

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011, 77-98

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.4269668

Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4269668>

# **Conviction, Commitment and Creativity: Philosophising in the Contemporary Indian Christian Context**

**Kuruvila Pandikattu S.J.**

Papal Seminary, Nagar Road, Pune 411014

**Abstract:** This paper proposes, to Indian Christians, a method of philosophizing in the Indian context, responding to the context of subaltern people, variety of religions, openness to society and the world, and especially the findings of contemporary scientific research.

**Keywords:** Philosophizing in Indian context, Indian Christian, subaltern, interreligious dialogue, response to scientific research.

India is poised to become an information society and a “knowledge power.”<sup>1</sup> Given the fact that an Indian has been traditionally an “Argumentative Indian”, with a theoretical orientation and scholarly mindset, it is not surprising that Indians were the first to discover zero and to reach tremendous philosophical depth, even in ancient times.

So this paper attempts to offer some guidelines for philosophising for Christian leaders in India. It pleads for a philosophising that takes into account the contemporary context of India and is rooted in the basic Christian experience.

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<sup>1</sup> See the call of the Prime Minister in “Unleash a Decade of Innovation Indian PM Manmohan Singh to Scientists.” See [http://wn.com/Unleash\\_a\\_Decade\\_of\\_Innovation\\_Indian\\_PM\\_Manmohan\\_Singh\\_to\\_Scientists](http://wn.com/Unleash_a_Decade_of_Innovation_Indian_PM_Manmohan_Singh_to_Scientists). accessed March 12, 2009.

To begin with, I take up three issues which I believe are central to philosophizing in the context of Indian Christianity: subalternity, inter-religiosity and openness to the world. The next section deals with the openness to the world, essentially as openness to the world of science and technology. This is because in the contemporary situation science and technology are radically changing not only our life-style, but also, at a deeper level, our world-view. Then I take up the classical division of philosophy as reflection on the world, on humans and on God, and see how the emerging scientific world poses new questions and offers novel opportunities in our philosophical appraisal of the world, humans and God.

Finally I argue that only when we as Indian Christians can weave a story in consonance with our faith commitment, intellectual depth and contemporary relevance, will our story be adequate. Without such an adequate reformulation of our Indian Christian story, what is at stake, I believe, is the very destiny of Christianity in India.

## **1. Subaltern Perspectives**

In this section we focus on our first priority or perspective, as Indian Christianity in terms of the privileged position of the subaltern, or the “preferential option” for the poor and marginalized, that is characteristic of the Christian message.

Christianity has experienced and lived out God’s option for the poor. It has proclaimed a God who liberates the oppressed and takes sides with the marginalized. In spite of the institutionalization that the Church has gone through and the political and cultural power that the Church has exercised, throughout the history of the Church it has

championed the cause of the marginalized and stood for their cause, right from its beginning when Christianity was mainly a religion of the outcasts and the slaves.

It was this experience that led the Church in the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America to articulate liberation theology, which mainly focused on the material welfare of the economically exploited, in order to achieve their full salvation, which is also essentially spiritual. In the 1980s in India this movement was very strong, and was represented by stalwarts like George Soares-Prabhu,<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Kappen,<sup>3</sup> Samuel Rayan,<sup>4</sup> Kurien Kunnunpuram,<sup>5</sup> etc.

Continuing this concern and commitment, the Church in India has taken the side of the marginalized in the contemporary world: the Tribals and the Dalits. Not only has the Christian message found ready acceptance by the Tribals and Dalits, they have gained considerably from the

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<sup>2</sup> Soares-Prabhu, George, and Francis X. D'Sa. *Theology of Liberation : An Indian Biblical Perspective*. Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series. Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> See Kappen, Sebastian. *Jesus and Freedom*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977 and Kappen, Sebastian, Philip Mathew, and Ajit Muricken. *Religion, Ideology, and Counter-Culture : Essays in Honour of S. Kappen*. Bangalore, India: Horizon Books in association with Asha Kendra, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Rayan, Samuel, T. K. John, and Gujarat Sahitya Prakash (Anand, India). *Bread and Breath : Essays in Honour of Samuel Rayan, S.J., on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birth Anniversary*. Series XI – Jesuit Theological Forum Reflections. Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Kunnunpuram, Kurien, and Bombay Saint Paul Society. *The Eucharist and Life : Indian Christian Reflections on the Lord's Supper*. Mumbai: St Pauls, 2006.

Church's commitment to them. That is why it is no wonder that people fondly remember the works of great missionaries like Constant Lievens or Hans Hendricks in Chotanagpur. So we can understand that 33% of the Tribals in India are Christians, who constitute 8.2% of the Indian population. Coming to the Dalit scene, the explicit Christian commitment to the Dalits can be traced to the last thirty years. Dalits who constitute 16.2% of the Indian people feel affinity to the Christian message that stresses the unique dignity and personhood of each individual. So it is understandable that 9% of the Dalits are Christians, whose concerns are taken seriously by the Christian Church.

Related to the priority for the subalterns are issues like folk traditions and popular religiosity. The poverty, injustice, exploitation that many of our people face is also a related issue.<sup>6</sup> In the next section we deal with the respect we need to give to other religions and the need for healthy interaction with them.

## **2. Interreligious Dialogue**

Another significant area of concern both for the Church and the world is a friendly and respectful relationship with other religions. Especially after 9/11 or 26/11, the future of the world, nay the very survival of humanity, is intimately tied with the way religions can relate and interact with one another.

Gone are the days we can use the rhetoric of a "clash of

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<sup>6</sup> It may be noted that today philosophy has taken seriously the insights and challenges from Social Sciences (Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, etc.).

civilizations.”<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately when some of the right wing group use such rhetoric to whip up religious feeling against another group, they are truly doing, unwittingly perhaps, great harm not only to themselves but to the whole world. In a world, which is so closely interconnected and where Hindus, Christians and Muslims form substantial groups of the population, there is no way, one can ignore or leave alone or annihilate the other. Sometimes the right wing rhetoric gives the impression that the only way of “winning against the enemy” is by defeating them intellectually and even physically.

In the world, where there are as many Catholics as Muslims, such a scenario of defeating the other is unacceptable. There is no way the world today can survive if the “clash of civilizations” between the so called Christian West and the Islamic or Hindu cultures were to occur. Thus the need of the hour is to enter into meaningful dialogue between religions, which respects their differences and diversity, and at the same time opens our eyes to the common destiny that humanity faces. For such a scenario to occur, dialogue, based on rational discourse and respect for each other, is a must.

In this context, the living dialogue that India has been practicing right from its inception is a classical case. The cases of Robert De Nobili and Joseph Constantius Beschi were new initiatives and enterprising initiatives from the part of the Christians. In the recent years numerous attempts by people like Abhshikatananda,<sup>8</sup> Bede Griffiths,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Huntington, Samuel P., and Lawrence E. Harrison. *Culture Matters : How Values Shape Human Progress*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Shirley du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishikatananda*, (Orbis Books, New York 2005)

Raimundo Panikkar<sup>10</sup> have focused on the need and vitality of such inter-religious encounters.

Today the Church in India is aware also of the need to take dialogue beyond the advaitic/brahminic tradition to the level of the ordinary people. So religious dialogue at the level of the folk traditions, taking into account the way of life of the common people, needs to be undertaken.

Such a dialogue will still focus on the theological content of different religions, but it will be based more on the experience of ordinary people with different religious traditions and experiences, meeting and living together. So, based on our rich and multifaceted Indian tradition, we can expect interreligious dialogue as a living and vibrant reality.

There we need to take up various issues like tolerating intolerance, and the mysticism of the marketplace, where the lived religion becomes dialogical. In other words, we need to rediscover that dialogue is “a way of life”<sup>11</sup> in the Indian context and that it involves the market place. Obviously the atheists and a-theists also will have something to contribute to our collective search.

So given the experience of Indian life and tradition, for

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<sup>9</sup> Pandikattu, Kuruvila. *Religious Dialogue as Hermeneutics : Bede Griffiths' Advaitic Approach to Religions*. Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series IIIb, South Asia. Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Abhishiktananda, and Raimundo Panikkar. *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary(1948-1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom H. Le Saux)*. 1st English ed. Delhi: ISPCK, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> See Kuruvilla Pandikattu, *Dialogue as the Way of Life: Bede Griffiths' Attempt at Integrating Religions, Cultures and Sciences*, Mumbai: Zen Publications, 2001.

us contemporary Christians, without in any way diluting our basic experience in Jesus and his saving action, it is no exaggeration to say that “to be religious is to be inter-religious.” For without such an attitude of committed openness, no religion, and our human society itself, can survive.

### **3. Openness to Society**

One of the fundamental Christian attitudes is that we are basically open to the world and affirmative of it. We are in the world. Though we may not be always for the world and its values, Christians are called to be deeply committed to the world and to find the presence of God in the world, which is totally created by God, who found it good.

Thus by our openness to the world and the worldly concerns, we accept that “Only when we affirm and accept the world can we assess it.” The things around us are not always ideal. There is so much evil and unnecessary pain and suffering in the world, which we should try to eliminate. Thus against the prevalent injustice in the world, there is need to be counter-cultural and to be prophetic, specially to take the side of the victims. So we are called to be part of our own future destiny by critiquing it, by suggesting alternatives, guiding it and also by appreciating and affirming it. So our Christian commitment urges us to guide and foster the things in the world based on our experience that God loves us unconditionally. It also urges us to learn from the world the mysteries of God and of human beings and so direct the world towards the Kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The relation between the world and the kingdom of God is a

Related to this issue is the phenomenon of globalisation that we encounter today, makes this concern all the more grave and even dangerous at times. Today we just cannot live in the safe and secure world of the frog's well. We are all threatened alike; we are also secured together. In fact in the globalised world of ours, the tendency for uniformisation and homogenisation is strong, which we need to resist. So as Christians, with our catholic vision, we need to reaffirm that "diversity defines us and not divides us." In the following section, when we deal with philosophizing, it may be noted that we limit our treatment of openness to the world only to science and technology, because of the paucity of space.

#### 4. The Emerging Reality

In a general way, we can understand philosophizing as a reflection on God, world and human beings. As humans it is imperative that we ask basic questions like: "Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?"<sup>13</sup> To simplify: when human beings ask, carefully and critically, questions about themselves and the world around, they are philosophizing. If "every understanding is self-understanding," then every considered question is an attempt to understand something more and to embrace reality even more. Thus basically all of us are philosophers and the living out of life is philosophizing. Philosophising is in fact, weaving a story that takes into consideration our basic aspirations, relating ourselves to the rest of the world

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dynamic and complex one, which cannot be taken up in this article.

<sup>13</sup> Encyclical Letter *Fides Et Ratio* Of The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II To The Bishops Of The Catholic Church On The Relationship Between Faith And Reason no. 1

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and to the Divine.

Traditionally philosophy has been subdivided as the study of the study of world, God and the self. It explores the nature of the world (e.g.: cosmology, metaphysics) and that of God (Philosophy of God, theodicy). Then it enquires into one's own nature (philosophical anthropology, epistemology, ethics, etc.). In this section we see how modern science has altered the way we understand these three broad subdivisions of philosophy.

### **a. Nature of Reality: Complexity**

The world in the last century has seen a dramatic transition from Classical to Quantum Mechanics. So the deterministic world of classical mechanics was very harmonious and even aesthetically beautiful. Such a world is irrevocably shattered by quantum mechanics, which definitely is the most successful theory humans have ever produced. And no one understands it.<sup>14</sup> So the questions to

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<sup>14</sup> "I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics." Richard Feynman, in *The Character of Physical Law* (1965). Further: "We have always had a great deal of difficulty understanding the world view that quantum mechanics represents. At least I do, because I'm an old enough man that I haven't got to the point that this stuff is obvious to me. Okay, I still get nervous with it.... You know how it always is, every new idea, it takes a generation or two until it becomes obvious that there's no real problem. I cannot define the real problem, therefore I suspect there's no real problem, but I'm not sure there's no real problem." Richard Feynman, in *Simulating Physics with Computers* appearing in *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* (1982) p. 471. We may also take note of the quote: "For those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum theory cannot possibly have understood it." Niels Bohr, quoted in Heisenberg, Werner (1971). *Physics and Beyond*. New York: Harper and Row. pp. 206.

See also "QM is THE most successful theory of the physical world

be raised are: With Quantum Mechanics, have we come to limit of our comprehensibility? Are we hovering between the “laws of the mind” and “laws of reality” that the classical philosophers thought are identical? So after Quantum Mechanics, we can no longer talk of “mechanical philosophy of nature,” but of a dynamic and evolving world.

To make the situation still more paradoxical or insightful, other recent theories like Theory of Chaos, Nanotechnology and Emergence make our understanding (nay non-understanding) of the world still more complex. Chaos theory is a mathematical theory that describes chaotic behavior in a complex system. It is the study of nonlinear dynamics, where seemingly random events are actually predictable from simple deterministic equations, which are heavily sensitive to the initial conditions.<sup>15</sup>

Nanotechnology is the engineering of functional systems at the molecular scale. It is manipulating matter on an atomic and molecular scale. Generally, nanotechnology deals with structures sized between 1 to 100 nanometer in at least one dimension, and involves developing materials or devices within that size. Quantum

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that humans have invented up to now and no experimental observation so far has contradicted it. So that alone is a very strong argument that we DO understand QM. However, if we ask if we understand how QM comes up with all the correct predictions of what nature does, or if there's anything underlying all the QM's predictions, then no, we don't.” <http://physicsandphysicists.blogspot.com/2007/04/no-one-understands-quantum-mechanics.html>

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The butterfly effect is a metaphor that encapsulates the concept of *sensitive dependence on initial conditions* in chaos theory; namely, a small change at one place in a complex system can have large effects elsewhere. Although this may appear to be an esoteric and unusual behavior, it is exhibited by very simple systems.

mechanical effects are very important at this scale, which is in the quantum realm.

Nanotechnology is very diverse, ranging from extensions of conventional device physics to completely new approaches based upon molecular self-assembly, from developing new materials with dimensions on the nanoscale to investigating whether we can directly control matter on the atomic scale.

Emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions. Emergence is central to the theories of complex systems. This studies how highly complex phenomena, like volcanoes or human intelligence, can arise from simple facts like atoms.

Thus given the present state of scientific knowledge we can safely conclude that the nature of reality (including our own bodies) is far more complex than we normally assume. Given the pace of scientific knowledge, we can safely assume that we will come up with astounding discoveries of the nature of the extremely complex reality in the near future.

## **b. Nature of Self: Consciousness**

Before understanding one's self and human nature, we need to raise the question: What is life? It used to be a problematic question till the last century. Though many scientists have attempted to recreate and explain life, it retained its inaccessible character till recently.

On the other hand, scientists have been trying to conquer nature and to take possession of the material world. They have succeeded in this attempt tremendously. The steam engine, the travel to the moon, and the theory

of the Big Bang are paramount examples of it. Such enterprises have also made the scientists feel proud of themselves and of human rationality. But as we have seen, quantum mechanics has enabled them to see that reality is much more complex than it was thought to be, and so, quantum mechanics, in spite of its great success, has been a humbling experience for many of the physicists.

Only recently, with the rather new disciplines like Genetics, Human Genome Project, Stem-cell research, could scientist advance to the next level: that of conquering life or taking life into their own hands. If the cloning of Dolly was the first example of it, the creation of artificial bacterium by Craig Venter's team<sup>16</sup> has captured best the imagination of the popular audience to the power of synthetic biology if not to explain, but at least to create life, the most prized prerogative of gods till now.

Moving to the understanding of human self (or personal nature), the Jesuit paleontologist had defined humans succinctly as "Evolution become conscious of itself." Sixty years ago, when biology was still at its nascent stage, it was a revolutionary self-understanding of humans. That we are not just products of evolution, but we are the evolution that has become self-conscious and in the process we have, at least metaphorically and conceptually, taken evolution into our own hands.

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<sup>16</sup> As reported in May 2010, Genome researchers Thursday unveiled the first bacteria strain with a man-made collection of genes. "This is the first self-replicating cell we've had on the planet whose parent is a computer," says team chief Craig Venter of the J. Craig Venter Institute in Rockville, Md., who called the bacteria "the world's first synthetic cell." See [http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/discoveries/2010-05-21-genome21\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/discoveries/2010-05-21-genome21_ST_N.htm). accessed Februry, 2011.

Today the scenario has altered much. Given the technological know-how (like stem-cell research and genetic engineering), we are in a position to intervene and manipulate genes, the basic building block of life. It is not very difficult, at least technologically, to produce not just transgenic or bionic animals, but further, it is possible for scientists to enhance the genetic structure of human beings. Some scientists have gone forward and begun talking about the creation of a new species, a trans Homo sapiens, which are called Transhumans or Extropians. They think that we can shape the next stage of human evolution, using the tremendous scientific and technological knowhow at our disposal.<sup>17</sup>

Further, today we are in a position to put an end to all of human life. And maybe even to the whole of life itself, given the biological, chemical and nuclear weapons we have at our disposal.

So today we need to redefine Teilhard de Chardin's remark as I suggest: Humans today are "Evolution capable of either eliminating itself or enhancing itself." Thus human nature, by definition, is an ever evolving one, a horizon that expands almost infinitely and in the process attempts to comprehend everything.

The next issue to be raised is the most intimate question: Who am I? This is the fundamental question of one's personal identity. In the last centuries, psychology, sociology and anthropology have helped philosophers to

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<sup>17</sup> Today the biologists want to take life into their own hands, just as physicists did with nature a century ago. The physicists have become humble today, and the biologists, I am sure, will experience the limits of their knowledge soon. Meanwhile, I am afraid, they can cause real and sometimes irrevocable harm to humanity.

nuance this question to explore the notion of personal and collective identities. Recently postmodernity has challenged many of the assumptions of human nature. The classical philosophy of mind also had shed light onto this question.

But the recent research into artificial intelligence and the connected robotics, brings into question the notion of personal identity again. Can robots think? Can a robot that defeats the chess champion and plays basket ball be considered as a thinking subject? The Turing Test (1950)<sup>18</sup> gives a way of answering this question and is still valid today.

Further, studies in cognitive science and neuroscience explore how the neuronal activities in the brain give us a sense of “identity” and self-understanding. The brain is the most precious and complex organ in our body. “It is unmatched in its ability to think, to communicate, and to

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<sup>18</sup> The Turing test is a test of a machine's ability to demonstrate intelligence. A human judge engages in a natural language conversation with one human and one machine, each of which tries to appear human. All participants are separated from one another. If the judge cannot reliably tell the machine from the human, the machine is said to have passed the test. In order to test the machine's intelligence rather than its ability to render words into audio, the conversation is limited to a text-only channel such as a computer keyboard and screen. By extrapolating an exponential growth of technology over several decades, futurist Raymond Kurzweil predicted that Turing test-capable computers would be manufactured in the near future. In 1990, he set the year around 2020. By 2005, he had revised his estimate to 2029.

The Long Bet Project is a wager of \$20,000 between Mitch Kapor (pessimist) and Kurzweil (optimist) about whether a computer will pass a Turing Test by the year 2029. The bet specifies the conditions in some detail.

reason. Most striking of all, it has a unique awareness of its identity and of its place in space and time. Welcome to the human brain, the cathedral of complexity.”<sup>19</sup> They experiment with the different regions in the brain using various mechanisms that tell us how our neural function enhances our self-awareness and leads us to the notion of “subject” and object. That will give us a more adequate picture of our consciousness (including self-consciousness).

### **c. The Nature of God: Completeness**

To understand and critique our understanding of God, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx have helped us much. In “The Future of an Illusion,” Freud described belief in God as a collective neurosis: he called it “longing for a father.” But in his last completed book, “Moses and Monotheism,” something new emerges. There Freud, without abandoning his atheism, begins to see the Jewish faith that he was born into, as a source of cultural progress in the past and of personal inspiration in the present. Close to his own death, Freud starts to recognize the poetry and promise in religion.

Karl Marx is famous for his simple analysis: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” At the same time Marx is ardently religious, since he holds: “Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield (from *Frontiers of Complexity: The Search for Order in a Chaotic World*, R., New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1995, p. 279).

oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions.”

Later, sociobiology tried to explain altruism as a survival technique, and the game theory and prisoner’s dilemma, taught us to weigh the probabilistic change implied in moral considerations.

The contemporary challenge religion and God face from neuroscience, has been mentioned briefly above. The brain is highly complex<sup>20</sup> and insights about God can be had through brain studies. True, some of them talk of a “God-Spot” in the brain analogous to the “God-Gene”<sup>21</sup> or even “God-particle”.

But going further, when we know the structure, functions and dynamics of the brain, we may come to appreciate our human brain that is open to infinity, transcendence and God (or non-God). I do not ever believe that neuroscience will be able to explain God away. Such attempts will fail, just as the earlier attempts by sociology, sociobiology or psychology. But I do wish that

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<sup>20</sup> “The brain immediately confronts us with its great complexity. The human brain weighs only three to four pounds but contains about 100 billion neurons. Although that extraordinary number is of the same order of magnitude as the number of stars in the Milky Way, it cannot account for the complexity of the brain. The liver probably contains 100 million cells, but 1,000 livers do not add up to a rich inner life.” Gerald D. Fischbach (from *Scientific American*, September, 1992)

<sup>21</sup> See Time Magazine, Oct 17, 2004. The God gene hypothesis proposes that human beings inherit a set of genes that predisposes us towards spiritual or mystic experiences.



neuroscience will be able to give us deeper insights into our spiritual realm and our experience of God. So some pertinent issues that neuroscience will enlighten us in the near future are:

1. Can the brain account for our own identity (soul)?
2. Can our moods and happiness be generated by brain intervention? Legitimate or ethical?
3. Can the neurons produce mystical experiences?
4. Can the brain explain (away) God?
5. Why is the brain such an astonishing phenomenon?<sup>22</sup>

Extending our earlier analogy, if classical mechanics helped us take possession of nature and biotechnology helps us to take possession of life, neuroscience helps us to take possession of ourselves (including consciousness and God.).<sup>23</sup> That may give us a completeness that is ever expanding, but never exhaustive.<sup>24</sup>

To visualise the next few decades many thinkers speak of the coming together of different scientific disciplines as

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<sup>22</sup> “What seems astonishing is that a mere three-pound object, made of the same atoms that constitute everything else under the sun, is capable of directing virtually everything that humans have done: flying to the moon and hitting seventy home runs, writing *Hamlet* and building the Taj Mahal -- even unlocking the secrets of the brain itself.” Joel Havemann (*A Life Shaken*, 2002)

<sup>23</sup> Julian Paul Keenan affirms: (*The Face in the Mirror*, 2003) “When considering the abilities and complexities of the brain, one is struck by the incredible efficiency and splendor expressed in gray and white matter.”

<sup>24</sup> Earlier I have used the expression, “ever approachable, but never attainable,” to decipher the depth dimensions of humans and of reality. That very inexhaustibility could be denoted to God also, who may be an ever completing completion.

NBIC convergence. “NBIC convergence”, that is, the convergence between Nano-, Bio-, Info-technologies, and Cognitive science. Such an ongoing unification of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technologies and cognitive science is not merely complementing, but gradually merging, yielding to unexpected and unexplored results. When we add the findings of neuroscience, we shall soon be experiencing unimaginable scientific and technological revolution.

And it is no wonder that in the coming years, every branch of philosophy (anthropology, ethics, epistemology, philosophy of God, aesthetics, etc.) will be faced with radically new data and will be, in turn, shaped by these incredible advances.

Just to substantiate with one issue: In the near future philosophy will have to confront the phenomenon of overcoming physical death! At the moment it still remains an esoteric or even exotic subject, limited to a powerful few. Soon it will become part of the collective consciousness of the mainstream youth, who are techno-savvy and wait for opportunities that are never-ending and unbridled.

After posing the ever evolving dimension of nature, humans and God, we, as Christians and Indians, are in a position to face the challenges in front of us.

## **5. Challenges Ahead**

As Christians and philosophers, what are the issues that we need to face and opportunities that we can grab? I believe the greatest challenge is to revision a world-view that is consistent with contemporary aspirations, in consonance with our Christian experience and at the same

time committed to our Indian roots! In other words, can we reformulate a story that is true to our scientific world, based on our Christian vision and relevant to our Indian audience?

To explore the situation further: As Indians and as Christians, we need to be thinkers and leaders. Truly it is “Imagination that rules the world.”<sup>25</sup> With reasoned knowledge, creative imagination and mature faith, we are in a position to guide the collective destiny of our world.

We just cannot afford to shy away from the world of technology and end up as a “pious sect.” That would be a basic disservice we do to our own human commitment. This urges us to take a stand against fundamentalism and fanaticism at all levels and be open to interactive and collective search.

Along with such critical thinking and problem-solving (conceptual categories/concepts), we also need to develop our ability to communicate effectively. In the contemporary world of lobbyists and PROs, we need to evolve a healthy and positive style of communicating our vision and goals. In the world of tweets, sms and mms, we cannot always depend on our classical forms of communications: elaborately written dissertations or obtrusively constructed homilies. Further, we need to enhance our ability to collaborate with different people. Gone are the days of “individual geniuses” who could sit together and come out with brand new inventions that will save the world. Today all scientific projects are interdisciplinary, flexible and elaborate. So we need today not

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<sup>25</sup> Quote from Napoleon Bonaparte. See *Think Exist*, at [http://thinkexist.com/quotation/imagination\\_rules\\_the\\_world/11611.html](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/imagination_rules_the_world/11611.html), accessed February 10, 2011.

“geniuses in isolation but scholars in collaboration” who may be guided by a “project leader” who is responsible in a democratic set up.

This impels us to collaborate not only with other centers of philosophy, but also with other centers of higher learning (technology), both religious and secular.

The above venture to reach out to others, to share our common story and to help weave a collaborative story is based on the assumption that we as Indians and Christians have something significant and unique to contribute towards the building up of a future world. We can truly believe that our collective concept of the world, our common vision of humans and our coherent idea of God makes sense to ourselves and is a chapter in the larger story of the world-story.

Our Christian story, with the preference for subalterns, respect for religions and openness to the world, has not been merely academic exercises, but realistic, affirmative, optimistic, forward-looking experiences that we have been living both as individuals and as communities.

To weave such a story, we need to appropriate an interdisciplinary approach, taking into consideration India’s rich intellectual, cultural and spiritual heritage. And we need to do it courageously, creatively, convincingly, without the ostrich mentality of refusing to confront the problem.

For such an adventure, we require not necessarily the best brain, but mutually affirming, creatively realisable teamwork, criticism that empowers, networking that facilitates, and technology that liberates.

## **The Church of Tomorrow**

Can the Church today learn from its experience with

enlightenment? It has suffered under it, but it was not defeated, but has grown more mature. In the same way, the Church today has to collaborate and even confront today's world of Science, Technology, Globalisation. The church may come out bruised, but there is no other alternative. The hope is that after such a healthy confrontation, even if the Church becomes more humble, it would have contributed its own share to the collective growth of the world.

Such a church can creatively talk with Hinduism, Islam, New Age Religions and even Atheists. Such a Church will have dynamic and intellectual leadership, based on its spiritual heritage and technological openness.

Then we will be contributing to a new story of the nature of reality. Such a story takes into account the Big Bang, Big Crunch and even Multiple universes. In such a world, we do not need be afraid of asking the question: Can our scientists create new universes through quantum vacuum? Of course we need to be cautious, but not afraid. We also need to evolve ecological sensitivity and be open to the novel properties opened up by nanotechnology. We will then be able to appreciate the fractal nature of the universe and see how it is mostly the virtual reality that shapes our life today.<sup>26</sup>

Then we can also face courageously crucial questions on the Philosophy of the Human Being. Some of the basic questions on our self, identity and intelligence can be reformulated as: Can we create intelligence? Does the chips embedded in our brains make us more human? Will

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<sup>26</sup> Virtual reality or cyber space shapes us much more than we imagine. In fact we can say that the real world of substance and accidents has blurred itself and merged with the cyber world of TVs, Internet and virtual existence.

brain studies throw more light on the nature of the soul? So questions on human dignity, freedom and respect for individuals will continue to haunt us even in the world of cyborgs, bionics and transgenic beings. The issue of the soul will accompany us still, though with new nuances.

This will enable us to appreciate God deeper and will help in the formulation of a new philosophy of God. Can we think of an 'Involving' God in an evolving world? Is God the cosmic power, the physical power and the inexhaustible energy? Are we hard-wired for God? Is transcendence an emergent property of matter? Thus we need radically new answers, based obviously on our perennial spiritual wisdom and relevant to our contemporary concerns. We need to ask ourselves repeatedly, based on our experiential faith: How do we make sense of Jesus' Abba experience in such a world?

## **6. Conclusion: Weaving a New Story**

The philosophy, we as contemporary Christians weave out today, is based on critical conviction, commitment and creativity. It is rooted in the faith conviction, that draws itself from our basic experience that God loves us. It leads to commitment, that is, sustained and persistent hard work that one enjoys. It leads to creativity, that is, imagination, ideals and dreams which inspire and which at the same time realize their own limitations.

In weaving such a story, can we affirm our preference for the subaltern, respect for other religions and affirmation of the world, without giving up our right to critiquing them? I believe the future of the Indian Church depends on how we are able to weave such an adequate and evolving story that embraces others, without losing our own uniqueness, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.