

Continuity and Change The Task of Contextualizing Theology in India Today

Francis X. D'Sa SJ

De Nobili College, Pune, 411014, India

Abstract: In this article the author reflects on “continuity and change” from theological perspectives with special referer to St. Paul and its relevance for the Indian context. The author's main thesis in the following contribution is this: Any tradition that is believed to be relevant has somehow to be communicable to its neighbours from other traditions who are part of its context. It has to make sense also to them. The author concludes by emphasising that the relevance respects the context. The search for relevance implies taking seriously the imperative of dialogue with the diverse cultures of our context. Dialogue is about the relevance of each culture and religion for today's problems. It has the potential to persuade us to reinterpret our traditions vis-à-vis the exigencies of our respective contexts. A process like this could eventually contribute to mutual enrichment, and, more importantly, to mutual correction. In course of time it could give birth to intercultural and interreligious relevance.

Keywords: Continuity, change, relevance, context, tradition, myth, culture, theology of religions, dialog.

0. Introduction

At the beginning of the year 2008 the Jesuits held their 35th General Congregation in Rome. Going through the Decrees, the letter and the allocution of Benedict XVI to the members of the General Congregation and the letters of the outgoing General and the new General one thing is striking: The use of quotations from St Ignatius, his Spiritual Exercizes, the foundational and other documents of the Society of Jesus without any attempt to translate them for our times. More than five hundred years have past but in this case the language of our spirituality and prayer has not changed;

it has ossified as it were. I am not referring to phrases like 'Holy Father' and 'Vicar of Christ on earth', but to expressions like the following:

- "The 35th General Congregation calls all Jesuits to live with the great spirit and generosity that is at the centre of our vocation: 'to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the Cross...and to serve the Lord alone and the Church his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth'." ¹
- "As the Formula of your Institute states, the Society of Jesus was founded chiefly 'for the defence and propagation of the faith'." ²
- "...it is my desire, dear brothers, that those who serve the Lord our God in the Society be outstanding in the purity and perfection of their obedience, the renunciation of their will, and the abnegation of their judgment." ³
- "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and possess; you gave it to me, I now give it back to you, O Lord; all is yours, dispose of it according to your will; give me your love and your grace; that is enough for me." ⁴

We are so accustomed to such language that we seem to be blissfully unaware that it makes little or no sense to 'outsiders', whether Christian or Hindu.

However the matter is more serious when we move over to Scripture. Take, for example Paul's confession: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor 2:2) "...we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles..." (1 Cor 1:23). To Paul's statement we Indian Christians can add: Christ crucified - a stumbling-block also to the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Jains, the Sikhs and the secularists. *In the cosmovision of these traditions too Christ crucified makes no sense whatever!* It is true that such a death (for one's friends) might evoke admiration but it does not answer the Asian question of how to escape from the clutches of Samsara.

The question for us is this: Do we leave these traditions to their fate so to say or is it time we asked ourselves whether the Pauline articulation of the Mystery of Christ can do justice in a religiously pluralistic context like India?⁵

My thesis in the following contribution is this: Any tradition that is believed to be relevant has somehow to be communicable to its neighbours from other traditions who are part of its context. It has to make sense also to them.⁶

In a globalized world (some would go far as to call it a globalized flat⁷) the self-understanding of a tradition cannot remain the same. It will in some way or the other have to respond to its globalized context. This will be true also of the Christian tradition.⁸ Its self-understanding has to be in the context of the world in which it finds itself. Other religions may not worry too much about being relevant to those not of the fold. But in the case of Christian traditions relevance to the other traditions is demanded by the very 'missionary nature' of the Church.⁹

Self-understanding is characterized by continuity and change which in turn are occasioned by two interrelated phenomena: temporal distance and cultural distance.

Temporal distance refers to the distance that obtains between the different stages of the same tradition. Thus, for instance, there is a temporal gap between the time of Jesus and the 21st century in which we find ourselves. The world of Jesus and the world of Christians today are indeed very, very different: socially, economically, politically and religiously.

Cultural distance is the distance between two or more cultures and expresses itself (broadly speaking) in a different understanding of God, World and Man. There is a cultural distance e.g., between Jesus' world and the world of the Indian Religions.

Thus there is in the world of Indian Christians temporal as well as cultural distance between their world today and Jesus' world. The problem that is connected with this is the following: *To understand Jesus in a way that is faithful to the Christian tradition; at the same time to understand him in a way that is meaningful in the religiously pluralistic context of India.*

1. Continuity and Change are Parameters of the Growth of a Tradition.

Continuity and change are the two important themes in the history of any tradition. It is not easy to say in what continuity consists and how much change continuity can put up with.¹⁰ The need for continuity and change derives from the necessity to identify ourselves afresh in a new context.¹¹ But there are no ready-made recipes for this. Continuity and change are such that we can never exhaustively know in advance what is changing and how much.¹² This is so because though amenable to reason both go beyond reason. Reason cannot exhaustively deal with them. We know and recognize (to some extent) change and continuity in our experience but always ‘after the event’ as it were. Hence it is not possible to predict what is changing and how much change *is actually taking place* in us, and what continues to be the same in this process.

The reason for this is the following: Continuity and change belong to the sphere of what Raimon Panikkar calls the *Mythos*¹³, that sphere namely where we know without knowing that we know. “Myth is precisely the horizon over against which any hermeneutic is possible. Myth is that which we take for granted, that which we do not question; and it is unquestioned because, *de facto* it is not seen as questionable.”¹⁴ *Mythos* is the horizon of understanding, the background which consists of all that we know and are familiar with and which makes understanding and questioning possible. Indeed it is that sphere where understanding and questioning actually *originate*. *Mythos* is not a substance but a complex process that continuously changes because of what we go through and understand in the sphere of the *Logos*.¹⁵ In spite of the change we go through we still remain who we are because *there is an accompanying awareness of the change*. That is why we know that change has taken place.¹⁶ However this awareness is not of the nature of subject-object knowledge. It is the light in which subject-object knowledge occurs. This is the dimension that grounds our continuity; it is the ‘who’ we are and not the ‘what’ we express ourselves to be. ‘What’ is the identification we keep on discovering; ‘who’ is the identity that we are and which we cannot describe but which urges us to search ever more deeply.

Change and continuity are parameters of growth. The more authentically we locate change the more we know we remain the same. The change we locate is another way of stating our identity. All attempts to express our identity inevitably employ the language of change. This may sound paradoxical but it is not so. Continuity refers to the 'being-and-awareness' that we are. Being-and-awareness is *in* space and time but is not *of* space and time. The net of language is unable to catch this; it can catch only the 'what' of being-and-awareness that *belongs* to space and time.

A tradition grows when it addresses its context, and the questions and doubts it raises and the challenges it throws up. When however it ignores its context and delivers standard answers – then this is a sign that the tradition is stagnating. The side-effect so to say of the phenomenon of stagnation is its lack of relevance. This is the case when the language of a tradition does not make sense to its members. In such a case it will make much less sense to the 'outsiders'.

'What makes or does not make sense' is not a purely subjective matter. It is not just a matter of individuals but of persons who are constituted by relationships which shape and form a community. This is clear from the responsibility they exercise in the community – a responsibility which is one of the constitutive pillars of such a community. Such subjects are concerned not just with themselves but with themselves as organic members of a community.¹⁷

2. Whatever is relevant in one Cosmvision has – in a globalized World - to make sense at least in some other Cosmovisions that are operative in the Context

Relevance relates to what makes sense in a community. What makes sense, makes sense generally to such a community where real growth is growth in relevance. A tradition grows (and not merely changes) when its relevance deepens and extends beyond its traditional borders. Relevance is not primarily a pastoral concern but an ontological phenomenon. It surely is a good sign when a tradition is concerned about pastoral relevance. But it will be good to remember that pastoral relevance is the application and not the

origin of this concern. Relevance is grounded in a world of interpersonal and intercultural relationships.

Something is genuinely relevant when it responds to the needs of the time, when it answers the questions and doubts of the persons involved and in general has an open ear for the problems of the context. This is correct as far as the social, economic and political needs are concerned. But Man's needs are not limited to these alone. Man does not live on bread alone! There is the cultural factor too and more especially the religious domain. Above all, there is the search for meaning. Indeed it is under this horizon that concern for religious and cultural needs makes itself felt.

We cannot escape the fact that today's community is increasingly the world community. Relevance has to prove its authenticity in the context of the world community that is made up of diverse universes of discourse.

A tradition expresses itself in beliefs, narratives, formulations, customs, structures, rituals, feasts and not least, values.¹⁸ All this constitutes, what I call, the text of a tradition. Just as no text can be reduced to the letters of the *text*, so too no tradition can be reduced to a formula. A text is more than the sum of its expressions.

On the other hand the *context* of a tradition is made up of the diverse universes of discourse which form and inform the preunderstanding of the interpreting communities of its time. Today no universe of discourse stands alone. It always finds itself surrounded by and within a world of multiple universes of discourse where mutual understanding is of the essence. Each universe of discourse is built on a specifically different understanding of God, World and Man.¹⁹

Understanding²⁰ refers to the foundational activity of personhood; it is less an act and more an on-going process. This on-going process is the continuous awareness that *we are* and not one that *we have*. Sometimes it happens that this stream of continuous awareness is deepened or heightened; that occurs when we thematically understand ourselves and our situation more significantly. This transforms both us and our relationship to our surroundings – but in proportion to the depth of our understanding. When some relevant information

comes our way (say, the timings of a train for a journey we need to undertake) we realize that we have to change our schedule to get in time for the train. Now change in schedule can imply a whole lot of things we had planned to do but cannot realize in the new circumstances. We have to see to alternate arrangements. Or when a person pours out her heart and all of a sudden we are ashamed that we have misunderstood and misjudged her. Our relationship to the person undergoes a sea-change as if automatically.²¹ Understanding changes not just our knowledge but also affects our whole person and, what is more significant, our relationship to the world.

Whether of a person or of a tradition self-understanding is always foundational. Our views, values and visions depend on that. On that depends the way we perceive others and *their* views, values and visions. On that depends the way we relate to God, World and Man²² When we say understanding is ontological we refer to the level of being and reality, not just the epistemological level of knowing and meaning. Understanding others cultures is having a changed relationship to them. When horizons touch, the encounter is much deeper than that of the tourist. The current of relevance moves from one to the other alternately.

3. Need of the Hour: Mutual Understanding among Cultures

Now relevance is connected with the depth-dimension of our being, namely, meaning in life. But meaning in life is not a thematic search. It is that overriding concern which is behind all our searching and choosing. Meaning in life cannot be restricted to *our* world of meaning alone. Whether we want it or not, we are affected – positively or negatively – by other worlds of meaning operative in our context. Relevance is shared when harmonious relationships obtain between these worlds.

Traditionally relevance has been restricted to the world of one's tradition. But this is too narrow a view especially if at the ultimate level we are all related and interrelated. Relevance is not bound by artificial boundaries. Whether we aware of it or not, our relationship with other worlds of meaning (i.e. cultures and religions) is on the ultimate level.²³ It is from this one source that ultimate meaning

(*parama-artha*²⁴) derives. Religions claim to mediate ultimate meaning because they originate from *Paramartha*. But our experience of ultimate meaning is bound to and expressed in the language of a definite cosmovision. If it remains confined within traditional borders it will in course of time become sectarian and result in polarization. Sooner or later it will erupt in violence. But when it discovers its relatedness to other universes of discourse in the context the process of cross-fertilization begins.²⁵

Live and let live – is not enough today. There are extremists who do not want one or the other group to live. We have seen this in the last few weeks.²⁶ That is why mutual understanding among cultures is the need of the hour. Living in the well of our own culture is neither possible nor sufficient. But if in spite of this we ignore the others we do so at our own peril.

Every tradition mediates ultimate meaning in its own way and to its own members. But this has perhaps made us forget that all meaning (in life) derives from the Ultimate alone. Our specific meanings have made us go our own way. Perhaps that has made us forget that we have to find out where and how we can meet the others.

Today the processes of symbiosis and osmosis are more active than ever before. Therefore there has to be a more conscious effort on the part of all cultures to ‘interculturalize’ their beliefs and whatever makes sense to them. By interculturalize I mean the effort to take cultures as seriously as one’s own by building bridges of understanding and making one’s own tradition intelligible to the others. This is indeed a Herculean task – Herculean because we have no precedence for this. Besides that we have the obstacle of cultural arrogance that feeds on ignorance of other cultures and on prejudices that are handed down uncritically with compound interest. As has been said, gossip solidifies into conviction as prejudice solidifies into self-evident truth.²⁷

Interculturation implies among other things two important elements: Recognition of the right of other cultures to their specific mode of existence and belief, and building bridges of understanding with them. The two are closely connected but their realization needs a theology of religion that makes room for pluralism.

4. Theology of Religion has to focus on and prepare for the Encounter of Religions

What is expected of a Theology of Religion is that it be open to the rich variety of beliefs and religious experiences and from there start its reflection. It has to avoid the pitfall of taking one kind of religious experience (especially the religious experience of one's own tradition) as a criterion for classifying the diversity of beliefs and religious experiences in order to establish their validity.

Plurality is different from pluralism. The former is an historical phenomenon, the latter a theological stance that sees itself as part of a religious landscape where the natural processes of cultural osmosis and symbiosis are at work.²⁸ Pluralism recognizes, (a) that all religions are not the same; (b) that each has its own way of articulating its stance regarding 'God, World and Man', (c) that this needs to be taken as seriously as one would like the others to take the articulation of one's own religious stance seriously and (d) that underlying all this there is a common myth of meaning in life.

This does not necessarily lead to relativism for two reasons. One, absolute truth which relativism rejects is the foundation of this species of pluralism. Two, Absolute Truth always reveals itself absolutely but its reception is limited and conditioned by the historical dimension. Relativism rejects Absolute Truth but in the stance that is being proposed here this is not the case. Here it is Absolute Truth that is the source of all revelation. It is Absolute Truth that is refracted in the beliefs of the diverse religious traditions. These beliefs, we said, are valid and make sense in their respective faith-world. What is being proposed here is not relativism but relatedness or relativity. Relatedness and relativity highlight the fact that all beliefs are related and relative to their world of belief.

In contradistinction to faith, beliefs are expressions that emerge from faith-experience.²⁹ Faith-experience belongs to the level of being-and-awareness and belief to that of language. Beliefs do not hang in the air; they are related to and understandable in their respective world of belief. Outside their belief-world they do not make sense. The belief in rebirth (*punar-janma*) makes sense in the world of Samsara, just as belief in the resurrection is at home in the

world of salvation-history. To ignore this is to ignore the specificity of a belief-world.³⁰

Therefore efforts at dialogue have ultimately to aim at translating the relevance of our respective traditions. Their quest is to understand the other religious traditions and to build bridges of understanding between their respective universes of discourse. Bridges of mutual understanding are necessary for relevance. They aim at discovering the so-called functional or homeomorphic equivalents.³¹ Functional equivalents identify similarity of function which allows one to state that the function that Jahweh exercises in Judaism is equivalent to the function that Allah exercises in Islam and Brahman in the Upanishads, etc. From this one can not conclude that Jahweh is the same as Allah and Brahman. Indeed because they are not the same it is important to discover more concrete meeting-points between very different traditions.

To do this we have to familiarize ourselves with the other traditions. To understand someone, it has been rightly said, is to understand something of the person's questions and answers more especially the world in which such questions emerge.³² The same applies to a tradition. The structures of its questions and answers constitute the mythic horizon, namely that background on which knowing and understanding take place. To understand another religion implies understanding its structures of meaning. This consists of all that makes sense and is expressed in its myths, metaphors, parables, legends and beliefs.

In this regard the document "Dialogue and Proclamation" of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue speaks insightfully of four kinds of dialogue³³ Dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange and dialogue of experience. All of them are essential if believers are to remain faithful to their traditions and at the same time learn to interact at the depth-level with one another.

When religions enter into dialogue with one another speaking and listening take place. Speakers themselves are not aware of the preunderstanding that actively undergirds their speaking. What was previously experienced and understood subsequently becomes part of the understanding process. Speaking reveals some of this to the attentive listener.³⁴ To come to know our own process of

understanding and its ramifications we need listeners who experience what is not obvious to us (speakers) in the same way that our accent and our manner of speaking are not evident to us. When listeners understand us differently from the way we understand ourselves, it does not necessarily imply that they have misunderstood or not understood us. It can also mean that they have assimilated from their perspective (their mythic horizon) what we have said – which is also an aspect of what we *said*, though not necessarily of what we *meant* and *intended*. Saying and intending are not synonymous processes. Saying is much broader and deeper than intending.

Thus to understand our own religion more fully we need the other religions. They perceive aspects in our religion that we do not perceive; and vice versa we perceive aspects in their religion which they do not perceive.

At the present Synod the SVD General Fr Tony Pernia made a valuable suggestion: „Evangelization”, he said, „is never a one-way street, in which the church speaks and the world listens. To be true to its mission the church must also listen to the searching of faith-seekers, the cultural and religious traditions of people of other faiths, the aspirations of the poor and marginalized.”³⁵

In his Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, 56 John Paul II states the same but with a different stress:

Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills. Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the “seeds of the Word,” a “ray of that truth which enlightens all men”; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind. Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the Spirit. *Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.* (Emphasis added)³⁶

The Pope considers the other religions a positive challenge for the Church because they stimulate her:

to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit;

to examine more deeply her own identity;

to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation (revelationis integritatem) which she has received for the good of all.

These could constitute the three essential ingredients of a theology of religion today; *mutatis mutandis* believers of other religions could put forward something homologous to this. Let me explain.

From the Christian perspective the Christ, the Logos, is the meeting-point of all, all religions and all traditions. The eternal Christ or the Logos who is more than the historical Jesus has revealed himself not only in Jesus but also in the other religions and in the whole of creation though differently.³⁷ We Christians have come to know the Christ through Jesus; the others through their specific revelation. This is not to imply that Allah, Buddha, Krishna are the same as Christ or that the difference between all of them is only in a difference in name. When Christians experience the Mystery in a specific manner in Jesus, they speak of the Christ and refer this to specific perspective of understanding history and salvation history. When others experience the Mystery in their own specific manner they too have their own specific name which also refers to their perspective of salvation (however each may name this goal). Each tradition experiences the Mystery in its own specific manner.

Our understanding of the Christ enables us to discover the signs of his presence and the working of his Spirit everywhere. The purpose of dialogue is precisely this. When we Christians speak among ourselves we speak of the Christ but when we speak with other traditions we might be better understood if we speak of the Mystery. In course of time we shall need (to discover) a language that does justice to our beliefs and to the beliefs of our neighbours. In dialogue we come to know where the formulation of our respective beliefs is a help and where it is a hindrance where mutual understanding is concerned.

5. Preaching Christ crucified in the context of Asian Religions?

In the Introduction I had stated that Christ crucified is a stumbling-block also to the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Jains, the Sikhs and the secularists. *In their cosmovision too Christ crucified makes no sense!* In the world of Samsara suffering can never make sense. What makes sense is whatever can help one to get out of this spiral of birth and rebirth. There can be no redemptive meaning for suffering in the religions of Asia.³⁸

Accordingly my question is this: Is this a blind alley or has the Apostle Paul jumped the gun in his formulation “a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles”? Arguably it was not Paul’s concern ‘to build bridges of understanding and dialogue with those who do not belong to the Church or who have difficulty accepting its position and message’.³⁹ Were Paul in India today where religions have come into their own he would probably have formulated his faith in Christ differently. *Redemptoris missio* Nr. 25 says:

The speeches in Lystra and Athens (cf. Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31) are acknowledged as models for the evangelization of the Gentiles. In these speeches Paul enters into “dialogue” with the cultural and religious values of different peoples. To the Lycaonians, who practiced a cosmic religion, he speaks of religious experiences related to the cosmos. With the Greeks he discusses philosophy and quotes their own poets (cf. Acts 17:18, 26-28). The God whom Paul wishes to reveal is already present in their lives; indeed, this God has created them and mysteriously guides nations and history. But if they are to recognize the true God, they must abandon the false gods which they themselves have made and open themselves to the One whom God has sent to remedy their ignorance and satisfy the longings of their hearts. These are speeches which offer an example of the inculturation of the Gospel.

Even a superficial familiarity with belief in Samsara would have convinced the brilliant Paul to go about other religions more dialogically and less exclusively. Perhaps something like this:

In all the Asian religions detachment plays a central role. It appears in different contexts under different names: Pseudo-I-

lessness (Anahamkara), the state of non-mine-non-thine, non-attachment, desirelessness, renunciation, indifference, equanimity, etc. The thinking behind it could be summed up thus: Giving in to desires, likes-and-dislikes, attachments – all these lead to spiritual blindness (Moha), and in some traditions to the Pseudo-I (Ahamkara). The solution to this is renunciation, desirelessness, detachment, etc.

This, I find, is a functional equivalent of the self-emptying, kenotic process that the letter to the Philippians (2:7) speaks of. Jesus emptied himself of his Ego totally, so that he could be fully filled with God's Spirit. There was in him not the least trace of Ahamkara; in its place was total openness to the Spirit of God.

The Indian religions would understand this because renunciation is of the essence for them. They would not much care for uniqueness and things like that but they would fully appreciate one who has given up all attachments and desires and for whom the Divine alone is worth desiring. Kenosis and desirelessness are functional equivalents that act like a bridge between the two centres of relevance in these traditions.

To repeat: Kenosis is not the same as desirelessness. But the function that Kenosis exercises in the self-understanding of the Christ is similar to the function that desirelessness occupies in the Hindu traditions. The significance of the Christ would be communicated to them through the Christian-Hindu bridge which connects Kenosis with desirelessness. That this is not a pipe dream can be gauged from the following quotation of Keshub Chandra Sen from his lecture „India asks: who is Christ?“ (1879) ⁴⁰

Christ ignored and denied his self altogether... Self must be extinguished and eradicated completely. Christ said so, and Christ did so. He destroyed self. And as self ebbed away. Heaven came pouring into the soul. For, as you all know, nature abhors a vacuum, and hence as soon as the soul is emptied of self - Divinity fills the void. So it was with Christ. The Spirit of the Lord filled him, and everything was thus divine within him.

In a private letter he writes: “Jesus is identical with self-sacrifice.”⁴¹

6. Conclusion: Relevance respects Context

The search for relevance implies taking seriously the imperative of dialogue with the diverse cultures of our context. Dialogue is about the relevance of each culture and religion for today's problems. It has the potential to persuade us to reinterpret our traditions vis-à-vis the exigencies of our respective contexts. A process like this could eventually contribute to mutual enrichment, and, more importantly, to mutual correction. In course of time it could give birth to intercultural and interreligious relevance.

An African proverb expresses in a nutshell the spirit of this paper: "If you want to go fast then go alone but if you want to go far then go with the others!"

Notes

- [1] "With renewed Vigour and Zeal". The Society of Jesus Responds to the Invitation of the Holy Father, §9. The quotation occurs in the Formula of the Institute, *Exposcit debitum* (15 July 1550), §3 (MHSI 90, 63, 375). See *Decrees of General Congregation 35* issued by the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2008). Former General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach also quotes the phrase in his letter to the 'Most Holy Father' (15th January 2008) as well as to the whole Society when his resignation was accepted by the General Congregation.
- [2] Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, §3. See *Decrees of General Congregation 35* issued by the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2008). Benedict continues, "Ignatius' first companions placed themselves at the Pope's disposal 'so that he might use them where he judged it would be for God's greater glory and the good of souls'." The last phrase is from Ignatius' *Autobiography*, n. 85. *Decrees of General Congregation 35*, p.166.
- [3] „A Fire that Kindles other Fires. Rediscovering our Charism", §17. The quotation is from the letter of St Ignatius to the Jesuits of Portugal (26 March 1553), §2 (MHSI 29, 671).
- [4] The Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, §10 concludes with the prayer in the Spiritual Exercises (234). See *Decrees of General Congregation 35* issued by the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2008). The decree „With renewed Vigour and Zeal"§17 also concludes with the same prayer.

- [5] See the interesting approach of Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ. The Christian Experience in the Modern World*. (SCM Press, 1980), 729: “*Negativity* cannot have a cause or a motive in God. But in that case we cannot look for a divine *reason* for the death of Jesus either. Therefore, first of all, we have to say that we are not redeemed *thanks* to the death of Jesus but *despite* it.” Later on (729) Schillebeeckx continues: “On the one hand it [Mk 8.31] contains the insight that man is redeemed by Jesus *despite* the death of Jesus, seen as negativity, and the human rejection of Jesus from our midst, one of the many exponents of our history of suffering.”
- [6] Mere similarity between traditions is not always helpful when working out relevance. Indeed what appears to be similar may not in fact be as similar as one had imagined; and what appears to be different might in some way share in a commonality. Difficulties like these bedevil us in various areas. In the field of inter-religious dialogue: Avatara and Incarnation beliefs might look similar but they are in fact very different. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim beliefs are generally said to be similar (with regard to monotheism) but they are not. The Christian understanding of the Divine is unequivocally Trinitarian. Vedic Yajña and Christian Eucharist might appear to be very different but they have in common a kenotic thrust (“for you” and “pararthatva”). See my “Christian Eucharist and Hindu Yajña”, in: Kurien Kunnumpuram (Ed.), *The Eucharist and Life*. Indian Christian Reflections on the Lord’s Supper (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2007), 255-283.
- [7] ‘Flat’ because we can actually hear and see what is going on in distant lands – thanks to the electronic media!
- [8] A healthy relationship between these two perspectives implies polarity (like that of the North and South Poles), not polarization (like that of two ideological camps). However Benedict XVI spells this somewhat differently. Cfr. his Address to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (21 February 2008), §5: “.....while you try to recognize the signs of the presence and work of God in every part of the world, even beyond the confines of the visible Church, while you endeavour to build bridges of understanding and dialogue with those who do not belong to the Church or who have difficulty accepting its position and message, you must at the same time loyally fulfil the fundamental duty of the Church, of fully adhering to the word of God, and of the authority of the Magisterium to preserve the truth and unity of the Catholic doctrine in its totality.”
- [9] See Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* Nr. 1: “The Second Vatican Council sought to renew the Church’s life and activity in the light of the needs of the contemporary world. The Council emphasized the Church’s “missionary nature,” basing it in a dynamic way on the Trinitarian mission itself. The missionary thrust therefore belongs to the very nature of the Christian life, and is also the inspiration behind ecumenism: ‘that they

may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (Jn 17:21).

- [10] What seems similar may not be as similar as one had imagined; and what appears to be different might in some way share in a commonality. Difficulties like these bedevil us in various areas. In the field of ecumenism, specifically with regard to the Eucharist, Papacy, Priesthood, etc. In the field of interreligious dialogue: Avatara and Incarnation beliefs might look similar but they are in fact very different. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim beliefs are generally said to be similar (with regard to monotheism) but they are not. Vedic Yajña and Christian Eucharist might appear to be very different but they meet in a kenotic thrust (“for you” and “parathatva”) in common. See my “Christian Eucharist and Hindu Yajña”, in: Kurien Kunnumpuram (Ed.), *The Eucharist and Life*. Indian Christian Reflections on the Lord’s Supper (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2007), 255-283.
- [11] Raimon Panikkar, “The Identity of Christ is not his Identification”, *The Fullness of Man. A Christophany* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis; Delhi: ISPCK 2006), 153-155. E.g. “Although identity and identification cannot be separated, they are not the same.” (153) Or again, 154: “The difference between identity and identification can explain Jesus’ reticence in revealing his own identity. Whoever has experienced the unbridgeable abyss of the ‘I’ will feel the necessity of keeping his own identity veiled, revealing it only to those for whom the subject-object division is overcome - that is, to those one loves, to the innocent (see Matthew 11:25-27; Luke 10:21). Jesus answered neither Herod nor Pilate.”
- [12] See the meticulous effort of Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*. Vol. 1, *Historical Ecclesiology*, New York/London: Continuum, 2004 and Vol. 2, *Comparative Ecclesiology*, New York/London: Continuum, 2004.
- [13] R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics*. Cross-Cultural Studies (New Jersey: Paulist Press 1978). [Indian edition. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation 1983.], 100: “...by *mythos*, I mean that human organ of apprehension on the same level as the *logos* and in constant relation with it. *Mythos* and *logos* are two human modes of awareness, irreducible one to the other, but equally inseparable.”
- [14] R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics*. Cross-Cultural Studies (New Jersey: Paulist Press 1978), 4.
- [15] Vis-à-vis *Mythos*, *Logos* is its language. The *Mythos* speaks in and through the *Logos*. The point of the distinction is this: Firstly, *Mythos* and *Logos* are two distinct (but not separate) *modes of consciousness*. Secondly, their respective *dynamics are very different*. *Mythos* can never be thematized, except in the *Logos*. Because the *Mythos* is inexhaustible the *Logos* can speak of it in innumerable ways. Thirdly, *Mythos* makes for unity and *Logos* makes for plurality. Pluralism however is grounded in the *Mythos* because

it is there that we meet in spite of differing standpoints. Fourthly, being-and-awareness (the Mythos dimension) and speaking (the Logos dimension) are distinct but interrelated. The Mythos dimension pours itself out so to say into the Logos dimension and the Logos dimension returns into the Mythos dimension. There is, as Panikkar points out, a constant passing from one into the other.

- [16] The phrase, 'they have taken place' is striking in our context because it brings out the spatio-temporal aspect.
- [17] See Thornton Wilder's novel *The Eighth Day*, 23: "Mind and Spirit will be the next climate of the human. The race is undergoing its education. What is education, Roger? What is education, George? It is the bridge man crosses from the self-enclosed, self-favoring life into a consciousness of the entire community of mankind."
- [18] Add to this the fact that a belief-world has different priorities at different times.
- [19] Unfortunately understanding has been gravely misunderstood as a purely intellectual activity. Understanding is primarily an ontological process: We *exist understandingly* and the other way round we *understand beingly* as it were. Awkward as these phrases sound they are attempts to draw our attention both to the ontological dimension of *existence* and *understanding*. Though existence and understanding are not the same they are not different either. They are intimately related in that they form a continuum. We really *exist* when we really understand. And we really understand when we really exist.
- [20] Understanding which is not to be confused with information consists of two aspects: One, the stream of awareness that we are and two, the heightening of this stream which transforms our relationship to our surroundings. The former constitutes who we are and the latter constitutes the knower as the Subject that affirms something about an object.
- [21] Understanding, hermeneuticians say, results in a changed relationship to the world in which we exist.
- [22] Raimon Panikkar, "Fullness of Man or Fullness of the Human?" *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, New York: Orbis Books, 2004, p.11 – 16.
- [23] Whatever our theology of religions may be, it will have to be assumed that religions have somehow to do with the Ultimate and that they derive from and lead to this Ultimate.
- [24] The Sanskrit expression *parama-artha* has the dual meaning of Ultimate Reality and ultimate meaning.
- [25] The present persecution of Christians in India is a case in point. What is relevant for Christians has to be shown to be relevant to the other belief-

worlds (like the Bhajrang Dal) too and *vice versa* what is relevant to the Bhajrang Dal has to be shown to be relevant to the Christians too. Of course for a start good-will has to be assumed on all sides. See

- [26] See "Kandhmal has a history of communal flare-ups-India"-The Times of India: 28 Aug 2008.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/3414130.cms-40k--Cached-Similar Pages>

- [27] See Thornton Wilder's novel *The Eighth Day* (Penguin 1967), 10.

- [28] See Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 173: "Osmosis and symbiosis are not only physical or biological but also human and cultural events."

- [29] See my "The Universe of Faith and the Pluriverse of Belief: Are all Religions talking about the same thing?", in *Dialogue and Alliance. A Journal of the International Religious Foundation*. 11:2 (1997), 88-115.

- [30] There is an added obstacle at work here. Every culture does as if *its* universe of discourse were the norm for all universes of discourse. As a matter of fact though different universes of discourse may speak the same phonetic language (say English), its universe of discourse is not the same. This means, its understanding of truth and reality is different from ours. Differences have to be upheld if an encounter of religions is to be meaningful.

- [31] Panikkar who coined this phrase has also speaks of 'homeomorphic' equivalents. See Panikkar, „Religion, Philosophy, Culture”, *polylog*, 1-140. For homeomorphic equivalents *ibid.* 17-29, file://localhost/Volumes/LEXAR%20MEDIA/LEXAR%20MEDIA/f.x.d/Stick061106/panikkar.htm More specifically 21-22 & 27-28: „I have introduced, a few years ago, the notion of homeomorphic equivalents, as a first step towards interculturality. One should, in our case, research both the eventual equivalent notions to philosophy in other cultures, and the symbols (not necessarily the concepts and even less a unique concept) that express the homeomorphic equivalents of philosophy. Homeomorphic equivalents are not mere literal translations, any more than they merely translate the role that the original word claims to play (in this case: philosophy), but they play a function which is equivalent (analogous) or comparable to that supposedly played by philosophy. It is therefore not a conceptual but a functional equivalent, i.e. an analogy of the third degree. One does not seek the same function (as that exercised by philosophy) but the function that is equivalent to that exercised by the original notion in the corresponding cosmovision.

“We cannot claim to define through one single word what intercultural philosophy is, nor even presuppose that such a philosophy exists. What is possible however is to inquire about the many homeomorphic equivalents, and, from within the other culture, to try to formulate what can correspond to

what we are trying to say when we say the word philosophy. We must seek a middle way between the colonial mentality which believes that we can express the totality of the human experience through the notions of a single culture, and the opposite extreme which thinks that there is no communication possible between diverse cultures, and which should then condemn themselves to a cultural apartheid in order to preserve their identity. I am thinking of the case of Bhutan as a political example. Our problem is not merely a 'speculative' one."

[32] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1975, p. 333f.

[33] Joint Document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples, Rome, 19 May 1991: *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. n.42):

"a. The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

b. The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.

c. The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values." (My emphasis).

d. The *dialogue of experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute."

Because I understand dialogue in this comprehensive manner I have not explicitly mentioned the importance of common concerns. In the quest for meeting-points common concerns too play an important role. The more a tradition responds to the questions and concerns of the context the more likely it is that it will find itself nearer to those traditions which have similar concerns.

[34] Moreover it is always the listener who is aware of the speaker's accent.

[35] John C. Allen Jr. in 'National Catholic Reporter', October 11, 2008. Quoted from MISSION SCAN # 69, ISHVANI KENDRA – Institute of Missiology and Communications, Pune – India, October – 2008.

[36] The original Latin text runs thus: 56. Non nascitur sane dialogus ex astuto quodam consilio aut studio proprio, sed inceptum est quod suas habet causas, postulata, dignitatepostulatur quidem alta ex observantia erga id omne, quod in homine operatus est Spiritus, qui ubi vult spirat (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 12). Inde namque detegere vult Ecclesia "semina Verbi" (*Ad Gentes*, 11. 15) ac "radium illius Veritatis, quae illuminat

omnes homines" (*Nostra Aetate*, 2); haec enim semina et radii ipsis in hominibus reperiuntur necnon traditionibus religiosis hominum generis. Spe dialogus nititur caritateque et fructus adferet in Spiritu. Ceterae religiones bonam Ecclesiae provocationem quandam obiciunt: illam videlicet excitant tum ut deprehendat tum ut signa ipsa agnoscat Christi praesentiae actionisque Spiritus simulque altius pervestiget suam naturam atque testificetur revelationis integritatem, quam in deposito habet ad omnium hominum commoditatem.

- [37] Michael Amaladoss, „The Trinity on Mission”, in: Frans Wijssen & Peter Nissen (Hrsg.), *'Mission is a Must'*. Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2002), 106:

To preserve the unity of the Trinity on the one hand, to affirm a certain articulation between the mission of God and of Jesus on the other, Indian theologians point to a distinction between the Word and Jesus. Jesus is the historical, incarnate manifestation of the Word. But his activity is not co-extensive with the activity of the Word as such. Whatever Jesus does, the Word of God does because Jesus is the incarnate Word. But the presence and action of the Word is not limited to its manifestation in Jesus. Such a distinction makes it possible to distinguish the action of God, the Father, the Word and the Spirit in the world and in history from the action of Jesus in and through the Church, and not reduce one to the other. The presence and action of Jesus in and through the Church then can relate creatively to the presence and action of God in other religions as well as in human, 'secular' history as such.

- [38] See John Paul II's Encyclical *Salvific Doloris*, 30 (1984): In the messianic programme of Christ, which is at the same time the programme of the Kingdom of God, suffering is present in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbour, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a 'civilization of love'. In this love the salvific meaning of suffering is completely accomplished and reaches its definitive dimension. Christ's words about the Final Judgment enable us to understand this in all the simplicity and clarity of the Gospel.

These words about love, about actions of love, acts linked with human suffering, enable us once more to discover, at the basis of all human sufferings, the same *redemptive suffering of Christ*. (Emphasis added)

This may convince Christians but not Buddhists, Hindus, etc. Their concern is to get out of the spiral of birth and rebirth. Christians however are at home in a world where redemptive suffering makes eminent sense. This is how it should be but because of the 'missionary nature' of the church they must also ask themselves *how* to communicate to believers from other traditions what is meaningful to them (= the Christians).

[39] Benedict XVI employed this phrase in his Allocution to the Jesuits at their 35th General Congregation § 5. See *Decrees of General Congregation 35* issued by the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2008), 168.

[40] Keshub Chunder Sen, "India asks: Who is Christ?", in David C. Scott (Ed.), *Keshub Chunder Sen. A Selection* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1979), 204-5. The whole passage which runs as follows argues from a specific understanding of self-abnegation rooted in Hindu Spirituality.

I am, therefore, bound to admit that Christ really believed that he and his Father were one. When I come to analyse this doctrine, I find in it nothing but the philosophical principle underlying the popular doctrine of self-abnegation - self-abegation in a very lofty spiritual sense. 'I and my Father are one'. These words clearly mean, - if you would only exercise the smallest amount of reflection, they would clearly appear to you to mean, - nothing more than the highest form of self-denial. Christ ignored and denied his self altogether. We, on the contrary, have each our hard selfishness, and it is our desire and interests to serve and gratify it heartily. All the pursuits of our lives, our affections, our associations, our daily thoughts, and feelings, our hopes and aspirations gather round this central self. *I think, I preach, I am a true man and a right man.. This is my virtue, that is my holiness, this is my charity, that is my prayer.* You have given this unto *me*. You cannot take it away from *me*. These are selfish ideas which prevail universally among mankind, and constitute the real danger of society and the root of our sins and wickednesses. Upon these shoals many a life has been wrecked, and many a life is being wrecked every day. Self must be extinguished and eradicated completely. Christ said so, and Christ did so. He destroyed self. And as self ebbed away. Heaven came pouring into the soul. For, as you all know, nature abhors a vacuum, and hence as soon as the soul is emptied of self - Divinity fills the void. So it was with Christ. The Spirit of the Lord filled him, and everything was thus divine within him."

[41] P.C. Mozoomdar, *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen*, Baptist Mission Press, 1887, 179.

[42] In fact, the traditional and even the present-day understanding of the "conversion" of Paul and the change of his name from "Saul" to "Paul" as a sign of his conversion have no biblical basis. Even after this so-called conversion, the author of the Acts refers to his name as Saul. According to Acts 13:1-3, it is Barnabas and Saul who are delegated from the Church of Antioch to preach the gospel outside of the Jewish territory. In the course of this narrative, when Paul stands as the apostle of the Greeks, the author of the Acts transfers on him his original Greek name, Paul. It is also this name Paul prefers in all his writings. In fact, the change of name as related to the change of mission is in tune with the biblical tradition in the case of Abraham

(Contd on p. 51.)