for integral evangelization.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, commitment to dialogue must accept and respect the identity of every religion and its self-understanding. When this is done, evangelization will not be seen as antagonistic to dialogue. It is pursuing the mandate the Church is under. While evangelization and the administration of baptism absolutely should not be forced on any one, they should not be abandoned in the name of dialogue either. To demand an abandonment of its evangelizing mission in this context is to demand of the Church the acceptance of religious relativism as part of dialogue which is unacceptable.

### **VIII. Conclusion: The Legacy of the Pauline Jubilee**

In the situation of multi-faceted opposition the Church must end the present situation of crisis and face the challenge posed by them by clarifying her mission and the place of baptism in it. With prudence and sensitivity, on the one hand, and with apostolic courage and clarity on the other, it must define its mission of evangelization, part of which includes the administration of baptism with full readiness to pay the price for it. The present situation of increasingly violent persecution, instead of intimidating the Church, should reinforce its resolve and motivation for its mission, knowing that it is led by the Spirit of God who strengthens it in its mission against all odds. Conversion leading to the administration of baptism to those who freely demand it after due and adequate preparation are fundamental human rights. It is also the fundamental human right of every person to be open to and accept such a new way of being and life as it involves the responsible exercise of human freedom.

This must of course be done without neglecting other aspects of the Church's varied and multi-layered mission. Hermeneutically speaking, within that vast expanse of the mission there is a good case for the Indian Church to prioritize in its mission the praxis of

the love commandment in its integrated two-fold reality as love of God and love of neighbor in our pluri-religious context which will strive for the integral liberation of all, co-operating with all people of good will for it. However, this should be done with a clarity of vision that in no way exhibits an apostolic cowardice because the going for integral evangelization is hard. It must be made clear both in our profession and practice that we would continue to be faithful to our divinely given missionary mandate to evangelize in its integral sense which entails bringing the divine gift of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone as and when God opens the door for it, but always with utmost honesty and authenticity in the manner in which it is done, as the highest act of love we can do for our brothers and sisters.

## Notes

1. Thus Subhash Anand, Professor of Philosophy and freelance theologian, in an article in the popular religious Biweekly "*Satyadeepam*" writing about the importance of the Pauline year for us in India, gives five reasons for it and quotes this statement of Paul in support of the first of these namely, an Indian Church free of striving for baptism in its mission (especially in the context of great resistance to it among sections of people) which he considers as a sign of inauthenticity. He goes on to observe that, since Paul is clearly the greatest missionary the Church has seen, his words are very important for us and so (following him) the church should consider its task to be to evangelize in a credible manner and not to baptize. He concludes this comment by saying that since very few people can do the former "people try to convince themselves of the worth of our work by counting the people we have baptized which in any case are not many". Cf. Subhash Anand, "Will St. Paul keep the Church in India Roman or Syrian," *Satyadeepam* July 16-31, 2008, 3.
2. The full text in the immediate context is: "Now I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ" Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius. so that no one can say that you were bap-

tized in my name (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.). For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.” (1Cor 1:10-17, NRSV).

3. Thus Paul’s statement in v14 “I thank God that I baptized none of you” except the few he mentions “is to spotlight the absurdity of what was going on in Corinth..”, Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, (Hermeneia-A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible), Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1975, 36. Similarly, William F. Orr and James Arthur Walter, *1Corinthians*, Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York, 1976, 151, state: “To reinforce his emphasis that in no way should people show party preference for him, Paul expressed thanks that he had baptized so few of them. If he had baptized a significant number of the Corinthians, that possibility of divided leadership loyalty might have increased.” Likewise, Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (The New International Greek Testament Commentary) William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Cambridge, 2000) 140, quoting Chrysostom (*Homilies*, 3:6f) affirms its sense to be: “Baptism truly is a great thing; but its greatness is not the work of the person baptizing, but of Him who is invoked in the person.” Quoting Tertullian (*On Baptism*, xiv) he adds a complimentary point that the fact of Paul’s mention of his baptizing Gaius, Crispus, and the household of Stephanas (v16) demonstrates that “Paul did not belittle baptism or refuse to baptize converts”. He expresses thanks that only few “could claim that *everything* came from or through him”. In tune with the above views, Thiselton contends the overall sense of the statement to be: “Ministry remains a shared partnership and points away from itself to that which it bears witness.” (Ibid).
4. “If I proclaim the gospel this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel”. (1 Cor 9:16).
5. As Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 36-37, states: “The explanation in v17a does not devalue baptism, but defines the personal commission to which Paul is subject. Baptism can be administered by anyone. *He* has to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal 1:16). To wander about as a baptizer would be a nonhistoric mode of existence. His task is nontransferably historic.” Similarly, William F. Orr and James Arthur Walter, *1Corinthians*, 151, who observe: “This should not be pushed to mean that Paul felt that baptism was of secondary importance and more or less dispensable.” They point out that later (12:28-30) he dis-

tinguishes among various offices in the church and recognizes that different persons perform different offices." Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 145, following C. Senft *Première Epître*, 36 adds: that there is neither criticism of baptism nor devaluing of eloquence in v 17 "when each genuinely places the cross at the centre of the stage, but Paul attacks any use of them which *isolates* them from the cross as acts or events in their own right."

6. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology A Brief Sketch* (Second Edition) Prentice Hall Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1989, 86.
7. Fitzmyer actually thinks that the formulas Paul uses in Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3 may reflect primitive baptismal creeds, *Paul and his Theology*, 86.
8. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 87. However James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998, 455-57, considers baptism more as a "metaphor for being baptized into Christ" and "baptized in the Spirit". Nevertheless, he accepts its role as the final step in the "*ordo salutis*", the order of salvation, based on Rom 10:14-17 and Gal 3:1-2. The different elements in this order include: first, "the preaching of the gospel by the one duly commissioned by Christ"; second, faith, "the believing response of the individual to the gospel so preached" which involves the acceptance of what has been preached and believed into and the faith as commitment, the complete reliance on the one proclaimed as the Lord; the third, the reception of the Spirit at the point of believing hearing (Gal 3:2). In this context Dunn concedes that, based on Rom 6:4 and Col 2:12, baptism is in some sense the medium through which God brings the baptizand into participation in Christ's death and burial. In this process then baptism is the moment and context in which all these elements come together "so that the image of "baptized into" Christ is given its deeper resonance". But he also cautions in this context that a theology drawn from Paul should be careful about two points namely, (1) to include all elements and aspects of "the crucial beginning event of salvation" mentioned so as to retain its wholeness and richness; (2) to note "the relative weight and emphasis Paul placed on the different elements and aspects in different contexts". J. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, (The Anchor Bible, Vol 33) Doubleday, New York London, 1993, 430-31, however, insists that for Paul baptism is not just a supplement to faith, "for in baptism the risen *Kyrios* exercises dominion over Christians who by their faith recognize his lordship and live their lives as a consequence of faith in him, acknowledging thereby their obedience to this *Kyrios*." He also affirms that Paul does not directly deal with the relation between faith



and baptism but takes it for granted that Christians who put their faith in Christ undergo baptism. (Ibid).

9. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, (WBC, 41) Word Book Publisher Dallas 1990, 155, observes that there is a parallelism of "*pantes*" (all) in 3: 26 and "*hosoi*" (as many as) in v27 which sets a parallelism of what is said in each sentence also. Thus "your faith in Christ Jesus" is paralleled by "you have been baptized into Christ." This clearly affirms the close connection between faith and baptism. Yet such connections should not blind us to the fact that these are two distinct features of the one complex Christian initiation. Each has its distinct function in making us children of God as Christians without these being confused or amalgamated, "as though, for example, baptism serves the same function as faith and so makes faith unnecessary, or conversely faith serves the same function as baptism and so makes baptism unnecessary... Faith in Christ is that which results in acceptance before God and the gift of God's Spirit (cf. 3:1-5); baptism is the outward sign and heavenly seal of that new relationship established by faith."
10. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 158, following E. Betz, points out that the statements in Gal 3:26 and 27-28 come from the "sayings" and "confessional statements" in the early Church respectively. In these Paul finds the essence of the Christian proclamation that "in Christ Jesus" there is a new "oneness" that breaks down all former divisions and heals injustices. The "in" of the equation is local and personal. Thus "Christ Jesus" is viewed in universal and corporate terms and "faith" and "baptism" describe the manner of entering into this state of being "in Christ".
11. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology* 87. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, (WBC 38A) Word Book Publisher Dallas, 1988, 329, thus understands this in terms of the Adam-Christ typology. According to this "the condemnation of all in the present age is that they follow through and reproduce Adam's death, but can share also in Christ's. That is to say: "Jesus is the *only* one who, having reached the end of this age of Adam, broke through the road-end barrier of death into the age beyond; who, having died Adam's death as an act of obedience, rose to a new life beyond. Christ's death and resurrection thus provide the doorway-for Paul the only doorway-through death to life, from this age under the power of sin to the new age free from sin. To make the transition from old age to new age, from sin through death to life, one must as it were be carried through by Christ's death in all its degradation and suffering, as sacrificial offering and act of obedience. Only those who make themselves one with his death can hope to experience

the life which is his life in the new age beyond. Now that the righteousness of God has been revealed as his saving act in Christ, the faith which God counts as righteousness, the eschatological faith appropriate to this new state of affairs, is faith in Christ, is the entrusting of oneself to the crucified (3:21-26)." The statement in 6:4 which says: "we were buried with him through baptism into death" completes this conception. Paul here tells his readers "that the means by which their identification with Christ's death was achieved was baptism. Paul could be understood to mean that he saw the ritual act as an "effective symbol" which achieved the identification sought, with baptism as an act of immersion seen as mirroring Christ's burial and so as symbolizing the burial of the baptized with Christ." J. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 434, speaking of Rom 6:4 adds, "The baptismal rite symbolically represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; the person descends into the baptismal bath, is covered with its waters, and emerges to a new life. In that act one goes through the experience of dying to sin, being buried, and rising to new life, as did Christ".

12. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 87. Idem, *Romans*, 435, speaking of Rom 6:5 affirms that the future in the second part of the verse ("we shall be also united with him through a resurrection like his") is a gnomic future expressing a logical sequel to the first part of the verse ("if we have grown into union with him") "for baptism identifies a person not only with Christ's act of dying, but also with his rising." It describes a share in the risen life of Christ that the justified Christian already has as a result of the Christ-event.
13. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 87. Similarly, Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 997; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina, Vol. 9) (ed) Daniel Harrington, S.J., The Liturgical press Collegeville, 1992, 143, in this connection states that "all the baptized form a single person in Christ: they are a new creation."
14. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 87.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid, 87; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 453-44, following James D.G. Dunn, however holds that in 1 Cor 6:11 we should interpret "baptismal" in the broadest terms which refers to the great spiritual transformation of conversion in which baptism is only one element in the complex which Dunn terms conversion-initiation.
17. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 87. Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, 142, points out that the "for" (*gar*) with which Gal 3:27 starts shows

that this verse explains the final phrase of the previous one (3:26) and means that "believers are sons of God in Christ because they have been clothed with Christ in baptism." Galatians have reached this sonship because they are "in Christ" through faith (*dia tes pisteos*). This faith, while it includes the faith of the believer, is more than it as the definite article indicates. Matera calls it Christ-faith, the faith of Jesus Christ who gave himself upon the cross and in whom the Galatians believe. Paul views baptism as an act of being clothed with Christ. Baptism is the moment when "Christ, like a garment, envelops the believer." By this Paul is describing the righteousness which is conferred upon the believers at this point although he does not explicitly use that term here in the sense of 1Cor 1:30 where he terms Christ as our "righteousness and sanctification and redemption".

18. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 88.
19. Ibid, 8. Also, J. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 433.
20. J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 88-89.
21. Ibid, 89; J. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 433.
22. For details see, J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 89. Also, Idem, *Romans*, 437.
23. The second is seen in the phrase *syn Christo* which expresses the association of the Christian "with Christ" (1Thess 4:17) [significantly *syn kyriō*]; Rom 6:8; 8:32; 2Cor4:14), J. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 89.
24. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 89.
25. For details on different nuances of it see, Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 89-90.
26. Ibid, 89-90
27. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 89; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) Eerdmans Grand Rapids, 1987, 617, speaking of 1Cor 12:27 says that this verse applies the preceding imagery of the body (vv12-26) specifically to the church in Corinth "with emphasis on the many who make it up." When Paul says "you are the body of Christ" he means that "collectively in their common relationship to Christ through the Spirit they are his one body."
28. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 90-91.
29. Ibid, 91.

30. Ibid, 92. Fitzmyer observes that this represents "the term of Paul's christo-centric soteriology." (Ibid)
31. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 997-98, observes that while the previous verse (v12) concluded with Christ as the focus of unity this verse expands it "by speaking of the common agency and experience of one Spirit and one body as focused in the very baptism that proclaimed and marked their turning to Christ and their new identity as people of the Spirit". He further affirms that the "all" and the reference to the overcoming of the prevalent Jew-Gentile, male-female, slave-free divisions "reflect the reference to baptism in Gal 3:27-28".
32. Fitzmyer, *Paul and his Theology*, 97. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 795, observes that the phrase "Church of God" involves a stress that while the Church is in continuity with Israel as the people of God, as Paul emphasized in 10:1-22, yet it stands in discontinuity with it as if the people of God are partly redefined, although not in an exclusivist manner "since its roots and basis of divine promise and covenant remain in continuity with Israel's history."
33. An example of such hazy thinking on the origins of Christian baptism is the way Christopher Duraisingh, describes its origins. Cf. "Some dominant Motifs in the New Testament Doctrine of Baptism," *Religion and Society* Vol. XIX, No.1 (1972)14. 5-17. Among other things, the author states: "Recent religious-historical and phenomenological studies reveal that the early Christian era in Palestinian Greco-Roman world was 'a baptismal age'.....John baptised in a baptismal era. Jesus came to John in a baptismal age. Proselytes were added into the Jewish fold through parallel rites in a baptismal age. Thus the early church continued to baptize and theologise regarding the rite, all in an era in which the rite had cultural and religious meanings. The rite as such was a part of, and arose out of, the natural historical religious milieu. Christian baptism is therefore influenced by and patterned primarily upon the proselyte baptism and John's baptism, not to mention the influence of similar rites in the mystery religions and Jewish sect of the Essenes." (Ibid 6-7). The problem with such descriptions is that they clamp together phenomena which have huge differences among themselves and assume that they all have the same origins and similar significances.
34. Gerhard Lohfink, "The Origin of Christian Baptism", [trans. "Der Ursprung der christlichen Taufe," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 1(1976) 35-54.] *Theology Digest*, Vol 25 (1977) 131.
35. Ibid.

36. Ibid, 131-32.
37. Ibid, 132.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid, 133.
40. Ibid.
41. Lohfink thinks that compared to this understanding Paul's idea of being baptized into Jesus' death is a later development. (Cf. Gerhard Lohfink, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," 133).
42. Gerhard Lohfink, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," 133. This clarification of the origin and specificity of Christian baptism seems to offer a corrective to James. J. Dunn's relative de-emphasis of baptism since it is partly based on the fall of the history of religion school's emphasis on its connection with mystery religions (Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 445-46 for details) and substituting it with Jesus' metaphoric use of baptism as a reference to his death (Mk 10:38-39 + par) to understand Christian baptism as a metaphor for the believer's participation in the Christ-event, into the death of Jesus, along with a one-sided stress on the connection of the gift of sonship/daughterhood with the event of the gift of the Spirit. (For details see, Ibid, 447-55). The first is superseded by Lohfink's clarification of the origin of Christian baptism in John's baptism taken over by the early Church and utilized with radically new content. In this perspective the water-rite in baptism can be seen in a new light which can obviate Dunn's interpretation of it as more metaphoric than as a reference to the water baptism without necessarily denying the presence of the metaphoric sense in certain texts which are based on the basic reality of water baptism. The gift of sonship which Dunn connects with the event of the gift of the Spirit can also be linked to water baptism in the faith-baptism complex of the Christian initiation, as the Spirit is also bestowed therein as the culminating point of the elements of Christian initiation which therefore does not stand apart and distinct from it.
43. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion in the Context of Mission in India", *National Christian Council Review* Vol. 103 (1983)121-127.
44. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion", 123.
45. Christopher Duraisingh, "Some dominant Motifs in the New Testament Doctrine of Baptism," 13.
46. Ibid, 14. Following Gustaf Aulen, the author however claims that here there is no idea of initiation but rather one of total commitment to

Christ, the pioneer of new creation, and with him to the total community. The former motif leads to the motif of solidarity. From here he concludes that baptism is the basis of and starting point for the solidarity of all mankind. He asks if baptism is thus the basis of and starting point for the solidarity of all mankind and is a means of proclamation and establishment of a Christo-centric solidarity for all mankind, could insistence of a particular mode of *baptisma* be allowed to mitigate the unity of mankind and concludes that "this is the scandal and challenge of baptismal rite in India today." (Ibid, 14-15). This however is not the consensual understanding of these phrases but a particular interpretation. Besides, there are other Pauline texts which explicitly refer to baptism both as identification with Christ and incorporation into his body and as such as the means of initiation into the Christian community as we saw above. This view also seems to separate off the material elements and the water-rite away from the theological reality. It is a means of grace, it is a sacrament-an outward means by which an inner transformation in man is effected. They symbolize the invisible grace at work of identification with Christ and incorporation into his body. It is this integral perspective on the reality of baptism that this view lacks.

47. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion, 123.
48. Thus, T.V. Philip, "The Meaning of Baptism: a historical Survey," *Religion and Society* Vol. XIX, No.1 (1972)18, states: "Whatever might have been its antecedents, baptism as understood by the Apostolic Church was something unique, and it differed radically in its meaning from both the Jewish and pagan rites".
49. Ibid 19.
50. Ibid, 20.
51. Ibid, 28.
52. Ivan Extross, "Theology of Conversion and Baptism in the Indian Context", *Religion and Society* Vol. XIX, No.1 (1972)30. The author obviously represents the Catholic position.
53. Ibid, 32.
54. Ibid, 34.
55. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and conversion", 123-24.
56. D.A. Thangamany, "Views of Some Christian Thinkers in India on Conversion and Baptism," *Religion and Society* Vol. XIX, No.1 (1972) 37.
57. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion", 124.
58. D.A. Thangamany, "Views of Some Christian Thinkers", 38.

59. Ibid, 42-43.
60. Ibid, 45.
61. Ibid, 43.
62. Ibid, 46-47.
63. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion", 124.
64. D.A. Thangamany, "Views of Some Christian Thinkers", 46-47.
65. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion", 125; J. R. Chandran, "Baptism-A Scandal or a Challenge?," *Religion and Society* Vol. XIX, No.1 (1972), 58.
66. J. R. Chandran, "Baptism-A Scandal or a Challenge?", 58.
67. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion, 125.
68. Richard W. Taylor, "On Acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus Christ without Shifting Tents", *Religion and Society* Vol. XIX, No.1 (1972), 61.
69. M. M. Thomas's Letter to Bishop Newbigin dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 1971 in "Baptism, the Church, and *Koinonia*," Three Letters and a Comment, *Religion and Society* Vol. XIX, No.1 (1972), 74.
70. However bishop Newbigin in his reply to the letter of M.M. Thomas in this connection points out that the NT in 16 out of 18 instances of the use of "*koinonia*", (fellowship) employs it to indicate the quality of the life within the Christian communities and not in the sense Thomas uses it namely, to refer to the "new reality of the Kingdom at work in the world of men and in world history" while the remaining two instances (1Jn 6.7) are at least ambiguous. Besides, one of them (2 Cor 6:14) "emphatically denies that there can be any *koinonia* at all between believers and others". These observations are to the point despite Thomas' later attempt to claim support for his position from certain New Testament scholars like Bishop Robinson and Christopher Duraisingh without presenting the arguments for the same (cf. Ibid, [M. M. Thomas' Letter, dated 20<sup>th</sup> December 1971] 87-88.) Bishop Newbigin also criticizes Thomas for accepting the right of Hinduism to be a Hindu religious community with the Christ-centered groups within this community 'remaining religiously culturally and socially part of it' while denying the right of the Christian community to be such a community. He also criticizes Thomas' conception of such a Hindu Christianity as being unrealistic since a person of this type is actually a Hindu. If, at the same time his allegiance to Christ is accepted as *decisive* hence over-riding his obligations as a Hindu, this allegiance needs be expressed in visible and social forms which show

that he shares this ultimate allegiance with others and these must have religious, social and cultural elements. Thomas' thinking which eschews such concrete expressions is characterized by Newbigin as "docetic" in its conception of the church. Speaking particularly about the 'religious' elements here, those elements in the total complex which imply another ultimate than Jesus Christ need to be eliminated from what can be called a Christ-centered fellowship of faith. Although one may accept that wherever Christ is accepted as Lord the Church is present in some sense, yet there are other forms, structures, practices and beliefs which are more congruous with the Lordship of Christ than these. Newbigin further observes that the communal character of the Indian Church is a reflection of the communal character of Indian society as a whole and hence one forced up on it, a point which becomes clear when we note that elsewhere the churches, formed by the same western missions, do not have such a communal character, for instance in Japan. Cf. Bishop Newbigin's Reply, dated 17<sup>th</sup> November 1971, in "Baptism, the Church, and *Koinonia*," Three Letters and a Comment, *Religion and Society* Vol. XIX, No.1 (1972), 75.77-78.80.

71. M. M. Thomas's Letter to Bishop Newbigin dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 1971 in "Baptism, the Church, and *Koinonia*," Three Letters and a Comment, 74.
72. D.A. Thangamany, "Views of Some Christian Thinkers", 47.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid, 48.
75. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion", 125.
76. D.A. Thangamany, "Views of Some Christian Thinkers", 40-42.
77. Thomas Mar Athanasius, "Baptism and Conversion", 125.
78. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 11 World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1982.
79. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 3.
80. Ibid, 3.
81. *Religion and Society*, Vol XIX, No.1 (1972) Editorial, 4.
82. G. Gispert-Sauch S.J., "Grace and the Christian Call"??? G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J., (ed) *God's Word among Men, Papers in Honour of Fr. Joseph Putz, S.J.*, Vidyajyoti, 23, Rajniwas Marg, Delhi-110054, 1973, 171. Quoting Durwell the author says in this connection: "This newness is intimately related to the faith in Jesus the Lord and to the baptismal event, which is the Christian's mysterious participation in the death and resurrection of Christ." (Ibid).
83. The seal spoken of here should not however be understood as coming exclusively from baptism but with the complex of faith-baptism since both these texts according to several exegetes refer to the bestowal of the Spirit



which happens both in faith and in baptism In the *ordo salutis*, faith, participation in Christ, bestowal of Spirit, and baptism must be taken together with baptism as its culminating point. Spirit is given in all this with baptism marking its completion. Thus, Ralph P. Martin, *2Corinthians*, (WBC, 40) Word Books. Waco 1986, 28, commenting on 2 Cor 1:21-22 in the context of varying opinions for and against this reading says in its favor: "Barett makes out a better case for seeing here a comprehensive statement of the entire rite of initiation into the new life in Christ, involving conversion, faith, baptism and the reception of the Spirit." Similarly, in regard to Eph 1:13-14, Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, (WBC, 42) Word Books Dallas 1990, 40, underlines that "the "sealing" in this verse is a reference to the actual reception of the Spirit, a distinguishable event for the early Christians, since it was usually accompanied by observable phenomena (cf. Acts 8:17.18; 10:44-46; 19:6)". While admitting that this was closely associated with water baptism, he, following Caird (41), however observes that "we must not confuse the occasion with the event" and concludes that "the "seal of the Spirit" is therefore baptism of the Spirit, to which in the conversion-initiation process baptism in water was the reverse side of the coin, an expression of the faith to which God gives the Spirit"". And to receive the gift of the Spirit meant "to be stamped with the seal of new ownership, a stamp whose effects made visible who it was to whom the individual now belonged.", James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 453. However Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, 145, commenting on Gal 3:27 "Because you are baptized into Christ," rightly differs. While accepting the caution of contemporary authors against viewing baptism in isolation from faith, thus turning it into a sacral act which operates independently of faith, he thinks that this problematic owes more to Catholic-Protestant debates on the nature of the sacraments than it does to Paul's actual thought. He says: "If the apostle does not envision a sacrament that works independently of faith, neither does he envision a personal faith which effects its own salvation. Faith is made possible by the faith of Jesus Christ so that believers are saved by what Christ has done. Baptism is the means by which believers associate themselves with Christ's faith, thereby becoming incorporated into Christ". (For details see, *Ibid*, 141-47).

84. G. Gispert-Sauch S.J., "Grace and the Christian Call," 176-77.
85. *Ibid*, 177.
86. *Ibid*.
87. *Ibid*, 179.
88. *Ibid*.
89. *Ibid*, 180.
90. *Ibid*.

91. Rudolf C. Heredia, *Changing Gods Rethinking Conversion in India*, Penguin Books, London 2007, a significant recent work on the question of conversion in India by a committed Jesuit sociologist also affirms this positive dimension of religious conversions as a route to equality and human dignity especially for the Dalits and Tribals, in the face of caste oppression and social dominance for the former and cultural oppression and cultural dominance for the latter. (Cf. Ibid, 141-51; Also, *passim*, Chs 5; 6 and 7) The author however does not discuss the issue from the following biblical theological perspective which gives the question its true theological depth and legitimacy.
92. Roger Height, *Ecclesial Existence. Christian Community in History* Vol 3 Continuum International Publishing Group Inc New York London, 2008, 164. This equality in the midst of differences based on ethnicity, nationality, sex is reached through faith-baptism. It is thus a consequence of faith-baptism making people part of one body of Christ, the community of the Church. It is not a reality that all humanity possesses simply by the death of Christ but one which follows their initiation into the death-resurrection of Jesus through faith-baptism. It is this crucial factor that the opponents of baptism discussed above have missed out in their emphasis on the new humanity. While the new humanity is born in the death-resurrection of Christ it has to be appropriated through faith-baptism. Without it no one actually inherits it. Humanity participates in the new humanity and thus builds a universal community of unity and equality through faith-baptism where both these are appropriated.
93. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origin*, New York: Crossroad, 1983.
94. Roger Height, *Ecclesial Existence*, 175, interestingly describes it thus: "No lesson of human life can be clearer or more obvious than the fact that human beings are not equal. They differ in size, shape, weight, intelligence, talent, every kind of ability, character, temperament, and so on. Human beings are measured and judged, hired and dismissed, loved and hated, welcomed or shunned, exalted or humiliated, because they are different and unequal. Every individual is different, each one is unique; no two are equal; and that's a fact. Part of the glory of God lies precisely in God's infinite capacity for creating through natural processes difference and inequality. God has written inequality into God's own creation, and marvelously so".
95. See Martin Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian, Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, II, ed. George Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 27-28; Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (Princeton University Press, 1941), 438-40.

96. Roger Height, *Ecclesial Existence*, 175-76.
97. Ibid, 176.
98. Ibid, 176-77.
99. Ibid, 177-78.
100. Needless to say therefore that one's respect for diversities, though important, should never lead one to accept or even tolerate differences without dignity, especially man-made ones.
101. Ibid, 178.
102. Often in this connection reference is made only to Mt 28,16-20 which is an attempt to isolate the Matthaen formulation and thus to relativize it. The fact however is that all the gospels climax in the giving of the world mission as the final outcome of the resurrection encounters with the risen Lord (Cf. Mt 28,16-20; Mk 16,14-18; Lk 24,44-49; Jn 20,21-23). Besides, world mission is the core content of both the shorter ending of Mark (even though the whole text consists of just two verses) and the longer ending of Mark (Mk, 16, 9-20). Although the original ending of Mark did not have a commissioning scene of world mission, universal mission is built into the whole gospel, a datum which becomes clear, among other indications, especially at two points namely, Mk 13,10 which affirms that "... the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations" as a sign that would precede the return of the Lord in glory. Similarly in Mk 14,9 Jesus tells in prophecy defending the anonymous woman who anointed him with the costly ointment that "... wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." Both the texts thus exhibit the gospel's inherent conviction of the universal mission. Indeed one must affirm that not only the gospels but the entire New Testament is defined by a conception of universal mission at least implicitly and this also ties in with the universal redemptive significance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

As regards the mandate to baptize, while it is only Mt 28,18-20 and Mk 16,15-16 which explicitly demand baptism as part of the world mission, the rest of the texts of world mission seem to presuppose it. This becomes clear particularly from Luke's two-volume work. Thus, while the missionary charge in Lk 24, 46-49 does not mention explicitly baptism as part of the mandate the disciples receive, in the Acts when this mission is operationalized after the disciples' reception of the Spirit, repentance and baptism are what is demanded of those who are persuaded of the apostolic proclamation (Cf. Acts 2,38.41; 8,12.13.36.38; 9,18; 10,48; 16,15.33; 18,8; 19,5).

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