

# jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

The Relevance of St Paul  
Indian Reading of His Letters



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Editorial .....	3
Continuity and Change	
<i>Francis X. D'Sa SJ .....</i>	8
Paul as a Pastor-Theologian in the Early Church:	
<i>Joseph Pathrapankal CMI .....</i>	30
Paul's Theology in the Context of Early Christian Pluralism	
<i>Lucien Legrand MEP .....</i>	52
Paul and Culture	
<i>Peter Hakip .....</i>	66
The Theology of St Paul as Predominantly a Christology	
<i>Francis Pereira SJ .....</i>	92
Paul and Justification: The Relevance of Paul for Today	
<i>Pauline Chakkalakal DSP .....</i>	111
Paul and Baptism	
<i>George Keerankeri SJ .....</i>	135
Eucharist in Paul: Table-Fellowship with Charity	
<i>Errol D'Lima SJ .....</i>	178
Paul and the Church	
<i>Evelyn Monteiro SCC .....</i>	194
Paul's Ways of Community Building	
<i>Thomas Manjaly .....</i>	212
From Fragmentation to Communion	
<i>Maria Arul Raja SJ .....</i>	244
Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church	
<i>Rekha M. Chennattu RA .....</i>	261
Politics of Body: Enabling & Ennobling Our Embodied Selves	
<i>Victor Ferrao .....</i>	280
Evil as the Disproportionate Desire to Deny Death	
<i>Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ .....</i>	292
Book Reviews .....	308

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## Editorial

In 1998, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth began publishing the journal *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*. We have just completed ten years of publishing it. To mark this important occasion we organized a National Seminar which was held in Pune on 17-20 October 2008. The choice of the theme for the Seminar: *The Relevance of St Paul* was inspired by the announcement of Pope Benedict XVI that a special Jubilee Year dedicated to the Apostle Paul would begin on 28 June 2008. The Seminar attempted an Indian Reading of the Letters of Paul. It sought to interpret Paul in the socio-economic, political, religious and cultural context of India and find out how relevant his teaching is for us today.

In this double issue (January and July 2009) of *Jnanadeepa*, we are publishing the papers presented at the Seminar.

The nineteen papers included in this issue can be grouped under four headings. The first group of four papers is in a sense introductory. The first paper clarifies the main thrust of the seminar. It discusses the task of contextualizing Theology in India today. The main thesis of the paper is this: Whatever is really relevant to us has somehow to be communicated to our neighbours of other traditions who are part of our context. It has to make sense also to them. The self-understanding of the Christian tradition has to be in the context of the world in which it finds itself. Self-understanding is characterized by continuity and change, which are occasioned by two interrelated phenomena: temporal distance and cultural distance. The second paper deals with Paul as a pastor-theologian in the early Church. The paper contends that the most important theological and pastoral role Paul played was the strong stand he took for establishing the true identity of the religious movement inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth over against the sectarian approach that developed in the Jerusalem church. Paul also developed new theological and pastoral perspectives while dealing with the concrete problems faced by the early Christians (see 1 Cor.) A third paper seeks to understand Paul's theology in the context of early Christian pluralism. Basing themselves on what Paul reports in Gal 2: 11-15, many people think

that Paul was the champion of orthodoxy in the early Church. Actually Paul's radicalism was rather one-sided; Peter and others had good reason to look at things from another angle. The light Paul received on the way to Damascus did not define a dogmatic position. It opened the way for an on-going discovery of the mystery of Christ, a way that was followed by Paul in fellowship with other insights of the apostolic Church. What is remarkable about Paul is this: His fidelity to Christ is not slavish mimicry. It is imbued by the creativity and freedom of the Spirit. A fourth article deals with Paul and culture. It contends that Paul was a cross-cultural person who sought to incarnate the Gospel into the culture of the people to whom he proclaimed it. Inculcation of the Gospel involves several steps: Affirmation of culture, relativization of culture, confrontation and transformation of culture. Paul's letters bear witness to the fact that he really inculcated the Gospel he preached.

The key to Paul's theology is arguably Christocentric soteriology. A group of four articles deal with Jesus Christ, his saving work and its effects. The first article deals with Jesus Christ and his role in salvation. It asserts that Pauline theology is predominantly a Christology. However, Paul is not very much concerned with the inner constitution of Christ but his saving activity. After pointing out that salvation is a gratuitous gift of God received through faith, the paper discusses the dimensions of salvation: salvation as a past event, salvation as a present experience and salvation as a future hope. Closely related to this is the second paper on Paul and justification. After a brief discussion of the Indian context from which the paper is reading Paul, it deals with justification through faith in Jesus Christ. Then it explores the meaning of expressions like the righteousness of God and redemption in Christ. By way of conclusion, the paper discusses the significance of justification by faith for Christian women and its relevance in the context of religious pluralism. Closely related to justification is baptism. The third paper discusses Paul's understanding of baptism. For him baptism is one of the two moments by which a person is transformed into a child of God. Justifying faith begins the process and it is fully realized in baptism. The paper also deals with the other effects of baptism such as incorporation into Christ and their implications. The fourth article discusses Paul's thoughts on the Eucharist. It contends that for Paul

the eucharistic celebration is a fellowship in charity. For him, the Eucharistic celebration originates in and takes place in an atmosphere of charity manifested in the sharing of a meal.

A third group of four papers deal with life in the Christian community. The first one discusses Paul's theology of the Church. For him the local gathering of Christians is the focus of his mission. He often uses *ekklesia* for the community in a particular place. Paul also speaks of the universal Church. By analyzing Paul's letters to the Corinthian Church and the Churches of Galatia, the paper clarifies the main elements of Paul's ecclesiology. Another paper examines Paul's ways of community building. Pastoral presence and availability, adaptability, a Word-centred ministry, Christ-centred spirituality, participatory leadership, team ministry are some of the steps Paul took to build communities. The third paper discusses Paul's understanding and praxis of ministries in the Church. The paper begins by a careful analysis of the conflict situation in India caused by the tension between the universal and the particular, between institutional authority and charismatic authority, and between the tendency to accumulate power and tendency to decentralise it. In Paul's approach to ministries there is a creative dialogue between the universal and the particular, a pluralistic blend of charism and institution, and a democratisation of power and a delegation of authority. The fourth article deals with Paul's understanding of women's place in the Church. Both the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Paul show that Paul had many women collaborators in his apostolate whom he respected and loved. Besides, Paul stood for an egalitarian Church. In his view, the Christians' transformed life in Christ implies the abolition of discrimination on the basis of racial, social and gender differences. The paper finally examines some texts in Paul's letters which are often thought to be against women and finds that Paul was in no way opposed to the equality of women.

Finally, there are two related articles. The first one deals with our embodied selves. Our culture teaches us to ignore our bodies. In India, we seek *moksha*, which is conceived as liberation from the bondage to the body. Bodies are real and have materiality but at the same time they are socially constructed. As a result, it is difficult to get a satisfactory answer to the question: what is a body? Modern

thinkers have expressed a variety of views on the body. Some of them are very confusing. There is also a politics of body. In this situation Paul can be of great help. Paul lays stress on the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – all of which imply an affirmation of the body. Paul also addressed many problems in the early Christian church like divisions in the community, the abuse of the body, the position of the weak and the strong, disorder in the worshipping assembly, with his teaching on the Eucharistic body of Christ. All this can help us to develop a healthy attitude to our embodied selves.

The final paper deals with the dynamics of evil and could be related to the previous issue of *Jnanadeepa*. It traces the dynamics of evil in our human attempt to fight against death and to become divine. In attempting to have total control over life and thus to become god, humans inadvertently fosters the very evil we are trying to eliminate. Basing himself on two of the contemporary philosophers - Paul Ricoeur and Ernest Becker - the author traced the phenomenology of evil in human's desire to deny death and thus become divine.

Ricoeur's understanding of the disproportion that characterizes human beings was insufficient to account for occurrences of actual will. No direct, unmediated inspection of the cogito, as Descartes and Husserl had proposed, could show why these evils, contingent as each of them is, in fact came to be. Recognizing the opacity of the cogito in this respect confirmed his suspicion that all self-understanding comes about only through "signs deposited in memory and imagination by the great literary traditions." The progress from *bios* to *logos* has enabled us greatly and also made evil possible. Thus we have arrived at an antinomy and this is where philosophy has to stop.

By refusing to accept mortality as part of their very nature, humans deny their animality and attempt to be angelic. In this very process of denial of death and anxiety, the humans join the "immortality projects" and disrespects the disproportion that is intrinsic to the human condition, enabling evil to emerge.

As a continuation of the philosophical analysis, Becker showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt at eliminating it. Though both the thinkers trace the existence of evil to the disproportion or in-betweenness in the human condition, it has not been our aim to give any account of the origin of evil.

It is our fond hope that the papers published in this double issue of our Journal will help the readers to gain a deeper understanding of Paul's thought and its relevance to us in India today.

**Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ**

**Editor**

## **Continuity and Change The Task of Contextualizing Theology in India Today**

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*Abstract:* In this article the author reflects on “continuity and change” from theological perspectives with special referrer 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 35<sup>th</sup> 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 Exercises, 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 35<sup>th</sup> 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'."<sup>1</sup>
- "As the Formula of your Institute states, the Society of Jesus was founded chiefly 'for the defence and propagation of the faith'."<sup>2</sup>
- "...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."<sup>3</sup>
- "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."<sup>4</sup>

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?<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

In a globalized world (some would go far as to call it a globalized flat<sup>7</sup>) 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> The need for continuity and change derives from the necessity to identify ourselves afresh in a new context.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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<sup>13</sup>, 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.”<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

## **2. Whatever is relevant in one Cosmovision 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

Understanding<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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 Man<sup>22</sup>. 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 alternatingly.

### **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 are aware of it or not, our relationship with other worlds of meaning (i.e. cultures and religions) is on the ultimate level.<sup>23</sup> It is from this one source that ultimate meaning

(*parama-artha*<sup>24</sup>) 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.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup> 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 ‘interculturate’ their beliefs and whatever makes sense to them. By interculturate 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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> Functional equivalents identify similarity of function which allows one to state that the function that Jahweh exerizes in Judaism is equivalent to the function that Allah exerizes 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.<sup>32</sup> 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 dialogue<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.”<sup>35</sup>

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)<sup>36</sup>

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 integratatem*) 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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’.<sup>39</sup> 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 inculcation 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 exerts 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)<sup>40</sup>

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.”<sup>41</sup>

## **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, *Exposit 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 Exercizes (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 Kunnumparam (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: Avataras 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 “pararthatva”) in common. See my “Christian Eucharist and Hindu Yajña”, in: Kurien Kunnumparam (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: ISPK 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 "Kandhamal 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 cosmovation.

"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 incepturn est quod suas habet causas, postulata, dignitatempostulatur quidem alta ex observantia erga id omne, quod in homine operatus est Spiritus, qui ubi vult spirat (Cfr. JOANNIS 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 Wijsen & 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-abnegation 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.)

## **Paul as a Pastor-Theologian in the Early Church: A Re-Reading in the Indian Context**

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*Abstract:* This article emphasize the key role Paul has played in making the gospel of Jesus Christ and the wider dimensions of his message available to the entire world. It means that, if it were not for Paul, the universal dimensions of the gospel of Jesus Christ would not have become a reality as it is today.

Finally, the author asserts: The Pauline Year is the *kairos* given to the Church in India and to her theologians and exegetes to have a better awareness of what Paul has contributed to the universal Church and thereby to play a more responsible and creative role within the rich and pluralistic context of the Asian subcontinent.

*Keywords:* Paul the Pastor, Paul the Theologian, Paul the Ecumenical Theologian, Church, Human rights, human dignity, Indian context.

With all our optimism about God working through his Spirit, above and against all human resistance and calculations, it is only logical and refreshing to understand that God works more through human agents than through supernatural events. The wisdom as well as the theological and pastoral vision of Pope Benedict XVI by announcing a Pauline Year in conjunction with the Year of the Word of God belong to this category of human and divine providence. Calculating a bi-millennium of the birth of Paul as happening around the corner in 2008, the Pope has announced that this special year would be from June 28, 2008 to June 29, 2009. But the main focus of this announcement is to emphasize the key role Paul has played in making the gospel of Jesus Christ and the wider dimensions of his message available to the entire world. It means that, if it were

not for Paul, the universal dimensions of the gospel of Jesus Christ would not have become a reality as it is today. With his newly found freedom and emancipation from the cultural bondage of Judaism and with the liberating cultural heritage of his Hellenistic background, Paul made the universal gospel of Jesus Christ a still more universal reality in the wider Roman Empire, thanks to his timely encounter with the Risen Christ and the mission he received from him.

After the historic event of Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church is very much aware of and is also more committed to its pastoral mission in the world. Consequently, the world is no more considered the enemy of the Church. After centuries of exclusive preoccupation with the inner nature of the Church with regard to its hierarchical and legalistic details, the Church is becoming very much conscious of its mission in the world and this awareness has inaugurated a new era of pastoral reflection in the Church as a whole and also among the various sections of the people of God. As a matter of fact, *pastoral* is a renaming of the concept of *service*, a concept which had become the key concept from the very beginning of the discussions during Vatican II. Theologically understood, the expression ‘pastoral’ is very dynamic and it connotes three levels of meaning, namely, the *personal*, the *diaconal* and the *kenotic* levels of the mission of the Church in the world. While the personal emphasizes the human dimension of the mission of the Church, the diaconal and the kenotic lay emphasis on the service and self-emptying aspects of the Church’s mission. In fact, it goes to the credit of the writers of the Old and New Testaments to have developed such a rich biblical concept as pastoral care, which has gone into the very understanding of the divine-human relationship as well as the human relationship from a religious perspective.

Looking closely at the inner content of the concept of the pastoral mission of the Church from a biblical perspective, the most striking point is to see the convergent and complementary aspect of two ecclesiological passages in the Gospels of both Mark and John. It has been customary to substantiate the entire theology of the founding and the nature of the Church exclusively through a single passage in the Gospel of Mark, where the focus on the faith of Peter (Mat 16:16-19). According to exegetes this story is a post-resurrection event presented

in as pre-resurrection one precisely because of the ecclesial preoccupation of this Gospel. Hence the parallel stories in Mark and Luke do not have this primacy passage at all. But in a very much similar passage in John it is the loving care and shepherding of Peter that stand out as the criterion of leadership in the Church (John 21:15-17). No mention is made here of the faith of Peter. Peter is instructed to take care of the sheep and the lambs that belong to Jesus. Moreover, the long community discourse in Matthew 18:1-35 is to be understood as a pastoral treatise on leadership in the Church. The leaders in the Church are exhorted to take personal care of the members of the community, going in search of the lost and the least, instructing those who go wrong and forgiving all. It is to be further pointed out that, according to Ephesians 2:20, the Church is constituted on the foundation of the apostles as well as the prophets. Hence the foundation of the Church is not to be understood as exclusively related to Peter. Paul, who was not one of the twelve apostles, was equally and more involved in the emergence of the Church as a universal reality as envisioned by Jesus Christ. This is the most important prophetic contribution of Paul for the Church of our times. So also the various pastoral aspects developed by Paul in his various communities with their cultural identities carry with them an ongoing message for the nature and mission of the Church in our times.

## **The Christo-centric Personality and Theology of Paul**

As the most important step towards understanding the unique role Paul played in the evolution of the early Church we have to analyze the inner nature of the emergence of Paul as a disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ. Whereas the Twelve, the chosen disciples of Jesus, were all called from a specific context of their everyday life without any resistance or hesitation, Paul had an entirely different background, which, according to the Acts and the testimony of Paul, was directly opposed to such a discipleship. As a well-trained Pharisee, Paul was totally committed to the observance of the Torah and he was fully convinced that the Torah was the sure way of religious identity and authenticity. As part of this commitment to the Torah, Paul had recourse to all kinds of measures to destroy the

early Christian movement; which he understood as a real threat to the future of Judaism. It is at the climax of these efforts to eliminate this ‘heresy’ within Judaism that Paul was challenged by the risen Christ to reflect on his attitude and actions. Traditionally this story is known as the Damascus event, and this encounter of Paul with the risen Christ stands as the point of departure for the entire life and ministry of Paul. Though Luke tries to give it the nuance of a conversion (Acts 9:1-19a)<sup>1</sup>, Paul himself refers to it either as a revelation of God (Gal 1:15-16) or better still as an encounter between himself and the person of Jesus Christ without any reference to time or place (Phil 3:4-14). This last passage also brings out the inner substance of the change that took place in the person of Paul with regard to his understanding of religious commitment.

A closer analysis of Phil 3:4-14 shows that it is an autobiographical narrative, and here we have Paul himself analyzing the change that took place in him as the result of an encounter with the risen Christ. Basically, it was a transition from Paul’s Torah-centric understanding towards a Christo-centric understanding of religion and religiosity. It was not a change from one religion to another, but from one conviction to another conviction. Paul always wanted to be excellent in everything, including his religious commitment. But when he realized that the excellence he had arrived at through his conformity to the demands of the Torah was something inferior to the excellence which could be reached through a personal and experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ, who had faced the challenge of life in its in-depth seriousness of death, Paul gave up his earlier conviction and embraced this new conviction and committed himself totally and wholeheartedly to the person of Jesus Christ, now risen from the dead for ever. As a Pharisaic Jew it was easier for him to understand the meaning and message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is this Christ-centred personality that stands behind Paul’s entire theology and his spirituality. A casual reference made by Paul that after the revelation of Jesus Christ, at once he went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus (Gal 1:17), shows that Paul purposely went into solitude and reflection in order to enter into the meaning of his future life, now seen from the mystery of the person of Christ.

Whereas the Torah was *something*, Christ is *someone* for Paul. A new “I-Thou” relationship was established and a new focus of perception and judgment was arrived at. Jesus, the Jew,<sup>2</sup> has now become the role model for Paul, the Jew. The world-vision of Jesus, the Jew, became the world-vision of Paul, the Jew. The generous attitude of Jesus towards the followers of other religions enabled Paul to enlarge the horizons of his world-vision and understand all humans as the children of God. During his public ministry Jesus had gone through the non-Jewish territory of Tyre and Sidon, thus meeting a Canaanite woman and extolling her faith (Mat 15: 21-28). Acting against the custom of avoiding the territory of Samaria during the passage between Jerusalem and Galilee, Jesus went to Galilee through Samaria, thus making the Samaritans realize that Jesus is the Savior of the world (John 4:4-42).<sup>3</sup> The story of the Greeks from Galilee wanting to meet Jesus and the reaction of Jesus to his disciples as well as his own reflections about his Jewish identity are a convincing proof of how Jesus understood religious identity.<sup>4</sup> Once Paul had realized that his own call was to take up this universal message of Jesus to the wider world, he did not want any human resistance to check it and he stood by his conviction at all costs. Hence the Risen Christ was the controlling power of his personality as well as his theology. What we analyze below are various articulations of this basic conviction of Paul and his consequent commitment to the cause of the gospel of Christ.

## **Paul: A Pastor-Theologian Defining the Church**

The Acts of the Apostles has taken special care to establish that the universal dimensions of the mission of the Church are not something invented by Paul, but is part of the evolutionary process of what had already happened in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-42). Whereas the Pentecost was the occasion of the coming together of the dispersed Hellenic Jews to Jerusalem, the martyrdom of Stephen that happened some years later was a divinely arranged event which enabled the Hellenic Jewish Christians to go away from Jerusalem and start a new centre of operation for the centrifugal growth of the Church (Acts 11:19-26). In fact, this was a matter of surprise and an initial shock for the leaders of the Jerusalem Church,

which is suggestively expressed by the author of the Acts as: "News of this came to the ears of the Church of Jerusalem; and they sent Barnabas to Antioch" (Acts 11:22). The expression is suggestive of an embarrassment the leaders in the Jerusalem Church must have felt. But in their wisdom and prudence they delegated Barnabas, a Hellenic Jewish Christian from Cyprus, to visit this new community. Reaching Antioch, Barnabas found there a very zealous Christian community and he was much edified by this new experiment. Naturally, he saw the need of having a good support and assistance for encouraging this community to make it a new centre of operation. Herein came Paul, who had been going through a period of quarantine in Tarsus, much against his own newly given mission from the risen Christ (Acts 9:30). The coming in of Paul and the combined work of Barnabas and Paul resulted in the emergence of a dynamic community in Antioch, so much so that this community was able to assist the Church of Jerusalem during a famine that it had to go through (Acts 11:27-30). Though this is a historico-theological reconstruction of events developed by the author of the Acts of the Apostles, it reflects, at the same time, the inner dynamics of the growth of the Christian movement as guided by the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

The suggestive description in Acts 13:1-3 about the inner contents of the Church in Antioch as consisting of prophets and teachers and the further developments in the growth process of the Christian movement are the starting point of a process that is responsible for the ongoing mission of the Church which we are witnessing even in our own times. Central to the event narrated here is the initiative that is attributed to the Holy Spirit. The most striking point is that this Church was guided by prophetic teachers. It is to these prophetic teachers that the Holy Spirit gave the inspiration to venture on an expanding mission into the wider world. It is more likely to think of Paul and Barnabas proposing to the other leaders about the need and prospects of an outgoing mission from this new centre into the wider world. But the initiative was not a private one; hence the community prayed and fasted and with the blessing of the entire community Paul and Barnabas set out on their mission, first to Cyprus, the homeland of Barnabas, and then to other places. Two issues are to be taken into consideration. First of all, it was not from Jerusalem that this universal mission took place, but from a far-off

place in Syria, thus showing that God takes things globally and not locally. Secondly, it is equally important that the Church of Antioch never consulted the apostles in Jerusalem about such a mission outside of the Jewish territory. In fact, a consultation would have had its negative consequences. Hence it is precisely from Antioch that the Church takes on its widening dimensions. The entire credit of this adventure goes to Paul for his initiative and pioneering vision. From what we know about Barnabas and his later reluctance to take the hardships of such adventures (Acts 15:36-39), it is clear that the universal vision of the mission of the Church was the unique contribution of Paul. It is also important to note that the change of name from Saul to Paul mentioned in Acts 13:9 is related to his new mission among the Greeks and not to the conversion from Saul to Paul, which is a conventional way of understanding his two names.

Paul was a committed pastor and theologian in the early Church. Among his many sufferings for the sake of the Christian communities Paul refers to his “anxiety about all the Churches” (2 Cor 11:28) as his biggest suffering. The most important theological and pastoral role Paul played in the early Church was his strong stance in establishing the true identity of the religious movement as inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth over against a sectarian approach towards it that had developed in the Jerusalem Church. Stephen had started this protest and paradoxically, it was the mission and task of Paul to defend it to the point of his later on becoming a *persona non-grata* before the official Church of Jerusalem. Galatians 2:1-10 gives a clear picture of this pastoral and theological crisis in the early Church. As Paul states, “false brothers secretly brought in” (Gal 2:4) tried to persuade Paul to give up his convictions about the gospel, but he did not give in at all. In fact, Paul was the only one who remained strong in his convictions. The result of this confrontation was that there was a compromise and a division of labour about such a crucial issue. The leaders also made use of this opportunity to make a request to Paul that he should “remember the poor” (Gal 2:10) when he worked among the Greeks, and Paul was only eager to agree to it.<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, the significance of this crucial event in the early Church has not been sufficiently understood, because it is the other presentation of the same event by Luke in the Acts as a smooth event, in which Peter presided over, that has caught

the attention of many readers of the New Testament (Acts 15:6-12). Luke wanted to give a kind of precedence to Peter in such important matters related to the growth process of the Church. But the trend in the Cornelius story in the same Acts (Acts 10:1-11:18) shows that Peter had his own reservations and negative attitude towards the entry of the Greeks into the community of the believers. Gal 2:11-14 also hints at the same conclusion.

## **Paul: The Great Defender of Human Dignity and Human Rights**

The starting point of any meaningful discussion on the specific role played by Paul in the early Church is his basic conviction about the inbuilt dignity and rights of all humans, which made him to stand and fight for this conviction at all costs. Paul was convinced that what the Priestly Tradition (Gen 1:26-31) and the Yahwist Tradition (Gen 2:7, 15) wrote about the human reality is something that is to be defended at all costs. The covenantal tradition which he had imbibed as part of his Jewish training also enabled him to see the greatness of the human reality insofar as Yahweh had entered into a personal relationship with Israel. Paul also had realized that the various laws prescribed in the Torah for observance were not to restrict the freedom of the people but to inspire them to lead an authentic life. But this was not all clear to Paul because of his pharisaic mindset. Through his commitment to Christ, Paul came to realize the larger dimensions of human dignity and human rights, and he considered it his duty to defend this truth at all costs. As a result, for Paul, the Jews and Greeks, free and slaves, men and women were all equals. Citing a baptismal exhortation from the early Christian community, Paul says: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Paul realized that it was his duty and right to hold on to the universal values which Jesus had upheld during his earthly ministry even by transgressing the barriers created between the Jews and the Samaritans (John 4:4).

Paul wrote to the Galatians: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to

you... You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal 5:1-4). It was in his encounter with the risen Christ that Paul had understood the deeper dimensions of human dignity, and it was a radical departure from his earlier enslavement to the Torah of Moses. It was to defend this human dignity and rights that Paul had fought in the Jerusalem Council which we discussed above. But when Paul realized that the understanding arrived at in Jerusalem was violated and abused by some Jewish Christians in the territory of Galatia, he had no choice but to demonstrate the valid principles of human dignity underlying the gospel preached by Christ. The question of respecting human dignity was not only a matter of freedom from the Torah but also of Christian living. Paul wrote to the Galatians: "If someone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal 6:1). Paul wrote to the Romans: "Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while others eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat. For God has welcomed them... Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds" (Rom 14:1-5).

However, Christian freedom does not mean a matter of license. The Christians have to be fully conscious of their call and the demands of that call. It was precisely here that Paul had to deal with a variety of issues related to human freedom. The Greek mind, characterized by its intellectual superiority and emancipating inclinations, tended to make each one aware of his and her identity to the extent of affirming and asserting it, neglecting the others. In fact, Paul had gone to Corinth after an initial shock he had experienced at Areopagus about this intellectual superiority consciousness when he explained the gospel of the resurrection to the Athenians (Acts 17: 22-31). So "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor 2:1-5) Paul made a new experiment in going to another community which had no intellectual excellence. It was a risky venture into the unknown future. Corinth was a commercial city and consequently it had its own problems.<sup>6</sup> Paul stayed there

eighteen months to educate that community and later on appointed Apollos to take care of it. But very soon Paul realized that this community also had radical problems, the main among them being its party spirit and consequent group quarrels.

It is in the context of this discussion on human dignity and human rights that we have to review the oft-discussed question of Paul being a misogynist and a misogamist, namely, that Paul did not give sufficient importance to women in the Church (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33a-36) and also that he did not recommend marriage as a Christian ideal (1 Cor 7:1). In dealing with the undisciplined Corinthian community Paul had to be rather strict with the dress code in the gathering for worship, especially in the context of the cosmopolitan and commercial city of Corinth. But the reference to women keeping silent in the worship gatherings does not seem to belong to the original text and is considered as an interpolation at a later date.<sup>7</sup> In 1 Cor 11:5 Paul refers to women praying and prophesying in the worship gatherings. On the other hand, it is beyond doubt that Paul had given great importance for the role to be played by women in the Church. The reference to Euodia and Syntyche as co-workers of Paul (Phil 4:2-3) and the recommendation he gave to Phoebe, the deacon of the Church of Cenchreae (Rom 16:1), a number of women whom Paul greets in his letter to the Romans (Rom 16:3-15) all prove that Paul recognized the important role women played in the Church. It is also related to the fact Paul had held in high esteem Prisca and Aquila in the Corinthian Church as well as Nympha in the Church of Colossae. Reference to 1 Cor 7:1 as a proof of Paul not encouraging marriage has been now proved as a misreading insofar as here Paul is referring to a slogan of the Gnostic Christians in Corinth who were against Christians getting married. On the other hand, Paul insisted on the need of Christian marriage and also the rights and duties of both husband and wife in the exercise their marital rights (1 Cor 7:2-7).

## **Paul: The Great Ecumenical Theologian of the Early Church**

Ecumenism and wider ecumenism are concepts which have become very popular in our times. Although the Greek word

*oikoumene*, from which the English word ecumenism is derived, basically means the inhabited earth, during the New Testament times it was identified with the Roman Empire. However, it assumed a new meaning during the past centuries when the ecumenical movement got started and became a venture towards the unity of the Churches. During the second half of the twentieth century, when the world became conscious of its increasing religious pluralism, the concept of a wider ecumenism evolved and it is still taking deeper roots in sociological, philosophical and theological discussions. Even ecological concerns are now brought into the purview of ecumenical discussions, emphasizing thereby the original meaning of the word. In the context of the world becoming a global village, peoples and nations try to transcend their ethnical, religious, cultural and linguistic considerations in view of experiencing the benefits and blessings of human solidarity. Hence theologians are also very active in our times in seeing the wider dimensions of ecumenism as a concern of the Church.

It is precisely in this context that certain theological reflections of Paul emerge as ecumenically important contributions for contemporary theological discussions. What Paul wrote about Christ breaking the dividing wall of hostility between the two opposing groups of Jews and Greeks and bringing them together to form a new humanity (Eph 2:11-22) is a typical example of how Paul could theologically establish that the existing customs and practices of social and religious discriminations are to be removed through the power of the Christ Event. The emphasis on the new humanity (*kainos anthropos*) (Eph 2:15) is remarkable insofar as it is the blue print of an ideal society the Church has to establish in the world. God reconciling the world to himself through Christ and entrusting the ministry of reconciliation to the apostles ( 2 Cor 5:18-20) and thereby constituting a new creation is a Pauline reflection that has important pastoral applications in our contemporary world of alienations and estrangements. A very significant contribution of Paul towards cosmic ecumenism is his reflection on the ultimate destiny of material creation, which, according to Paul, is its final transformation through the ongoing power of the Spirit of the Risen Christ (Rom 8:18-25). Whereas Judaism had speculated on the destruction of the present world order and the inauguration of a new

world order as an apocalyptic event, Paul tries to see the groaning of the present world order as moving towards an eschatological transformation as a result of the resurrection of Christ. Consequently the entire material creation is undergoing a process of inner transformation till its eschatological fulfilment when God will be all in all (*ho theos ta panta en pasin*) (1 Cor 15:28).

## **Paul: The Pastor-Theologian and Issues of Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis**

Our analysis of the various aspects of Pauline personality as well as his theological reflections invite us also to have a closer look at how Paul dealt with issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxis when he had to face such issues in the various communities he himself or his close associates had founded. Paul realized that such issues are bound to happen (1 Cor 11:19), especially when various issues of the gospel were to be put into practice in different socio-cultural and religious contexts. But Paul had an inbuilt capacity to differentiate between the more important and the less important as well as those issues which had no relevance at all to Christian life. The various pastoral issues discussed in the first letter to the Corinthians are typical examples of how Paul faced such issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxis in that community. What is most important is how Paul approached such issues from a radical and not from a superficial and conventional perspective. With regard to the question of eating meat once offered before the deities of other religions, it was more a question of edification and concern for the others than a real question of orthodoxy (1 Cor 8:1-11:1). But the scandalous celebration of the Agape and the Lord's Supper was more a question of orthodoxy and orthopraxis, because it tended to destroy the very foundation of the Christian community (1 Cor 11:17-34). When Paul was asked to give clear answers to various issues related to Christian life, he had his own pastoral and catechetical approach to such issues, such as the questions related to marriage and virginity and the role and meaning of charisms in the community. Christian edification in a multi-religious and multi-cultural context was a crucial issue, which Paul wanted to defend at all costs. However, many of his simpler teachings are interpreted by theologians out of context and this fact

has brought in a lot of confusion about several issues of Pauline theology.

The major Christological issues discussed in the Deutero-Pauline letters to Colossians and Ephesians deserve special attention. Even if Paul was not the direct author of these letters, the issue, as such, seems to have a Pauline framework of reflection, especially because of its profound Christological overtones which are characteristic of Pauline theology. This is particularly true of Colossians 1:15-20, where we have one of the most sublime formulations of who Christ is. It is in the same perspective that we have to understand the Christological presentation of salvation history as having its origin, historical accomplishment and eschatological fulfilment in and through Christ (Eph 1:3-10). In fact, here we have a non-lapsarian approach to Christology and soteriology which should assume greater significance in contemporary theological discussions. So also the discussion on unity, diversity and growth into the maturity of Christ as the specific characteristic of the Christian community has a genuine Pauline trait, when compared with Romans 12:3-9. Paul's ability to relate practical issues to sublime theological ideals is given a clear proof in his letter to the Philippians. As such, the Philippians were Paul's best friends. His writing to them: "My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved" (Phil 4:1) is typical of a pastor who is seasoned by theological and personal depth. It is to them that Paul presents the kenotic Christ and he requests them to have the "mind of Christ" as the controlling power of Christian life (Phil 2:1-11). When he felt that theological arguments would fail to bring home to his readers the sublime ideas of his Christian intuition, he gave expression to his inner depth of spirituality through a hymn of love which has within it the solution of all pastoral problems then and now (1 Cor 13:1-13). After his in-depth analysis of the role and function of the Spirit of the Risen Christ in Christian life and Christian economy of salvation (Rom 8:1-30) Paul exclaims: "If God is for us, who is against us?.. Who can separate us from the love of Christ?... I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8: 31-39).

## ***Paul: Social Concerns as Theological Concerns***

A much related and closer approach to Paul as a Pastor-Theologian is, when we evaluate the ministry of Paul from the perspective of his social concerns, and these are spread out in his several of his genuine letters. In fact, the linking of social concerns and theological concerns is something characteristic of our times, especially since Vatican II. Chapters, such as, "The proper development of culture", "socio-economic life", and "The life of the political community" in *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II are typical examples of the merging of social concerns and theological concerns as related to the mission of the Church in our contemporary world. The same documents states: "Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God" (art. 2). This is a clear way of our present-day understanding of the merging of the sacred and the secular. In fact, it is the articulation of what Jesus had tried to establish during his earthly ministry, but it was all forgotten during the centuries when the missionaries were burning with the zeal for the souls and forgot all about the earthly dimension of Christian life. Thanks to this new incentive and initiative taken by the official Church, liberation theologies of all sorts are developing in different part of the world, including India.

It is here that Paul emerges as a theologian who had a clear and definite stance on the social concerns of the people he had to deal with, whether they were cultural concerns, or gender concerns, or economic concerns. When Paul realized that cultural issues were brought into the centre of theological concerns, thus demanding the denial of cultural issues for the sake of the supposedly theological issues, Paul had to stand firm and defend the cultural freedom of those to whom the gospel was preached. This is precisely what happened in Paul's defence of the freedom of the Greek Christians from the Jewish custom of circumcision and the observance of the Torah. In other words, it was not a question of Paul denying the meaning of the Jewish practices, but of affirming the right and freedom of the Greeks in the acceptance and practice of the Christian faith and praxis. Though Paul was equally or even more committed

to the conviction about the superiority of the Jewish Torah over all other religious practices, the enlightenment he received from Christ and later reflected on during the silent moments of his life, challenged him to give up his old convictions and stand for new values and new principles of behaviour. We have already referred to Paul's basic convictions about the creative role of women in the missionary activity of the early Church. In fact, it was a continuation of the dynamic role several women disciples had during the earthly ministry of Jesus, an important information we get from the Gospel of Luke (Lk 8:1-2).

Time and again it has been argued that Paul did not do anything to remove one of the major social problems of the Roman Empire, namely, slavery. On the other hand, Paul is said to have encouraged this practice, advising the slaves to obey their masters and telling the masters to treat the slaves with sympathy and understanding. So in Eph 6:5-9 as well as in Col 3:22-4:1 Paul is said to have advised the slaves and masters in such a manner that they were supposed to remain at that level and the slaves were not expected to have a better future than what they had experienced with their masters. Here a clear reference is to be made about the Proto-Pauline and the Deutero-Pauline letters in the Pauline Corpus. The above passages are all found in the Deutero-Pauline letters. It is true that in his own letter to the Corinthians Paul had advised the slaves to remain satisfied with their own state as slaves (1Cor 7:21). Then we read: "If a chance for liberty should come, take it" with a possible different reading also: "But even if a chance of liberty should come, choose rather to make use of your servitude" (NEB). The argument of Paul is clear, from a theological point of view: "Whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ" (1 Cor 7:22). Paul's ideas may look strange to our own way of thinking because his theological world stood much above our own mundane thinking and behaving. Freedom and slavery are all relative concepts as long as people enjoy the inner freedom of the children of God, and Paul was more concerned about this fact.

This is precisely the world of thinking Paul presents to us in his genuine and shortest letter to Philemon. Though short, this letter

opens before us a world of challenging reflection to show how Paul tried to initiate a slow but powerful way of inner transformation among the masters and slaves in the Roman Empire. Paul's appeal to the Christian Philemon, the master of the slave Onesimus, who had recently become a Christian, to accept him as a brother, as if Philemon was receiving Paul himself, who had brought Philemon to faith in Christ, is one of the most powerful appeals Paul had given to establish an egalitarian society. Paul did not want to act as a revolutionary, especially in the context of making the Christian movement as an agent of upsetting the Roman socio-economic system. At the same time, Paul had sown the seeds of an inner revolution which became the basis of later attempts for the establishment of a society based on equality at all levels. However, it is true that several medieval theologians had defended the divine establishment of slavery, precisely to defend the colonial systems of enslaving the conquered people throughout world. It was during Vatican II that the Roman Catholic Church has once and for all defended the issue of human dignity as the basis of religious freedom.

A discussion on the social concerns of Paul has to necessarily include a reference to Paul's concern for the poor, a cause which he had set to his heart as of vital importance, as Paul himself states in his letter to the Galatians (Gal 2:10). Coming under the category of 'remembrance'<sup>8</sup>, Paul had taken it as a vital part of his apostolic ministry because he knew very well that preaching the gospel was not only a question of spiritual salvation but also one of empowering humans to have a dignified life. In accordance with the request the Jerusalem authorities had placed before him, Paul worked very hard to collect a financial subsidy for the poor Christians of Jerusalem and Judaea and he pleaded with the Corinthian community to share their wealth with these poor Christians (2 Cor 8:1-9:14). In fact, he had taken special care to have this help reach the Church of Jerusalem not as his gift but as the gift of the donor Churches. He had advised the Corinthians to have their own representatives selected to carry their gift to Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:3). However, by the time this gift was to be taken to Jerusalem, Paul had received news that the Jerusalem Church was not likely to receive this support for the simple reason that Paul and his theology had by then become unacceptable to the authorities of Jerusalem (Rom 15:31). Here we have a typical

example of how ideological differences result in the denial of a legitimate and sublime human cause, something typical of the so-called religious administration.

## **Paul: Indian Biblical Theologians and the Indian Scenario**

In his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* published in 1998 Pope John Paul II has invited Indian theologians and philosophers to engage themselves in a re-articulation of the gospel in the Indian context. He wrote: "In preaching the gospel, Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded. Today, as the gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds which once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation, which mean that our generation faces problems not unlike those faced by the Church in the first centuries. My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamics of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems. In India, particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought. In this work of discernment, which finds its inspiration in the Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, certain criteria will have to be kept in mind. The first of these is the *universality of the human spirit* (italics mine), whose basic needs are the same in the most disparate cultures. The second, which derives from the first, is this: in engaging with great cultures for the first time, the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. This criterion is valid for the Church in every age, even for the Church of the future, who will judge herself enriched by all that has come from today's engagement with Eastern cultures and will find in this inheritance fresh cues for fruitful dialogue with the cultures which will emerge as humanity moves into the future. Thirdly, care will need to be taken lest, contrary to the very nature of the human spirit, the legitimate defence of the

uniqueness and originality of Indian thought be confused with the idea that a particular cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference and affirm itself by opposing other traditions".<sup>9</sup>

Never has any Pope described in such beautiful words the richness of the Indian philosophical and theological traditions. The Pope has invited Indian theologians to take up the challenge of articulating biblical and theological concepts giving due respect to Indian thought patterns and taking into account India's rich religious and cultural heritage. At the same time, Indian theologians must remain open to other articulations, especially the early Hellenic ones, because they are also part of the treasure of the Church's tradition. Sufficient attention must be paid to the contributions of the Greek, Latin and Syriac Fathers of the Church. Likewise, Indian theologians must appreciate the theological traditions and contributions of other countries and peoples. The human spirit is universal and its articulations are also universal. That is why the Pope says that no cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference which tries to affirm itself by opposing other traditions. As Pope John Paul II has pointed out in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Indian theologians have to be fully aware that Asia, "the cradle of world's major religions" whose "people take pride in their religious and cultural values" is also a land of "religions showing signs of great vitality and a capacity for renewal". These religions also bear witness to "deep thirst for spiritual values". The Pope wrote: "The task of proclaiming Jesus in a way which enables the peoples of Asia to identify with him, while remaining faithful both to the Church's theological doctrine and to their own Asian origins is a paramount challenge"<sup>10</sup> The words of the FABC are also very relevant here: "The local Church is a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions, in brief, with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own."<sup>11</sup>

What Indian theologians need today is a greater sense of identity, a deeper sense of selfhood and legitimate pride to take upon themselves the responsible task of being the theologians of the kingdom of God in a country which has its own philosophical,

theological and religious heritage. The principle of adaptation and inculcation is of great significance not only for the missionary in the traditional sense of the term, but also for the theologians. The church is *in* history and this means, in turn, that a sound theology of the church is also a living reality and one in touch with the actualities of the age in which she finds itself. Hence the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* recommends: "Each nation develops the ability to express Christ's message in its own way. At the same time, a living exchange is fostered between the Church and the diverse cultures of people.... With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire people of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine Word. In this way, revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth to greater advantage".

The early Church Fathers saw in Greek philosophy the work of the Logos and thus worked hard to establish a relationship between Christianity and Greek philosophy. In the medieval period Scholastic theology depended very much on Aristotle and efforts were made to reconcile the Christian doctrine of God with the teachings of Aristotle. What are the contributions of other religions and cultures in India for the formulation of an Indian Christian theology worth the name? What Pope Leo XIII said in 1893, when he erected the Papal Seminary of India and Ceylon in Kandy, should always remain as a reminder to the church in India and to her theologians: "O! Children of India, you are the administrators some of your own salvation". The concept of salvation about which the Pope spoke in 1893 has undergone radical changes in our times and it now includes many more nuances at the social, religious, cultural and economic levels. Hence the Indian theologians have to become aware of the great task they have to take up, and carry it out with a renewed sense of dedication and commitment and thereby contribute their share for the realization of the kingdom of God in this land of religions and cultures.

Paul the great missionary of the early Church is a model *par excellence* for the Indian biblical theologians in their efforts to translate the Christian gospel in the language and idioms of this vast subcontinent with its religious and cultural pluralism. In the

same way as Paul was first of all a scribe trained for Judaism and later on he became a scribe trained for the larger interests of the kingdom of God in the wider Roman empire, Indian biblical theologians have to decipher the wide spectrum of the concerns of the kingdom of God in this country. Jesus has already referred to the quality of such scribes insofar as they have a treasure within them from which they can take the new and the old (Mat 13:52). What is of vital importance is to have a pastoral sense and commitment in the same way as Paul had it as the élan vital of his life and activities. Leadership in the Church is walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd. The writer of the first Letter of Peter wrote it in clear terms: "I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gains but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge but be examples to the flock. And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away" (1 Pet 5:1-4). The Pauline Year is the *kairos* given to the Church in India and to her theologians and exegetes to have a better awareness of what Paul has contributed to the universal Church and thereby to play a more responsible and creative role within the rich and pluralistic context of the Asian subcontinent. Deutero-Isaiah exhorted the returnees from the Babylonian captivity: "Widen the space of your tent, extend the curtains of your home. Do not hold back! Lengthen your ropes, and make your tent-pegs firm, for you will burst out to right and to left" (Is 54:2-3). This exhortation is very much applicable to the Indian theologians and exegetes of our times who are also challenged to go out of their centripetal world of theological reflection to the wider world of God.

## Notes

- [1] 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, Jacob and Peter, and also the practice of the universal Church, including the naming of the Pope after his election.

- [2] In a recent book, *A Marginal Jew*, New York: Doubleday, Vol I, 1991; Vol II 1994. John P. Meier has demonstrated the kind of Jewish identity Jesus of Nazareth had practiced during his earthly ministry, very often going against the conventions and practices of Judaism. Cf. Joseph Pathrapankal, *The Christian Programme*, Dharmaram Publications, 1999, pp.142-146.
- [3] The statement of the Evangelist that Jesus "had to go through Samaria" (John 4:4) hints at the prophetic compulsion through which Jesus made this courageous action for the cause of his gospel.
- [4] Joseph Pathrapankal, "Jesus and the Greeks (John 12:20-28): A Semiotic Study on Religious Identity" in *Enlarging the Horizons: Studies in Bible and Theology*, Vazhoor: Sopanam Publications, 2008, pp. 82-103.
- [5] "Apostolic Commitment and 'Remembering the Poor: A Study in Gal 2:10'" in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in their Textual and Situational Contexts*, Essays in honour of Lars Hartman, ed. by T.Fornberg and D.Hellholm, Stockholm, 1995, pp. 1001-1018.
- [6] Joseph Pathrapankal, "From Areopagus to Corinth (Acts 17:22-31; 1 Cor 2:1-5): A Study on the Transition from the Power of Knowledge to the Power of the Spirit" in *Mission Studies*, vol. 23, 2006, pp. 61-80.
- [7] The NRSV translation of the Bible has printed 1 Cor 14:33a-36 within bracket, to make it clear that it is not part of the original letter of Paul. According to scholars, the author of the pseudo-Pauline 1 Tim 2:8-15 could be responsible for this interpolation.
- [8] "Remembrance" in the biblical sense is much more than a psychological exercise of recalling a past event. It is a re-presentation of the past event in such a manner that the past becomes the present and something happens as a result of this remembrance. The Israelites remembering the past history of their deliverance from Egypt were reminded that they have to make the past a present experience as they were exhorted to lead a life in accordance with the blessings they had received from God through that deliverance. Hence "remembering the poor" also meant a commitment of the person to do something concrete and meaningful for the poor.
- [9] *Fides et Ratio* art. 72; [10] *Church in Asia* art. 8
- [11] FABC Statement, April 1974. Cf. Gudencio B. Rosalels and Catalino G. Arevado, eds, *For all the Peoples of Asia*, No. 12, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992, p. 14.

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(Contd from p.29) Jacob and Peter, and also the practice of the universal Church, including the naming of the Pope after his election.

- [43] In a recent book, *A Marginal Jew*, New York: Doubleday, Vol I, 1991; Vol II 1994. John P. Meier has demonstrated the kind of Jewish identity Jesus of Nazareth had practiced during his earthly ministry, very often going against the conventions and practices of Judaism. Cf. Joseph Pathrapankal, *The Christian Programme*, Dharmaram Publications, 1999, pp.142-146.
- [44] The statement of the Evangelist that Jesus “had to go through Samaria” (John 4:4) hints at the prophetic compulsion through which Jesus made this courageous action for the cause of his gospel.
- [45] Joseph Pathrapankal, “Jesus and the Greeks (John 12:20-28): A Semiotic Study on Religious Identity” in *Enlarging the Horizons: Studies in Bible and Theology*, Vazhoor: Sopanam Publications, 2008, pp. 82-103.
- [46] “Apostolic Commitment and ‘Remembering the Poor: A Study in Gal 2:10’” in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in their Textual and Situational Contexts*, Essays in honour of Lars Hartman, ed. by T.Fornberg and D.Hellholm, Stockholm, 1995, pp. 1001-1018
- [47] Joseph Pathrapankal, “From Areopagus to Corinth (Acts 17:22-31; 1 Cor 2:1-5): A Study on the Transition from the Power of Knowledge to the Power of the Spirit” in *Mission Studies*, vol. 23, 2006, pp. 61-80.
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- [49] “Remembrance” in the biblical sense is much more than a psychological exercise of recalling a past event. It is a re-presentation of the past event in such a manner that the past becomes the present and something happens as a result of this remembrance. The Israelites remembering the past history of their deliverance from Egypt were reminded that they have to make the past a present experience as they were exhorted to lead a life in accordance with the blessings they had received from God through that deliverance. Hence “remembering the poor” also meant a commitment of the person to do something concrete and meaningful for the poor.
- [50] *Fides et Ratio* art. 72; [51] *Church in Asia* art. 8
- [52] FABC Statement, April 1974. Cf. Gudencio B. Rosalels and Catalino G. Arevalo, eds, *For all the Peoples of Asia*, No. 12, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992, p. 14.

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## **Paul's Theology in the Context of Early Christian Pluralism**

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**Abstract:** This article deals with theological pluralism prevailing in the early Church and Paul's creative response to it. The author asserts that it was the *sensus fidelium* guided by such figures as Clement and Ignatius of Antioch and helped possibly by the common martyrdom in Rome of the "two pillars" that exercised its discernment within this wide and wild range of opinions. What this discernment signifies is that, on the one hand, a certain orthodoxy was established but that, on the other hand, this orthodoxy accepted a pluralism in which Peter and Paul functioned as the two focal points of an ellipse.

**Keywords:** Reconciliation, pluralism, early Christianity, theological context, theology of religions.

Our reflection on the theological pluralism prevailing in the early Church can start with an unedifying story. It is the story of the quarrel between Paul and Peter in Antioch as Paul himself reports it in Gal 2:11-15.

When Kephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews (also) acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not on the right road in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Kephas in front of all, "If

you, though a Jew, are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

## 1. Paul's viewpoint

The reader is invited to sympathize with Paul's disappointment. Apparently the Jerusalem Assembly, reported in Acts 15:1-29 and Gal 2:1-10, had settled the question of circumcision which was a burning issue in the early Church. The theological problem of a Christian identity without circumcision had been solved in favour of the Pauline position. The influential leaders (the *dokountes* of vv 2.6.9) seemed to have been convinced and "extended the right hand of fellowship" (v.9) to the Apostle of the Gentiles. Unfortunately, according to the report of Paul, immediately afterwards, Peter showed signs of weakness and gave way to undignified dilly-dallying. Paul took him rudely to task for his "hypocrisy" (v. 13) and reminded him of the right doctrine.

The modern reader will side with Paul and thank him for his firmness. As the entire letter to Galatians will show, it amounted to the basic question of Christian freedom. Once for all, the Gospel of liberty had been given full expression and set free from the shackles of Jewish legalism and communitarism. Now it could stretch its wings and go flying all over the world.

This is, at least, the common reading of the text. It views Paul's position as the final expression of Christian faith. Henceforth the true believer has only to toe the Pauline line. Catholic authors tend to minimize the issue. They go by the interpretation of Tertullian: "It was an error of attitude not of doctrine,"[1] a kind of venial sin that can be all the more overlooked since the reproof was received with exemplary humility.[2] Non-Catholic commentators are more outspoken: "Peter was dreadfully wrong and Paul right in his rebuke in defence of the Gospel."<sup>[3]</sup>

In any case it is commonly accepted that Paul's intervention settled the issue. Peter had only to repent and fall into line. His attitude "could well have had serious consequences. Paul stopped Peter from committing such an error."<sup>[4]</sup> W. Barclay draws the lesson of the story: "Paul's action gives us a vivid example of how one

strong man by his steadfastness can check a drift away from the right course before it becomes a tidal wave.”[5]

## 2. Peter’s Viewpoint

But was it so? It takes two to tango... or to pick a quarrel and experience teaches us that, in a dispute, both sides deserve to be heard. The account of Gal 2 gives us the version of Paul. It would have been interesting to get the Petrine side of the story. It is not sure at all that it would have reported an ultimate submission to the Pauline stand. Even Paul’s report does not state that Peter was convinced. There are several indications that “the Antioch incident ended in a political defeat for Paul.”[6] Barnabas rallied to Peter’s position (v.13), which shows that Paul’s rhetoric failed to convince the audience. Moreover and mostly, the converging data of Acts and of the Epistles indicate that Paul gave up Antioch as a base for his missionary campaigns. The subsequent account of Acts reports a single passing visit of Paul to Antioch (18:20). As for the Epistles, there is no epistle to the Antiochians and, with the lone exception of Gal 2:11, Antioch is never mentioned at all.[7] “We can reasonably infer from these facts that Paul lost the argument, found himself isolated at Antioch, separated himself from Barnabas and undertook a wide-ranging mission with new co-workers.”[8] “Paul was right, but did not win the day.”[9]

Actually Paul’s radicalism was rather one-sided. Peter and the others had their own reason to look at things from another angle. They all agreed that access to the new Israel was no longer obtained through circumcision and the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ. But there remained the practical problems of social intercourse and conviviality between Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ. Where the community was homogeneously made of Gentile Christians, as was generally the case in Greece and further West, Paul’s rigorous attitude raised no problem. But in the case of mixed communities as it happened in Antioch, a *modus vivendi* had to be found especially as regards the food to be served in common meals, the calendar of feasts, the Sabbath observance, not to speak of mixed marriages, etc.[10] Could Jewish Christians be required to sit at table and share in the unclean food of the Gentiles? Whatever be the theological

presuppositions, the cultural rift subsisted. We know the problem in India. Peter and Barnabas faced a problem similar to that of De Nobili and Ricci, and all the pioneers of inculturation.

### **3. Luke's Viewpoint**

Was it not normal to expect mutual concessions on both sides? This is what is suggested by the Lukan account of the Jerusalem Assembly in Acts 15. The construction of the chapter is rather surprising. First the main problem of the circumcision is solved. Peter formulates the basic principle that all are saved by faith "through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15: 9-11). This is followed by a general silence of assent welcoming the wonders of God among the Gentiles (v. 12). But the debate seems to rebound when James, while joining with the general agreement (vv 14-18), proposes an amendment limiting this agreement with restrictive conditions concerning matrimonial impediments and rules of *kasruth* (vv 19-20).[11] It seems to be a case of the left hand taking away what the right hand has given. Or better it looks like the small print appended to a contract: the agreement is clear but conditions apply. Moreover in his lengthy discussion of the problem of idolothytes in 1 Cor 8-10, further resumed in Rom 14:1-15:5, Paul does not seem to be aware of the restriction proposed by James. On the opposite side, in Rev 2:14, on the same question of food offered to idols, the church of Pergamum is judged not on the Pauline principle of flexibility but on the strict Jacobite rule.

From the historicocritical point of view, "most exegetes agree that the 'kosher' observances from Lev 17-18, imposed on Gentile converts in Acts 15:20, 29, do not belong historically to the Jerusalem agreement between the pillars and Paul."<sup>[12]</sup> But the Lukan text as it stands is the expression of a community or communities which could not go by the strict application of the Pauline principle and, like Peter, had to adjust to the concrete situation.

### **4. The Antiochian Situation**

The background of such a situation is found in the decision of the Jerusalem Assembly reported by Paul in Gal 2:9: "When they

perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised."

This text has been subject to much speculation. How is the agreement to be understood? Does it refer to a kind of personal jurisdiction which would reserve Jews to "Peter" and exclude Paul from any contact with Jews?[13] But this does not correspond to the praxis of the Apostle who made himself "Jews with the Jews and Greek with Greeks" (1 Cor 9:20). Or does it refer to a territorial partition, reserving Palestine to Peter and giving the rest of the world to Paul?[14] It would be a very unequal division and it would leave out major areas of the world that anyway remained outside the Pauline orbit, like Egypt and Cyrenaica in Africa, Mesopotamia and Persia in the East. We must more probably think rather of cultural areas from a Jewish perspective. Africa (Egypt, Nubia, Libya, and possibly Ethiopia) had long been exposed to an influential Jewish presence: in Alexandria of Egypt, one third of the population was Jewish. Equally substantial was the Jewish presence in Asia (Mesopotamia, Media, Persia and possibly India). To those countries could be applied the words of James in Acts 15:21: "from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues." Those parts of the world had long been exposed to Jewish culture. Everybody did not "belong to the circumcision" but Jews could presume that Moses and his Law were sufficiently known to all. Such was not the case in the West where, until the events of 70 which brought a number of Jewish slaves all over the Roman Empire, and with the exception of Rome, Jewish presence was minimal or totally non-existent. For the Jerusalem Assembly, the East (Asia) and the South (Africa) were the world of "circumcision" deeply penetrated by Jewish presence and culture. It was left to the "pillars." And it was indeed the area where Paul did not go. West was the pagan world, unexposed to Jewish culture. This was left to Paul.[15]

Antioch of Syria was on the intersection of both worlds. It was the capital of "pagan" Syria but had an important Jewish Diaspora. Hence the meeting of the two apostles and the conflict of policies.

At any rate, it cannot be said that Pauline orthodoxy got the upper hand. The two courses of action just came to meet. It did not result in a unified common statement. Rooted in two different cultures, they were the expression of two different perspectives.

## 5. Theological Implications

It was not only a question of missionary tactics. Different theological perspectives stemmed from these various cultural backgrounds. Addressed to non-Jews, Paul's is a theology of rupture, a theology in black and white, made of antitheses: law and freedom, works and faith, Spirit and flesh, old and new humanity, kenosis and glory, grace and merits, etc. This sense of disruption might also be connected with the shattering experience of his conversion, an experience which attuned him to the needs of a non-Jewish listeners.

For Matthew, on the contrary, the stress is on "fulfilment":

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:17-19).[16]

In the context of this solemn introduction, the so-called antitheses which follow (5:21-42) do not really express contradiction but fulfilment. There is nothing wrong in condemning murder, adultery, and perjury. Even the law of retaliation is a law of justice intended to limit tribal vendetta. The literary form of those statements is not that of a rhetoric contraposition but of rabbinical *pesher*. To the text of the Torah, which is in no way abolished, Jesus gives a new interpretation in terms of the new righteousness.

There might even be a touch of antipaulinism in 5:19 referring to those "who teach others." [17] Even if Paul himself is not personally criticized, it would concern a tendency to ultra-pauline anomism which had developed by the time Mt was written. A similar reaction against Pauline or Deutero-pauline anomism can be traced

in Mt 7:21-23.[18] It is not irrelevant to note that modern scholarship has connected the Matthean work with the church of Antioch.[19]

The Antiochene origin of the Gospel of Luke is a moot point. It is stated by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, 3.4,6) and Jerome (*De Vir. Ill.*, 7). But equally ancient sources mention Achaia,[20] and scholars suggest at random, Pisidian Antioch, Philippi, Cyrene or Rome. Whatever be the birth place of Luke and the place of composition of his double work, the solution he proposes to the Jerusalem conflict in Acts 15 is quite "Antiochian" as it goes along the lines of Peter's position in the conflict at Antioch. This tallies with his general tendency to express the newness of the Gospel in terms of continuity. Luke is the evangelist of continuity, continuity of a salvation history moving progressively from the time of the prophets to the time of Jesus and the time of the Church.[21] Unlike Paul, Luke does not set Law and Faith in Christ in contrast. He rather emphasizes their continuity. In his Gospel, the old economy is represented by a galaxy of prophets inside (Zacharias, Simeon, Anna) or outside (Elisabeth, Mary) the Temple of Jerusalem. In the Temple also, the "child" is attentive to the teachings of the scribes (Lk 2:46). In the Acts of the Apostles, Jews get the priority of the Gospel. This continuity extends even to the time of the Nations: Roman officials are presented in a favorable light. Caesar brings unwittingly Paul's ministry to its climax in Rome as in the beginning; Augustus Caesar had been unconsciously but quite effectively the mediator of the fulfilment of the Davidic prophecies (Lk 2:1-5). With his scheme of continuity in the unfolding of the divine plan of salvation, Luke is too keen on ecumenical *koinonia* to give way to anti-paulinism. He is a disciple of Paul but not without qualifications. His double work represents an attempt to propose a middle way.

Therefore it follows that the New Testament itself situates Paul in the midst of a lively interaction between various currents attempting to account for the significance of the Christ event in different circumstances and settings.

Close to Matthew is the stand of James:

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or

sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works (Jam 2:14-18).

The late layers of the NT will show a tendency to emphasize that middle course. Interestingly 1 Pet also tries to steer a middle course since, while "closer to the missionary enterprise of James and Peter than to the mission of Paul," it shows "close relationship to Pauline thought." [22] Rather closer to Luke's gentleness is 2 Pet when it expresses politely its uneasiness towards Paul's letters "in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:16).

## 6. Reconciliation and Pluralism

Historically did Paul and Peter themselves get reconciled? Scriptural data are silent about such a possible move. A solid tradition largely accepted reports that both of them were martyred in Rome under Nero. In these early 60es they would have been together in the capital of the Empire, sharing the fate of the persecuted community. How did they happen to find themselves together? Was it deliberately or by chance? What kind of relationship did they entertain at that time? We do not know.

What we do know is that the early Christian tradition reconciled them by canonizing and celebrating them together. This "canonical reconciliation" cannot be taken for granted. The situation in Rome was rather confused. The 1<sup>a</sup> Clem at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century reminds the Romans that "envy and jealousy assailed the greatest and most virtuous pillars of the Church" (Peter and Paul) "till death ended their days." Post- apostolic developments amplified the differences and radicalized them. On one side, an anti-pauline movement developed among Jewish Christian Ebionites. For them, Paul was an apostate. Acc. to Epiphanius:

they explained Paul's apostasy from the Jewish Law with a story presenting Paul as born of pagan parents. He became a proselyte and underwent circumcision in Jerusalem so as to wed the daughter of the High Priest. Since his request was turned down, out of anger he began to write against the Law and circumcision.[23]

On the opposite side of the spectrum, among Gentile Christians, an anti-Jewish tendency rejected the Old Testament. Marcion (ca 140) restricts the canon of the Scriptures to the single Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters (minus Pastoral and Heb). Less radical than Marcion, the Hellenists, without going all the way to a rejection of the Old Testament, are more radical even than Paul in that they do not share in the Apostle's "great sorrow and unceasing grief... for the sake of (his) brethren, (his) kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:2-3).

Thus did the early Post apostolic Church witness a theological development presenting a wide spectrum of opinions, with an anti-Pauline trend on the extreme left (Ebionites, Pseudo-Clementine) and a Marcionite rejection of Israel and of the OT on the opposite side:

*Anti-Pauline Ebionites   James-Mt-Lk   Peter   Paul  
Hellenists                    Marcionite tendencies.*

In this wide range of positions,[24] Paul and Peter do not appear any longer as the opposite terms of an antithesis. They represent rather the kind of middle course implied in their common belonging to the people, "to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all" (Rom 9:4-5).

The Canon of scriptures (2d c Muratori Fragment) is the outcome of this quest for a middle way consensus in which Paul and Peter would be equally listened to while eliminating extreme opinions going against the *sensus ecclesiae*. Among those positions, those situated within the range from James to the Hellenists were accepted in the Canon. The two extremes Ebionites and Marcionites were rejected as heterodox.

## 7. Conclusions

It was the *sensus fidelium* guided by such figures as Clement and Ignatius of Antioch and helped possibly by the common martyrdom in Rome of the “two pillars” that exercised its discernment within this wide and wild range of opinions. What this discernment signifies is that, on the one hand, a certain orthodoxy was established but that, on the other hand, this orthodoxy accepted a pluralism in which Peter and Paul functioned as the two focal points of an ellipse. The range of orthodoxy is now somewhat restricted but remains sufficiently extensive:

*James-Mt-Lk*    *Peter*              *Paul*              *Hellenists*

1. This historical and canonical variety shows that Paul does not monopolize orthodoxy. To the Spirit-inspired common sense of the people of God, orthodoxy is plural. To some extent, it can be said that the Pauline agenda has monopolized the attention of Western biblical scholarship. We know the importance of St Paul for the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-reformation. Present day scholarship has enlarged its perspectives and is now giving their due to the letter of James, Peter and to the Gospel of Mathew. Yet the horizon remains that of the Pauline, anti-Pauline and ultra Pauline developments. For the West, the East and the Eastern Churches mean Jerusalem and Antioch, or at most Constantinople and Edessa. In India we do not feel quite comfortable with this definition of the “East.” This may account for the special interest Indian biblical scholarship bears to the work of John. An Indian approach to the Captivity Letters could also be enlightening.

2. Accepting the entire Bible as the inspired word of God, we have no ground to select one viewpoint against another. The biblical pluralism invites us rather to keep an open mind and avoid sectarian short-sightedness. No one author, even inspired, can embrace the plenitude of the divine mystery revealed in Jesus-Christ. This is why there are four Gospels.[25] The various currents of the New Testament complement each other. For instance, the theology of rupture underlying Paul’s perspectives gives due emphasis to human sinfulness and the call for radical conversion. This is the aspect that will be further developed by St Augustine, Luther, Barth; it is also

implied in Liberation Theology denouncing the sinful forces and structures at work in the world. Luke's theology of continuity on the other hand highlights the unity of the divine plan through the stages of a salvation history invigorated by the power of the Spirit. It is the viewpoint that will be underlie the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas, and Teilhard de Chardin. It is also the basis of a theology of inculturation. One need not choose between Liberation and Inculturation, Paul and Luke.

3. The idea of a Canon within the Canon that would be regulative (for instance Rom as the criterion of Christian authenticity for the Lutherans... or Mt 16:16-19 for Catholic ecclesiology) is historically and theologically wrong. The light Paul received on the way to Damascus did not define a dogmatic position. It opened the way for an-going discovery of the mystery of Christ, a way that was followed by Paul in fellowship with other insights of the apostolic Church. This partnership had its tense moments. The Spirit is a Spirit of life, not of monotony.

4. He is also a creative Spirit. Paul himself gives an example of this bewildering creativity. In a way it could be said that his theological horizon is totally different from that of Jesus.

<i>Jesus</i>	<i>Paul</i>
Within Palestine, and mostly Galilee	the world at large
For the Jews	for the Gentiles
Poor villager from Nazareth	upper (?) middle class industrialist
Rural type of ministry	urban type
Story teller (parables)	argumentative style
Depending on local response (Mk 6:11)	planned on <u>great</u> centres
No human resources (Mk 6:8f)	goes for financing (Phil 4:15f; 2 Cor 8f)
Wonder worker, exorcisms	rare miracles, man of the Word

Paul wants to "know only Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). But his fidelity to Christ is no slavish mimicry. It is inhabited by the creativity and the freedom of the Spirit.

5. Situating Paul in the context of a pluralistic early Christianity does not demean him. On the contrary, it would rather not do justice to him to transform him into a block of rigid authority. Coming down from the monumental statue where Christian admiration has placed him, Paul comes back to life and leads us into the creative vitality of his commitment to Christ in the power of the Spirit.

## Notes

- [1] "Conversationis fuit vitium, non praedicationis » (*De Praescr. Xxiii*), quoted by J.M. Lagrange, *Epitre aux Galates*, EB, Paris : Gabalda, 1950, 44s. Tertullian would even lay at least part of the blame on Paul who spoke with the overzealous radicalism of a young neophyte: "ferventer adhuc ut neophytes.... Aliquid in conversatione reprehendum existimavit" (*Adv. Marcionem*, 1,20).
- [2] "As for Peter, he received with a holy and saintly humility the useful correction made by Paul in charity. He thus left us a rare and holy example: we must not disregard corrections made by inferiors... So all praise goes to rightful liberty in Paul and to holy humility to Peter" (Augustine, *Epist*, 82,22).
- [3] R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WC 41, Dallas: Word Books, 1990, 79.
- [4] H. Daniel-Rops, *The Church of Apostles and Martyrs*, vol 1, New York: Doubleday, 1960, p.108.
- [5] W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily Study Bible 10, Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1976, p.18.
- [6] J.L. Martyn, *Galatians*, AB 33A, New York: Doubleday, 1997, p. 236.
- [7] 2 Tim 3:11 refers to Antioch as to a place where Paul endured "persecutions and sufferings." But this is only a deutero-pauline testimony.
- [8] R.E. Brown and J.P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome. New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*, London: Chapman, 1983, 39 quoting other authors holding this opinion.
- [9] R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 79.
- [10] On the complexity of the situation in Antioch and the compromise it called for, see J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul His Story*, Oxford: OUP, 2004, 41-44. Murphy-O'Connor attributes the "compromise" to Paul. In fact, it represents rather the position of Peter.
- [11] The four restrictions proposed by James refer to the prescriptions of Lev 17-18 concerning the aliens residing in Israel: food offered to idols,

eating of blood and of meat not ritually slaughtered, intercourse with close relatives. Cf. R.J. Dillon, "Acts of the Apostles," in *NJBC*, 752.

- [12] R.E. Brown and J.P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome*, p. 38.
- [13] Opinion of Betz, Hengel, Lüdemann, Schmithals, etc.
- [14] Opinion of Bengel, Blight, Burton, Haenchen, Lagrange, Mussner, Sanders, Fitzmyer, etc
- [15] Cf. L. Legrand, "Gal 2:9 and the Missionary Strategy of the Early Church," in Tord Fornberg (ed.), *Bible, Hermeneutics and Mission*, Uppsala: Swedish Institute for Missionary Research, 1995, pp. 21-83.
- [16] "These logia affirm not only the continuing validity of the Torah as an essential component of Christian existence, but in doing so they also offer a direct critique of the Pauline view that the appearance of the Christ has brought the Law to an end (cf. Rom 10:4a; Gal 3:23-25)" (D.C. Sim, "Matthew 7.21-23: Further evidence of its Anti-Pauline Perspective," *NTS* 53/2007, 325).
- [17] On anti-paulinism in Mt cf. D.C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998, pp. 188-211.
- [18] Cf. D.C. Sim, "Matthew 7.21-23: Further evidence," 325.
- [19] "Matthew's Gospel must be seen as a theological and pastoral response to a crisis of self-identity and function in the Antiochene church, a crisis that was social and structural as well as theological in nature" (R.E. Brown and J.P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome*, 57).
- [20] Cf. M.J. Lagrange, *Evangile selon saint Luc*, EB, Paris: Gabalda, 1948, pp. 12-16.
- [21] Cf. H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, New York: Harper & Row, 1961 (tr. from *Die Mitte der Zeit*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1953).
- [22] R.E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles left behind*, London: Chapman, 1984, p. 75.
- [23] H.J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1949, p. 464.
- [24] That would call for further distinctions: cf. R.E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles left behind*, London: Chapman, 1984. Particularly the Johannine corpus had its own specificity which does not fit in the Pauline-anti Pauline equation. It responds to other concerns in which we find echoes of a more distant world than Western Asia. Its mystical overtones find an echo in the Indian soul and religiosity. Is the link between John and the further East to be found in Ephesus, traditionally

ascribed as the setting of John's Gospel? It was situated at the mouth of the Meander River which opened the way between the Mediterranean world and the highlands of Anatolia, Upper Mesopotamia, Iran and the rest of Asia. It was not only the most important trade center of Asia Minor, it was also the melting pot of cultural influences and of esoteric mystical currents. As shown by the Captivity epistles and the Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation (Rev 3-4), they were soon to be the epicenter of the earliest Christian heresies, vaguely characterized as "Gnosticism." From the time of Alexander, East and West have begun to interact. Buddhism was Hellenized in the Greco-Buddhist art and reciprocally "gymnosophists" of India and missionaries of Asoka had come to the Mediterranean world. Cf. L. Legrand, *The Bible on Culture*, New York: Orbis Books, 2000, 154-162. Without going to the extreme of tracing Indian sources to the Johannine work, the Ephesian background suggests an Asian world that extended much further to the East than the Mediterranean area in which Paul lived.

- [25] Cf. O. Cullmann, "The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity," in *The Early Church. Historical and Theological Studies*, London: SCM Press, 1956, 39-54, summarized in the concluding sentence: "Faith cries for manifold witness" (54).

## **Paul and Culture: Inculturation of the Gospel in the Letters of Paul**

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*Abstract:* Paul is seen as a contextual, pastoral or missionary theologian than a systematic theologian. His letters are “unrivaled in offering examples of doing contextual theology for diverse Christian communities,” and are “case studies in contextualizing of the gospel.” We shall briefly discuss the gospel Paul inculturated, present his cross-cultural personality as a model agent of inculturation, and analyse Paul’s methods of contextualizing as affirmation of culture, use of cultural language and imagery, relativization, confrontation and transformation of culture, and indicate some pointers for possible relevant Indian readings of Paul.

The question whether Paul is relevant or not to India will depend whether we can preach and live the gospel Paul preached and lived. The gospel Paul preached and lived was the radical newness God accomplished in Christ Jesus: “A new creation” or “a new humanity,” which is but another version of the old story of enabling “people and communities to be restored into the image of God.”

*Keywords:* Culture, inculturation, relativising of culture, confrontation of culture, transformation of culture.

### **Introduction**

Culture is one of the most difficult things to define exactly. A working definition could be that it stands for “the more or less integrated system of ideas, feelings and values and their associated patterns of behaviour and products shared by a group of people.”[1] A simpler definition could be: “The sum total ideas, images, myths,

language, laws, values and institutions that express a given society's analysis of itself and of the world as it knows it."<sup>[2]</sup> Christianity, according to the West African missiologist, Lamin Sanneh, has been able to enter such living cultural worlds with relative ease, and is compatible with all cultures. He calls this the "translatability" of Christian message.<sup>[3]</sup> Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles initiated this process. Today, Paul is seen more as a contextual, pastoral or missionary theologian than a systematic theologian. His letters are "unrivaled in offering examples of doing contextual theology for diverse Christian communities," and are "case studies in contextualizing of the gospel."<sup>[4]</sup> We shall briefly discuss the gospel Paul inculturated, present his cross-cultural personality as a model agent of inculturation, and analyse Paul's methods of contextualizing<sup>[5]</sup> as affirmation of culture, use of cultural language and imagery, relativization, confrontation and transformation of culture, and indicate some pointers for possible relevant Indian readings of Paul.

## **What God has done in and through Jesus Christ: The Gospel Paul Inculturated**

What was Paul "actually contextualizing in his letters? If Paul's theology takes many shapes, what keeps it from becoming a "chameleon-theology"? "<sup>[6]</sup> In Galatians 2:14, Paul speaks about the "truth of the gospel" in a context of the gospel under threat, something "normative, something *transcontextual* about the faith he conveys.<sup>[7]</sup> The uncovering of the transcontextual is the problem. In the past, the search was for "some controlling idea or core doctrine" like "justification by faith" or "participation in Christ" or "salvation."<sup>[8]</sup> This approach failed to capture the contextual nature of Paul's theology. But Paul, the theologian, cannot be cut off from Paul the missionary pastor.<sup>[9]</sup>

Recent scholarship sees the normative aspect of Paul's thought in terms of a foundational narrative or story about God and Christ that underlies Paul's theological arguments in his letters.<sup>[10]</sup> It is also an abiding coherence in Paul's thought that is constantly interacting with the contingent circumstances of the mission field."<sup>[11]</sup> As a pastor, Paul was to proclaim the gospel (1 Cor 9:

22), and shape the lives of his converts in accordance with the gospel (e. g. Phil 1: 27), not to formulate a theology. The gospel was the singular passion of Paul's life and ministry (1 Cor 9: 23).[12] His letters are reflections on how the gospel intersects with the world in which his readers live, and how they are to think and act in that world.[13] The coherent element that gives shape to everything in Paul's thought is in the "gospel." [14]

Significantly the noun "gospel" (*euangelion*) appears sixty times in the Pauline corpus (forty-eight of them in the undisputed letters). Paul also uses other nearly equivalent terms for the gospel.[15] What did Paul mean by "gospel"? In the OT, it meant the "announcement of the good news of God's coming salvation (e. g. Is 40: 9; 52: 7 = Rom 10:15); and its Christian usage may go back to Jesus himself (Mt 11: 5; Lk 4: 16-21) and the church before Paul (e. g. Acts 10: 36-38)." [16] "Gospel" was also used for the good news about the birth, accession or victory of a king or emperor in the Greco-Roman world.[17] Hence, it would have been associated with political and religious aspects related to the rule of the imperial "saviour." [18] It was typical of Paul to use a term that has both a Jewish and a pagan past and give it a distinctively Christian meaning.[19]

The gospel, for Paul, first and foremost, "stands for the powerful proclamation of Christ for people to believe in him and receive revelation (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 9: 16-18; 1 Thess 1: 5; Col 1: 5-6). [20] It was proclaimed both to pagans and Christians (Rom 1:15) and includes "the full exposition of the gospel that is designed to edify believers and ground them in the faith." [21] It is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom 1:16), has a coherent and stable content (see Gal 1:6-9 and 2: 5, 14 ("the truth of the gospel")), stands for the nonnegotiable message Paul preaches, and is normative for both Christian belief and behaviour (e. g. Rom 1: 1-4; 10: 16; 1 Cor 15: 1-2; 2 Cor 9: 13; 11: 4, Phil 1: 27; Col 1: 5; Eph 1: 13; 2 Thess 1: 8; 1 Tim 1: 11). [22] The letters of Paul assume and interpret the gospel.[23] The gospel is Christological ("the gospel concerning his Son" Rom 1: 3-4) and soteriological ("the power of God for salvation" Rom 1: 16-17).

In simple words the gospel Paul preaches is "Christ." [24] Paul is not concerned with Christology as such, but in the good news of

God's loving and saving intervention in Jesus Christ "for us" (Rom 8: 31-32).[25] He tells the Corinthians: "We proclaim Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1: 23). The focus is on Christ's death and resurrection as the saving events (1 Cor 15: 3-4; Rom 4: 24-25; 2 Cor 4: 14; 1 Thess 4: 14), which includes his present lordship (2 Cor 4: 5; Phil 2: 0-11) and future return (1 Thess 1: 10; 4: 13- 5: 11; 1 Cor 1: 7-8; 15: 23; Phil 3: 20-21). Christian faith and life are not based on some timeless theological truth but on a contingent, historical happening: the event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. All of Paul's theological reflection is around the one gospel of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ.[26]

## A Cross-Cultural Paul: Model Inculturator of the Gospel

To inculcate the gospel, a missionary must first insert himself/herself into the culture of the community. Paul was such a missionary. Christ, Son of God, inculcated himself into human culture. In imitation of Christ "the missioner seeks to become an adopted child"[27] of the community to which he preaches the Gospel. Paul was the adopted child of the Gentile world because he was called by God even before his birth to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles (cf. Gal 1: 15-16). Scholarly debate has been: How should we understand Paul's identity and thought?[28] Are the letters of Paul witnesses to his Jewishness[29], or are they influenced by the Graeco-Roman philosophy, rhetoric and social practice?[30] The answer to this question will influence our perception of how Paul interacted with the Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultural and social worlds of his day.[31]

Paul himself never mentions where he was born and was brought up. Luke tells us he was born in Tarsus in the province of Cilicia (Acts 22:3), and was a "citizen of no mean city" (Acts 21:39). Indirect support for this is found in the Hellenistic outlook and style of the undisputed Pauline letters. If Paul was born in Tarsus, did he live long enough there to be influenced by Hellenistic environment?[32] Acts seems to contradict it: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city of Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3). A generation ago, scholars argued for the historicity of

this reference, suggesting that Paul grew up in the centre of Judaism where the Torah prevailed in the home and in the street.[33]

Recent research, however, indicates Tarsus rather than Jerusalem may be where Paul grew up and was educated. His preference for the Septuagint, familiarity with Stoicism, ability to use its idioms and rhetorical strategies, close acquaintance with Hellenistic literary styles, all seem to be in favour of Tarsus as the environment where Paul grew up.[34] Though of pure Hebrew blood, Paul was “bilingual at least, and could express himself fluently in Aramaic as well as in Greek.[35] Being bi-lingual also means being bi-cultural. Paul was, in fact, a cross-cultural person, one “who crossed cultures,” the Jew who lived like a Gentile. To embrace another social identity, for Paul, was not only a missionary strategy, but a matter of principle, a way of being true to God’s equal love for all human beings with impartiality toward their differences as peoples[36]. Paul can be described as a child of mixed parents of Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. He was “at the same time and completely both Jew and Greek, a perfect example of the crossbreeding. His bicultural background was the providential equipment that enabled him to be the bridge between the Jewish matrix of the Christian faith and its universal reach.”[37] Greeks, Romans and Jews of Paul’s time were “ethnocentric,” regarding themselves generally superior to others.[38] The Jews hated the rest of the world, and the rest reciprocated.[39] The Jewish religion was considered a “barbarous superstition” and the Jews, “the vilest of peoples.”[40] The Jews too consider the rest of the world as “Gentiles,” a “bunch of sinners, radically impure and hated by God.”[41] In this situation, Christianity needed a man to form a bridge between the two antagonistic worlds. Paul was the man: A Jew to the core, born outside Palestine in the midst of Gentiles and thoroughly trained in Greek culture,[42] Paul represented the best of both worlds. He was at home in both, and his aim was to make Christianity be at home in both. In him were both Christianity and Judaism at their best.

### **How did Paul Inculturate the Gospel?**

Born in the Jewish cradle, Christianity’s first contact was the Graeco-Roman world. There was no better agent than Paul of Tarsus to spread its good news. For Paul, incarnating the gospel within the

dominant Graeco-Roman culture meant more than “simply exchanging Jewish categories and expressions for Greek ones without any loss of meaning.” It involved “affirming, relativizing, confronting and transforming culture.”[43]

### Affirming Culture: First Step of Inculturation

Paul never directly addressed the question of culture,[44] but the implications of his writings are clear. Culture has a theological dimension. It is rooted in God’s creation and his ongoing commitment to the world. Paul assumes God’s creative presence in the created order, which includes culture.[45] In the beginning of his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of God’s gracious activity in creation and conscience. Using the Hellenistic religious vocabulary of the Stoics, Paul affirms that God’s “eternal power” and “divine nature” are visible to all people through his creative order, providing them a genuine knowledge of the Creator (Rom 1: 19-20). They have no excuse for their sins. Their conscience makes people know what is right and wrong (Rom 2: 14-15). This moral consciousness is not simply the innate human capacity, but the grace of the Holy Spirit working in individuals and cultures and religions.[46] When cultures and their ethical and religious values reflect God’s truth and right action, grace is at work.[47] Thus, Paul affirms the particularity of cultures and uses it as a vehicle of the gospel message which is powerfully expressed in his statement of 1 Cor 9: 19-23: “I have become all things to all people... I do it all for the sake of the gospel.” This is “the incarnation principle”[48] of being born into the community to which one preaches the Gospel Christ, as Christ was. Physical birth into a community is not possible, but psychological rebirth out of love into a new people is possible, and “knows no limits.”[49] The radicality of Paul’s declaration is often not appreciated sufficiently. “By affirming the basic equality of every culture and cultural group, Paul rejects the ethnocentrism of his time. By voluntarily identifying with Jews and Gentiles, Paul validates their distinctive cultural commitments.”[50] Accepting another culture for Paul was “more than merely tolerating or indulging the other person with his or her ethnic and cultural features; it entails accepting, giving space for, respecting the distinctiveness of the other.”[51] Paul wanted to safeguard the cultural particularity of a

Jew as a Jew and a Gentile as a Gentile, but challenged both the Jews and Gentiles to find in Jesus Christ their true affirmation.”[52]

Paul never gave up his identity as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3: 6; cf. 2 Cor 11: 22; 1 Cor 16: 8) when he was called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, nor did he try to make Jewish Christians into Greeks and force them to give up their cultural symbols like circumcision or dietary laws. He continued to identify with his “own people,” his “kindred according to the flesh,” and agonized over their unbelief (Rom 9: 2-3). Paul never gave up his conviction that God had a plan for the Jews as *Jews* (Rom 1: 16; 11: 26-29). Jesus remained a Messiah of the Jews and the gospel continued to make a home within the Jewish Scriptures and culture.[53] Paul also came to realize that the gospel had to come to live within the language and culture of the Hellenistic world.[54] The gospel was “translatable” from Aramaic and Hebrew into new linguistic and cultural forms. Hellenistic culture became the natural extension of the life of the Christian movement.[55] Thus, affirming culture was Paul’s first step in inculcating the gospel.

### **Gospel Inculturated Expresses Itself in Cultural Language and Imagery**

The translation of the message of Jesus was crucial for Christianity to transcend its Palestinian cultural roots and be intelligible to the wider Hellenistic world. People’s perception and interpretation of reality (world view) is built into the language.[56] Language provides the symbolic world of a linguistic community. By language, the community orders and maintains its world, confirms and communicates it.”[57] With Greek, Paul was able to express the gospel with a new vocabulary and a new set of images to communicate with urban Gentiles.[58] Paul’s letters are full of theological language taken from the life of its readers, Graeco-Roman philosophical and religious circles.[59]

Words like “wisdom” (*sophia*) or “knowledge” (*gnosis*), already used in the Greek Bible, were familiar to Paul. The word “conscience” (e. g. Rom 2: 15; 1 Cor 8: 7-12; 10: 25-29; 2 Cor 4: 2; 5: 11) is new, virtually absent from the Jewish writings, but is found in popular Greek sources like the writings of the Stoic philosophers.[60] The

word *reconciliation* occurs exclusively in Greek secular literature or in materials heavily influenced by Hellenism.[61] It means restoring peace between enemies and exchanging friendship for hostility. This secular image became the key way of picturing God's reconciling work on behalf of humankind in the death of Christ.[62]

In his ethical teaching too, Paul co-opts the vocabulary of Hellenistic moralism. Philippians 4: 8 is a typical example. The series of virtues listed here would have sounded familiar to his audience: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." What Paul tells his Christians is to embrace the good wherever it is found, provided it is seen in the light of Christ, and whatever we do that is pleasing, commendable and excellent is sanctified by life "in Christ."[63] For Paul, cultures have virtues and values that can be affirmed and drawn into the service of the gospel.[64]

While Jesus used primarily the rural imagery in his preaching and teaching, Paul drew from the symbols and imagery of the city dwellers of the Roman Empire. From the sporting world, he made use of images like the track and boxing which were highly significant for urban gentile culture (1 Corinthians 9: 24-27; cf. also Gal 2: 2; 5: 7; Phil 3: 13-14; I Tim 4: 7-8; 2 Tim 2: 5; 4: 7). From education, he borrowed the figure of the pedagogue. The family slave in Hellenistic society functioned as guardian, teacher and disciplinarian of the children until their adulthood (Gal 3: 23-25).[65] Paul made use of commercial symbols like "seal" (2 Cor 1: 22; Eph 1: 13; 4: 30) which signifies the mark of ownership, and the "guarantee" (*arrabon*) is applied to the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1: 22; 5: 5; Eph 1: 14).[66] The Stoic expression "gentle ...as a nurse" (1 Thess 2: 7) portrays Paul's tender care for his readers and their responsibility to one another.[67] These images are drawn from daily life in urban Hellenistic society providing people a lens through which they can gain a fresh vision of God's saving work and their response to it. Paul's use of new forms of imagining the gospel from the cultural world of his communities not only facilitated communication with the Gentiles, but it also enriched and deepened his understanding of

the Christian message itself.[68] Most of all, it made the gospel message belong to the people. Paul happily embraced whatever linguistic and cultural resources were available to him in order to convey the significance of Jesus Christ to his audiences.[69]

In spite of protesting that the message he was preaching did not imitate the ornamental rhetoric of the Sophists (cf. 1 Cor 2: 1-5; 2 Cor 11: 6), Paul made extensive use of the cultural forms the ancient rhetoric.[70] “What is important to point out is not so much how exactly Paul followed the classical rhetoric, but his use of rhetoric to effect change in his audience, as well as to aid their retaining of what they heard.”[71] Paul was using the best method of conveying a message available in his time. The example of Paul should inspire us. The ‘medium is often the message too.’

Paul also made use of conventions and institutions of the Graeco-Roman society like the ‘household’ which could comprise not only the extended family, but also the slaves, hired workers and even tenants and business associates.[72] A household was the place of gathering for the Pauline communities (Rom 16: 5; 1 Cor 16: 19; Col 4: 15; Philem 2). Paul used the household concept to describe the church (Gal 6: 10; Eph 2: 19; 1 Tim 3: 15; 2 Tim 2: 20-21) as well as his own ministry (1 Cor 4: 1-2; 9: 17; Col 1: 25).[73]

Paul, thus, did not stigmatize the dominant Graeco-Roman culture of his time as inherently sinful to be shunned. On the contrary, he recognized God’s grace in human culture. He became a catalyst for the inculturation of the gospel within it.[74] Paul was also flexible in his use of the cultural materials: language, religion, philosophy, ethics, rhetoric, literature, politics, social institutions, family, and community life – as long as they did not conflict with the gospel.[75] Was it a conscious decision? Paul was at home in the urban Graeco-Roman world of his time. It would have been quite natural that his theologizing should tap the language and life of that world as the gospel came into contact with the cultural and religious contexts of the Mediterranean world. He was not concerned as to whether a particular expression or language was Jewish or Greek in its origin, provided it could be used in the service of the gospel and the mission of Jesus Christ.[76]

## Gospel Inculturated Relativizes Culture

True, the gospel expressed in one's cultural language, images and conventions makes the gospel at home in one's culture; the gospel, in fact, becomes one's very own. However, when I express the gospel in my cultural language and images, I also become aware that the gospel cannot be contained totally in my own cultural expressions. It cannot be so in any cultural setting too. The gospel of Jesus far exceeds what my culture can express. Hence, a genuine search for understanding the gospel will make me open to welcome other cultural expressions for a deeper appreciation of Christ and his gospel. I cannot absolutize the expression about the gospel in my culture. Hence, the gospel makes my culture relative.

Paul believed that God had done something radically new in Christ which signals an end to the old order. A radical view of the world is needed. Paul tells the Galatians: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3: 28; cf. Col 3: 11).[77] Being "in Christ" brings about a new set of relationships for believers. It relativizes the major distinctions of human society.[78] Paul's injunction to the Galatians might have been in response to the Jewish cultural imperialism.[79] When one thinks that one's cultural expression about God or Jesus or the gospel is the only way others must follow, it is cultural imperialism. Here, in the Galatian context, the Jewish Christian missionaries were apparently trying to force Gentile converts to observe the Law of Moses as a requirement of being full members of the people of God. These laws were like circumcision (Gal 6: 12-13), food laws (Gal 2: 11-14) and the observance of the Jewish holidays (Gal 4: 10). Both Jews and non-Jews recognized these as distinctive of the Jews. Hence, those who advocated the necessary practice of these laws by every body were absolutizing the Jewish culture and imposing it on Gentiles.[80]

Paul's position on the matter is very clear: "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!" (Gal 6: 15; cf. 5: 6). God's new creative work makes every cultural symbol *spiritually* unnecessary.[81] Paul had denounced Peter for refusing table-fellowship with the Gentiles as

a denial of the “truth of the gospel” itself since it draws cultural boundaries for the Christian community other than faith in Christ (Gal 2: 11-14). It forces the Gentiles “to live like Jews” (Gal 2: 14).[82] In the new creation, cultural “border-crossings” that split the Christian fellowship into pure and impure, first-and second-class citizens, no longer apply. For a Jew like Paul, this was no less than a cultural revolution.[83] Many of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries must have thought he was betraying his own culture.

The Roman church had the opposite problem of Galatia. The Gentile majority in Rome had assumed that they had replaced the Jews as God’s favoured nation and wanted to cut themselves off from their Jewish roots.[84] This was Roman ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism, whether coming from the Jews or the Gentiles, was not acceptable in the new order introduced by Christ. The relativizing of the Gentile culture is seen in Colossians 3: 11 where Paul affirms that in the new humanity, “there is no longer barbarian, Scythian..... These terms addressed the cultural superiority of the Greeks. Every culture becomes provisional in the light of the cross.[85]

Paul’s culturally plural stance is reinforced in 1 Cor 9: 20: “To the Jews, I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews.” How is it possible for a Jew to intentionally to decide to *become a Jew*? Paul no longer understands what it means to be a Jew in the same way as he did before he met Christ. In Christ Paul has transcended all cultural allegiances.[86] The former definitions of kinship based on ethnicity and genealogy have been superseded by Christians’ adoption into a single family of believers under one Father (Rom 8: 14-17; 9: 6-8; Gal 3: 26-29; 4: 5-7).[87] Each group must be willing to lay down their cultural rights in order to participate in a community that finds its transcending allegiance in Jesus Christ.[88]

For Paul, the cross of Christ relativizes cultural and social distinctions; but it does not remove them. Paul affirms cultural particularity, but rejects cultural privilege.[89] He deprived each culture of ultimacy in order to give them all legitimacy in the family of cultures.[90]

## Gospel when Inculturated Confronts Culture

Culture not only provides the locus for God's gracious activity, it is also the theatre of human sinfulness.[91] It means culture has its negative, dehumanizing elements that the gospel has to boldly confront. "Paul's analysis of human condition in Romans 1:18-3:20 is still applicable today. It speaks about the plight of individual sinners as well as human cultures and societies in a collective sense. Cultures along with their worldviews and social behaviours can be ridden with the cancer of sin."[92] The gospel cannot be good news without prophetically judging the sinful elements of culture and the "works of darkness" (Rom 13: 12) in human society.[93]

Paul showed us the way to confront culture. He was, first and foremost, a radical critic of Jewish culture.[94] Paul's relationship with his own culture is said to be "*contracultural*" – "deeply embedded in it, but inverting key aspects of it."[95] He was able to critique the law and the Jewish culture as an insider (Phil 3: 3-9; Gal 5: 6; Rom 2: 1-3: 20). He distanced himself enough from his own culture to perceive elements in it that were incompatible with the gospel.[96] To criticize one's own culture is said to be like trying to push a bus while you are still sitting in it.[97] Yet it was essential that Paul "push the bus" if he were to offer a gospel to the Gentiles that was rooted in the Jewish Scriptures but freed from Jewish ethnocentrism.[98]

Like Paul, the gospel must challenge the presuppositions of the missionary's culture, if it has any hope of speaking prophetically to the new culture in which the gospel is being contextualized.[99] Not only a missionary, but each Christian community must grapple with the gospel's critique of its own culture, particularly when that culture claims in some sense to be "Christian." It is much easier to recognize the cultural speck in another's eye than to come to terms with the log in my own. [100] The gospel is not only a searchlight that I use to uncover the sinful in the cultures of others; it is also a mirror that I must hold up to my own face.[101]

## **Gospel Incultured Transforms Culture**

Speaking about the interpretation of the Bible from the perspective of the indigenous cultures of Latin America, Pablo Richard says: “The indigenous community that reads the Bible begins to transform the biblical text, but at the same time the biblical text begins to transform the indigenous community. The community reads the text, and the text reads the community.”[102] Something similar happens when the gospel is inculturated into a culture. In the interface, the gospel also transforms itself into the text of the community in so far as it is expressed in its symbols, language and images. Once the cultural symbols of the community become the vehicles of the gospel, they become “signals of transcendence”[103]and are thus transformed.

The gospel’s judgment on culture is never the last word. Grace opens up the potential for cultures to be re-formed from within.[104] Just as sin has a negative impact on culture, so the new creation in Christ the gospel proclaims will affect culture.[105] Paul does not envision Christians retreating from their earthly cultural existence to form some kind of new “Christian culture.” They stand “with one foot outside of their own culture while the other remaining firmly planted in it.”[106] Christians function within their society as a prophetic subculture, whose cross-shaped living offers a visible alternative to the ethos of the dominant culture.[107]

One way of transforming culture is by transforming its cultural language through “re-signifying it.” Paul often converts language from pagan belief system to give a transformed meaning. For example, he uses the notion of “transformation” (*metamorphosis*), a term of the Greek mystery religions, and injects a new meaning of “the inner renewal of the believer in conformity with Christ” (Rom 12: 2; 2 Cor 3: 18).[108] Similarly, Paul takes words like “mystery” (Rom 16: 25-26; 1 Cor 2: 7; Eph 1: 19; 3: 3, 5; Col 1: 26-27), “libation” (Phil 2: 17), and even “gospel” itself which had associations with pagan religious practices or the Caesar cult and gives new meanings that in part alters and in part replaces the old.[109]

Unfolding the implications of the Christ-event also transforms the values, ethical teachings and conventions of behaviour. Paul's teaching on "humility" (Phil 2: 3; Eph 4: 2; Col 3: 12) calling the disciples to follow the humility of Christ himself (Phil 2: 5-8) is a counter-cultural message. In the Graeco-Roman understanding humility meant servility, having the image of a slave.[110] The 'household codes' in Ephesians and Colossians were taken from the Graeco-Roman cultural world. Materially the codes may be the same, but relationship within the household becomes a concrete expression of what it means to live under the lordship of Christ. Paul adds a phrase like "in the Lord" (Col 3: 18, 20) to his instructions to wives or children, or he tells slaves that by working for their earthly masters they are really serving their heavenly Lord (Col 3: 23). [111]

If Paul can call for sweeping changes as regards relationship between Jews and Gentiles, why was he so conservative as regards slaves and women? Within the first century Roman world, advocating sweeping changes in society was simply not an option for the church which was a minority and marginalized community in the midst of a dominant culture. Calls for such changes would have endangered the very existence of the community.[112]

### **Pointers towards Indian Readings of Paul**

In a recent book, *Cross-Cultural Paul: Journey to Others, Journeys to Ourselves*,[113] three biblical scholars, Charles H. Cosgrove, Herold Weiss and K. K. (Khiok-Khng) Yeo (European American, Argentine, and Chinese respectively) each interpret Paul from two different socio-cultural locations – their own and another. India offers almost infinite possibilities of reading Paul from a variety of socio-cultural locations. It could be challenging as well as rewarding. The second pertinent teaching of Paul could be the radical newness he proclaimed in Galatians 3: 27-28. Thirdly, only cross-cultural followers of Christ like Paul of Tarsus would effectively proclaim of the Good News of the Kingdom of God in India.

## Multi-Readings of Paul

Indian theology or efforts at inculturation in India, so far, have been, by and large, from the perspective of the dominant culture. The experience of the *Dalits* and Tribals has been largely ignored. “If there is an Indian theology it must be based on the experience of Christian people. If 60-70 percent of the Christians in this country come from the Scheduled caste and the Scheduled Tribe communities, one may again ask: to what extent are the experiences of these people made part of the theological reflection in this country.”[114] The same thing can be said about the interpretation of Scripture. An Indian reading of Paul should include the *Dalit* and Tribal readings of Paul too. The late Fr. George M. Soares Prabhu said: “The Bible is particularly responsive to a tribal interpretation. It is a book steeped in tribal ethos. The Old Testament expresses the faith of the tribes of Israel, and remains faithful to its tribal ethos even when its tribal structure was replaced by a monarchy. The teaching of Jesus can be seen as a return to the tribal ethos.”[115] The teaching of Paul too, I am sure, can be read and interpreted from a tribal or *Dalit* perspective.

The Brazilian biblical scholar, Carlos Mesters’ efforts to read the Bible from the perspective of the native South Americans, through the lens of their myths and stories,[116] can give us insights into our reading of the Bible from the tribal and Dalit perspectives. According to Mesters, “Paul defined his mission as that of a ‘fellow worker with God.’ We, too, are called to collaborate with the God who is already at work in the life of the Indians. If we attempt to enforce our ways on them, we are obstructing the treasures the God has placed in their lives.”[117]

Paul not only used the Hellenistic cultural language, images, institutions, etc. to express the gospel, he also developed his theological language from the life experience of people. He did not limit himself to using fixed terms for a particular reality. For example, Paul expresses the meaning of the death of Christ in many ways: it is reconciliation (2 Cor 5: 18-20; Rom 5: 10-11; Eph 2: 16; Col 1: 20-22), sacrifice (Rom 3: 25; 8: 3; 1 Cor 5: 7) representation (1 Cor 15: 14-15), redemption Rom 3: 24; 1 Cor 7: 21-23; Gal 4: 5), righteousness (Rom 3: 21-26; 5: 9; 2 Cor 5: 21), curse (Gal 3: 13), self-giving/emptying (Rom 8: 32; Gal 1: 4; 2: 20; Phil 2: 7), victory

over the powers (Col 2: 15), paradoxical power and wisdom (1 Cor 1: 24-25; 2 Cor 13: 4). These are some examples among many.[118]

The use of this variety of images, first, conveys the richness of the meaning of the death of Christ which can hardly be described with one terminology. Secondly, Paul could tailor his interpretation of the meaning of the atoning death of Christ to fit the needs and circumstance of his audience.[119] In Galatians, Paul uses the word redemption. His opponents were trying to enslave the Galatians by trying to impose on them the yoke of circumcision and the Mosaic Law. The word redemption would have not only evoked the ransom of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but also would have been familiar to the Gentiles from the practice of buying back slaves. The power of the word for Galatians is obvious. Christ's death means ransom and release from those who have been enslaved under the law and its curse (Gal 3: 15; 4: 1-5).[120] Hence, "[a] preacher would have delighted ...to contrast the price paid by the slave in the secular world with the free gift of God in Christ."[121]

Paul's description of the believers' experience of the new life in Christ is even more varied, drawing from Scripture and secular culture, including those from everyday life experience (inheritance, putting on or off clothes, salvation/rescue, putting on armour), commerce (redemption, "seal" of ownership), agriculture (grafting, first fruits), customs and practices of society (justification, reconciliation, freedom/liberation, citizenship), religious practice (sanctification, washing, cleansing, anointing), major life events (birth, adoption, marriage, death and life) as well as various others (new creation, transformation, union with Christ).[122] One must not exalt one single out or absolutize any single metaphor or theme. Paul shows us the way of both the richness of language available to describe the church's multi-dimensional experience of salvation and the variety of situations to which the language must be applied.[123]

Which of the metaphors Paul used to express the meaning of the death of Christ would be more meaningful for our communities is our task to search. Paul is free to use whatever theological themes or images that enable the gospel to be incarnated into the life of the communities to which he writes. He is compared to a military field

command centre that is able to dispatch then required material according to the needs of the various field outposts.[124]

Reading Scripture through one's own cultural eyes makes the Scripture one's own. To illustrate this, let me refer to two examples: An Australian Aborigine Lutheran Pastor's experience and the experience of the Mizos in Mizoram (Northeast India). These examples are illustrative, and so are appropriate to quote fully:

I have been able to understand and communicate Western Christianity [to other Aborigines] because I have been trained in European culture. But it was still very painful for me when I noticed that my people were straining desperately as they attempted to understand and grasp the deep meaning of the gospel. Only when I began to learn their stories and customs and used them as pictures to see and understand the gospel did I notice their faces light up. To hear comments such as: "Ah! It's like our story!" made me very happy to share the gospel with my people.[125]

Similar was the experience of the Mizos according to the report of the pioneer missionaries to Mizoram, Rev. J. H. Lorrain and F. W. Savidge:

Our first message, as soon as we could speak the language, was to proclaim a Saviour from sin. But the people had no sense of sin and felt no need for such a Saviour. Then, we found a point of contact. We proclaimed Jesus as the vanquisher of the Devil as the One who had bound the "strong man" and taken away from him" all his armour wherein he trusted" and so had made it possible for his slaves to be free. This, to the Lushais, (now known as Mizos) was "Good News" indeed and exactly met their great need.[126]

## **Radical Newness in Christ: All are One**

If Paul had been in India, what would have been his approach to the problem of caste? We have already mentioned that Paul's apparent conservative stance as regards the status of women and slaves of his time might have been prompted by the minority and marginalized status of the Christian community of the first century Roman world. It was simply no option for the church advocate sweeping changes in to society. But if Paul were to be

in today's India, things would be different. He would boldly proclaim and promulgate the radical newness God has brought in Christ Jesus: *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus* (Gal 3: 27-28) because he would know he has the backing of the Constitution of the country (Section 15) which guarantees the right to equality irrespective of caste, creed, place of birth, etc. as the fundamental right of all its citizens.[127] The Church in India has not been able to proclaim the radical newness God accomplished in Christ effectively because she herself is still plagued with the menace of a caste-ridden mentality. The church, especially its leadership, needs the Damascus experience of Paul in order to gain the "surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord" (Phil 3: 8). Only then can the church boldly proclaim the radical newness of what God accomplished in Christ Jesus. Until then, the church will have to stand as a hapless spectator to the injustices of caste, ethnic and religious conflicts as well as injustices to women, the poor and the marginalized of India.

## **Formation to be a Cross-Cultural Person**

One of the most powerful images that emerge when one reads Paul's letters is his cross-cultural personality powerfully expressed in his celebrated declaration in 1 Corinthians 9: "*I have become all things all people... and I do it all for the sake of the gospel.*" While being deeply rooted in and fiercely loyal to Jewish culture, Paul was a man at home in the Hellenistic culture. His birth in a cosmopolitan city of Tarsus together with his education and training made him a cross-cultural person singularly equipped to translate the gospel of Christ cross-culturally. Agents of the same gospel of Christ in a multi-ethnic and cultural milieu of India also need to be like Paul. A recent issue of *Missiology*[128] devoted its entire issue on training church personnel for cross-cultural mission. The India of recent days is becoming more fragmented. Regional politics, parties and issues are occupying the main stage. The situation is likely to become worse than better if proactive steps are not taken.

Christian presence in India is strong enough to be the ‘the light, ‘salt’ and ‘the leaven’ in the country. Christian leadership, especially of the priests and the religious should follow the path of Paul in order to be bridge-builders across the caste and creed divide that is threatening the country. The formation of the priests and the religious should include programmes to train them to be cross-cultural persons or bilingual or tri-lingual, and consequently bicultural or tri-cultural too in order to be ‘all things to all people.’ Producing leaders who can truly say after the manner of Paul: *To the Dalits, I have become as a Dalit, to the tribals, I have become as a tribal, to the marginalized, I have become as marginalized; and I do it all for the sake of the gospel*, will be a relevant way to read Paul in India and it is the need of the hour.

## Conclusion

The question whether Paul is relevant or not to India will depend whether we can preach and live the gospel Paul preached and lived. The gospel Paul preached and lived was the radical newness God accomplished in Christ Jesus: “A new creation” (2 Cor 5: 17; Gal 6: 5), or “a new humanity” (Eph 2: 15), which is but another version of the old story of enabling “people and communities to be restored into the image of God. And if we begin to learn what that means, there can be no agenda more relevant, attractive and compelling in the world.”[129] This will truly be possible, if the church leadership, after the example of Paul, can be ‘all things to all peoples, for the sake of the gospel,’ because of the “surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord” (Phil 3: 8), making the community “come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4: 13) enabling the community to share in the glory of God which means being ‘fully human and fully alive.’

## Notes

- [1] Paul Hierbert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985, p. 30.
- [2] John J. Kilgallan, “The Christian Bible and Culture,” in *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1994) 45, note 2

- [3] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, New York: Orbis Books, 1989, pp. 50-51
- [4] Dean Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Pattern for Theology and Mission*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005, p. 89 (Henceforth, Contextualization).
- [5] The terms contextualization and inculturation are used interchangeably here. Every context may not be cultural, but every cultural element is also a context.
- [6] Ibid., p. 90.
- [7] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 90
- [8] For a detail discussion on the search, see Joseph Fleunik, "The Center of Pauline Theology," *CBQ* 51 (1989) 461-78, esp. 469-76.
- [9] Fleming, *Contextualization*, pp. 90-91
- [10] See Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3: 1-4:11*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2002); Idem, "Crucified with Christ," in J. M. Bassler, ed., *Pauline Theology, Volume I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp 227-46; N. T Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), esp. pp. 403-9, Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Norman R. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). See also B. W. Longenecker, ed., *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).
- [11] This "coherence-contingency" approach was articulated by Christian Becker. See *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980; idem, "Recasting Pauline Theology: The Coherence-Contingency-Scheme as Interpretive Method," in J. M. Bassler, ed., *Pauline Theology, Volume I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991, pp 15-24.
- [12] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 92.

- [13] Paul J. Achtemeier, "Finding the Way to Paul's Theology: A Response to J Christian Beker and J. Paul Sampley," in J. M. Bassler, ed., *Pauline Theology, Volume I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991, p. 25
- [14] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 92
- [15][15] Ibid, see note 8, like 'proclamation' (*kerygma*) or 'word' (*logos*, e. g. 'word of the cross,' 1 Cor 1: 18; 'word of Christ,' Col 3: 16; 'word of reconciliation,' 2 Cor 5: 19; 'word of truth, the gospel,' Col 1: 5; Eph 1: 13).
- [16] Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Pauline Gospel," in Peter Stuhlmacher, ed., *The Gospel and the Gospels*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, p. 156-66
- [17] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 92
- [18] R. A. Horsley, "Rhetoric and Empire – and 1 Corinthians," in R. A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honour of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000) 91-92
- [19] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 93
- [20] Ibid.
- [21] Peter T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993, pp. 61-65.
- [22] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 93
- [23] Ibid.
- [24] See Rom 16: 25; 1 Cor 1: 24; 15: 12; Phil 1: 15-18); or "the Son of God" (Rom 1: 9; 2 Cor 1: 19; Gal 1: 16) or "Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor 4: 5), all of which can stand as shorthand terms for his gospel. It is, above all, the "gospel of Christ" (Rom 15: 19; 2 Cor 9: 13; Gal 1: 7; Phil 1: 27), a message about Jesus, God's beloved Son. Yet it is also God's gospel (Rom 1: 1; 15: 16; 2 Cor 11: 7; 1 Thess 2: 2, 8).
- [25] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 94
- [26] Ibid., pp. 94-95
- [27] Ivan Illich, "Selection and Formation of the Missioner," in his book: *The Church, Change and Development*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1970, p. 98.

- [28] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 120
- [29] The publication of E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) is said to have influenced this thinking which gave a "new perspective" on Paul seeking to understand Paul's thought in the light of Palestinian Judaism of his time. See also E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) and James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
- [30] Cf. Troels Engberg-Perdersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000, and Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.
- [31] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 120
- [32] C. J. Roetzel, *Paul: the Man and the Myth*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, p.11.
- [33] Ibid.
- [34] Ibid., p. 12.
- [35] Bermejo, *Paul, Missionary, Mystic, Martyr*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2007, p. 1.
- [36] Charles H. Cosgrove, Herold Weiss and K. K. (Khiok-Khng) Yeo, *Cross-Cultural Paul: Journeys to Others, Journeys to Ourselves*, p. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, pp. 3-4.
- [37] Lucien Legrand, *The Bible on Culture*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001, p.138.
- [38] Chrles H. Cosgrove, "Did Paul Value Ethnicity?" *CBQ* 68/2 (2006) 273. See also A. N. Sherwin-White, *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- [39] L. M.Berrmejo, *Paul*, p.11.
- [40] Ibid.
- [41] Ibid.
- [42] Ibid., p.12.
- [43] Fleming, *Contextualization*, pp. 125-126. See also H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper and Row, 1951.
- [44] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p.125

- [45] William A. Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's: A Theology of American Culture*, New York, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995, p. 58.
- [46] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 126
- [47] Dean Fleming, "Foundations for Responding to Religious Pluralism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31, Spring, 1997, p. 66-67
- [48] Fleming, *Contextualization*, pp. 126-127.
- [49] Ivan Illich, *Selection and Formation of a Missioner*, p. 98.
- [50] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 127
- [51] Charles Cousar, "Paul and Multiculturalism," in Walter Brueggemann and G. WE. Stroup, eds., *Many Voices, One God: Being Faithful in a Pluralistic World*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998, p. 56.
- [52] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, p. 47
- [53] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 128.
- [54] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 128
- [55] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 1, 51 and passim
- [56] Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, New York/Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 247.
- [57] M. Robert Mulholland, "Sociological Criticism," in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, D. A. Black and D. S. Dockery, (eds.), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991, p. 302.
- [58] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 129
- [59] Ibid.
- [60] Ibid.
- [61] S. E. Porter, "Peace, Reconciliation," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993, p. 695
- [62] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 129.
- [63] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letters to the Philippians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, 417 n. 17, 421.
- [64] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 130.
- [65] Ibid.
- [66] Ibid., p. 131

- [67] See Malherbe, *Paul and Popular Philosophers*, pp. 35-48
- [68] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 131
- [69] Ibid.
- [70] Cf. Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 115-129; G. W. Hansen, "Rhetorical Criticism," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp. 822-826.
- [71] Fleming, *Contextualization*, pp. 132-133
- [72] Ibid., p. 133
- [73] Ibid., pp. 133-134.
- [74] Ibid., p. 134.
- [75] Ibid.
- [76] R. David Kaylor, *Paul's Covenant Community: Jew and Gentile in Romans*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1988, p. 13.
- [77] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 135.
- [78] Ibid.
- [79] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996, p. 33
- [80] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 135
- [81] Ibid.
- [82] Ibid.
- [83] Legrand, *Bible on Culture*, pp. 122-123.
- [84] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 136.
- [85] Ibid.
- [86] Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997, p. 151.
- [87] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 136
- [88] Ibid., pp. 136-137.
- [89] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 138
- [90] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1996, p. 49.

- [91] Fleming, *Contextualization*, p. 139
- [92] Ibid.
- [93] Ibid., p. 140
- [94] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p. 12
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## The Theology of St Paul as Predominantly a Christology

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*Abstract:* In this article, the author acknowledges that Pauline theology is primarily Christology. In fact, his theology is to be found in his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. It is there, in that unique event, that Paul understood the plan of God for the salvation of humankind in the death and resurrection of Christ.

This “story of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18) thus puts Christ himself at the centre of soteriology (God’s new mode of salvation), and all else in Paul’s teaching has to be oriented to this Christocentric soteriology. Finally the author attempts to answer the disconcerting question: How would he proclaim Christ in the situation of religious pluralism in our country?

*Keywords:* Pauline Theology, Pauline Christology, reconciliation, Indian context, Challenge of Paul to India, life in Christ.

Scholars generally agree that the key to Pauline theology is to be found in his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. It is there, in that unique event, that Paul understood the plan of God for the salvation of humankind in the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul expresses this truth over and over again in various ways: “It pleased God to save those who would believe through the folly of the gospel message (*k-rygma*). For whereas Jews demand signs, and the Greeks look for philosophy, we proclaim a Christ who has been crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and an absurdity to Gentiles. But to those who have been called, whether Jews or Greeks, he is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:21-25; cf. Rom 1:16; 2 Cor 4:4). This “*story of the cross*” (1 Cor 1:18)

*thus puts Christ himself at the centre of soteriology (God's new mode of salvation), and all else in Paul's teaching has to be oriented to this Christocentric soteriology.*<sup>1</sup>

Paul saw the gospel as part of a plan, gratuitously conceived by God, for a new form of human salvation, to be revealed and realized in his Son. The author of this plan was God (*ho theos*, 1 Cor 2:7), whom Paul had worshiped as a Phari-see, the God of "the covenants" (Rom 9:4) of old. What Paul teaches about God is not a theology (in the strict sense) independent of his *Christocentric soteriology*, for this God is the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 1:3; Rom 15: 6), and what he says about God is usually asserted in contexts dealing with his salvific activity. "It pleased God to save those who believe through the folly of the gospel message" (1 Cor 1:21). Even when Paul speaks of the qualities or attributes of God, they almost always depict God as such and such for us.

**If Paul's theology is predominantly a Christology**, one must insist on its functional character. Paul was little concerned to explain the intrinsic constitution of Christ *in se*; he preached "Christ crucified," Christ as significant for humanity. "You are God's children through your union with Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God, our uprightness, our sanctification, our redemption" (1 Cor 1: 30). This "Christ crucified," though described in figures derived from contemporary Jewish or Hellenistic backgrounds and even embellished with myth, still has relevance for people of our times.<sup>2</sup>

**In the present paper, our main aim is to discuss Paul's understanding of Jesus Christ and his place and role in Paul' world-view.** In the end we shall discuss briefly some issues which emerge in the socio-economic, political, religious and cultural context of India, and see what relevance Paul's teaching has for us today.

## **Christ's Role in Salvation**

One invariable trait of the Messiah (Christ) in Jewish expectation was that he should be the agent of God's final victory over his enemies. On the popular level that meant, quite crudely, victory over the pagan empires which from time to time oppressed the chosen people.<sup>3</sup>

However, the believers in Jesus pro-claimed that the *crucified* Jesus, now raised and glorified by God, was the “LORD (*Kyrios*) and the Christ (*Messiah*)” (Acts 2:36).

For Paul, a devout Pharisee, a crucified man stood under God’s curse. For, according to Deut 21: 23, “a hanged man is accursed by God.” Thus the revealed word of God itself testified that Jesus was cursed by God, as he had been crucified and had died an ignominious death upon the tree. To accept a man cursed by God as the Messiah was impossible to any pious Jew. It amounted to blasphemy against God Himself. None of the expectations of the Jews concerning the Messiah and the messianic kingdom were fulfilled in Jesus. Surely, Jesus crucified was ‘a stumbling block to the Jews’. Hence Paul persecuted the Christians violently; not only in Jerusalem, but he proceeded also to other cities, e.g., to Damascus.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul himself gives an account of his sudden, unexpected encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (Gal 1:11-17):

“...I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it... But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me,<sup>4</sup> in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles,... I went away into Arabia; <sup>5</sup> and again I returned to Damascus.”

### *The Significance of the Event for Paul’s Christology*

The experience with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus radically changed the Jewish theology or rather the *messianic* theology of the Pharisaic rabbi, Paul. The whole plan of God for the salvation of humankind could be seen by him now in a new light, illumined by the fact of the risen and glorified Jesus.<sup>6</sup> A number of aspects of God’s plan of salvation, His *myst-rion*, would become clearer and grow deeper in the mind of Paul in the course of time during his apostolic endeavours in proclaiming the good news of God in Jesus Christ. However, as scholars observe, *the Damascus encounter remains the key to Pauline theology or his Christology*.

The following theological motifs emerge implicitly, if not explicitly, from the accounts of the Damascus encounter:

## *The Crucified Jesus, now risen, is the LORD and the MESSIAH*

The Damascus experience brought home to Paul that Jesus, who had died on the cross, was now incontrovertibly alive — alive by the power of God. Paul saw the risen Christ resplendent with the ‘glory of God’. According to the Bible, the ‘glory of God’ means God Himself, insofar as He is revealed or manifested in His majesty, His power, the glow of His holiness, the dynamism of His being (cf. e.g.. Ex 33:20ff).<sup>7</sup> Thus Paul was convinced that he saw *the invisible God become visible in the person of the risen Jesus* (cf. 2 Cor 4:6).<sup>8</sup> He could, therefore, and he always would henceforth, call the risen Jesus the LORD (*Kyrios*).

He could assert that the risen Jesus was indeed the Messiah, who fulfilled the Jewish expectations of the Messiahship in a far superior and deeper way, since he was indeed the giver of the promised Spirit and the deliverer from the bondage of sin. His resurrection was the pledge of victory over all enemies of the human spirit, for it was victory over death, ‘the last enemy’ (1 Cor 15:26); and appropriately enough, since death is the final frustration of all human designs – if that were indeed the end. This experience of salvation Paul himself had when he surrendered himself to the risen Jesus in faith.

### *‘The Eschatological Age has dawned’*

In the fact of the outpouring of the Spirit by the risen Jesus, Paul knew that the Eschatological Age (also called ‘the Age to Come’, or ‘the *Eschaton*’) had already begun. This brought Paul to view the salvation history in a new perspective. He saw that God had ‘now’ intervened through the coming of Jesus into the world, especially through his death and resurrection: the evil powers, sin, and death were conquered decisively, though in an initial, ‘inaugurated’ manner. The irrevocable process of victory over all evil had already begun. In other words, the *Eschaton* had already dawned on the believers. “Upon us the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11). The fullest realization or the culmination of this new age, was ‘not yet’. That would surely come (hopefully not too far in the future), when the Lord would come in glory, at his parousia. “We are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus

Christ. He will transfigure the body belonging to our humble state, and give it a form, like that of his own resplendent body" (Phil 3:20-21).<sup>9</sup>

### *The Meaning of the Cross of Christ*

In the light of the reality of the risen and glorified Jesus a new meaning of Deut 21:23 dawned upon him. Jesus, who "knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21), hung upon the tree not for his own sins but for the sins of all humankind. Both Jews as well as Gentiles were guilty because of their sins, and as such stood condemned before God; in that sense they all were cursed. Jesus completely identified himself with the sinful humankind as their *inclusive representative*, and by hanging on the cross took upon himself their curse. As Paul would say in Gal 3:13: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse *for us* (*hyper h-mMn*)."<sup>10</sup> Thus Jesus, hanging on the cross was an expression of God's uncompromising No to sin.

However, through his perfect obedience (Rom 5:19) and the 'expiation by his blood' on the cross, Jesus removed our curse and reconciled us to God (cf. Rom 3:25). The cross which was the place of God's curse for Paul the Pharisee, became now the place of God's revelation — revelation of His redeeming and atoning love. The cross which was an object of utter shame and a stumbling block to Paul the Jew, became for him now the 'power and wisdom of God'.

### *Salvation, a gratuitous Gift of God, received through Faith.*

Previously as a Pharisee, Paul was hoping to obtain salvation through his faithful observance of the Law.<sup>11</sup> He thought that salvation depended on his good works and efforts. In the Damascus experience, however, he came to realize that salvation is of the Lord; it is an act of divine grace man has done nothing to deserve.

This salvation (= 'justification', i.e., forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the divine sonship, etc.) Paul received from the Lord, not as a reward merited by works of the Law, but as a sheer gift, grace (*charis*), bestowed upon him by the Lord in response to his personal self-surrender to the Lord, i.e., his faith. He says

emphatically in Rom 3:28: "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law." From then onwards, the grace of God, i.e., His favour done to undeserving humans, became almost a single-word expression for the gospel Paul preached.

### *The Gospel open to the Gentiles also*

In the 'revelation' on the road to Damascus, Paul realized that salvation was through faith and not through the works of the Law; thus it was open to the Gentiles also. Henceforth Paul would preach the gospel of God's grace in Christ to all, both Jews and Gentiles<sup>12</sup> alike.

### *The Church as the Body of Christ*

Paul's doctrine of the Church is to a great extent rooted in the Damascus encounter. The risen Lord asked him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (cf. Acts 9: 4; 22:7; 26:14.). Paul realized that in his persecution of Christians, he was persecuting Christ himself. In other words, the Lord identified with his disciples. This identification is fundamental for Paul's understanding of the Church as the body (= the *person*, in biblical language) of Christ.

### **God's Salvation in Christ**

The impact of the radical transformation, the profound **saving experience of God in the person of Christ**, was so great in Paul that he had to proclaim this good news of God's grace in Christ, the gospel, to every human being he met.

We shall deal with the central theme of Paul's gospel, viz., **God's salvation in Christ**, or his **Christocentric Soteriology**, culled mainly from his uncontested letters, in three sections:

(1) Salvation as a *past* event; (2) Salvation as a *present* experience; and (3) Salvation as a *future* hope.<sup>13</sup>

## (1) Salvation as a *Past Event*

### Man's Existence Without Christ

The starting-point of Paul's thought is the whole man as he is in reality, as he is seen by God. It is the reality of unredeemed man without Christ, before God's intervention in man's life through Christ.

Looking from the plenitude of Christ, Paul views with a sombre and distressing outlook the miserable situation of unredeemed man, man without Christ: a slave of sin, pulled down by the flesh, made worse by the imposing influence of the Law, and doomed to death. All men, both Jews and Gentiles, are under the power of sin (Rom 3:9). All have sinned, and they all come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

Man as man is doomed and incapable of helping himself. No matter how impressive his accomplishments may be in the field of science or art, of technique or of the mystery of the natural forces, he remains hopelessly deficient in the essential human values of morality and religion. In anguish he cries: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24).

### God's Intervention to save Humanity

Immediately Paul gives the answer: "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:25). Against the background of the dark reality and in the midst of the utter helplessness of unredeemed man trying to 'save' himself on his own, Paul sees the great act of the grace of God, His merciful love towards undeserving man, i.e., His righteousness (*dikaiosyn-*), in the work of redemption in Christ.<sup>14</sup> What no man could do, "what was impossible by the law, in that it was weak because of the flesh, God has made good. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He has condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3). "While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6). "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

In the famous passage, Rom 3:21-26, Paul deals with this eschatological act ("now") of God's righteousness in the person and

work of Christ Jesus. As scholars observe, this passage is considered as “the epitome and mother-idea of Paul’s theology”,<sup>15</sup> or “the essence of Paul’s theology” (J.A. Fitzmyer). The passage brings out most beautifully how God’s grace, His infinite love, is manifested in the cross of Christ, so that when we look at Christ on the cross sprinkled with his own blood, we can truly say: “God is love.”

### Man’s Justification by the Faith of Christ (Rom 3:22)

It is interesting to note that in all the most important passages about justification, Paul characteristically says that we have been justified by the faith of Christ: “But now the righteousness of God is revealed...which is through faith of Jesus Christ (*dia pisteMs lesou Christou*) for all who believe (*pisteuontas*)” ( Rom 3:21-22). “A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith of Jesus Christ (*dia pisteMs tou Christou*), ...we have believed in Christ Jesus (*eis Christon lesoun episteusamen* ), that we might be justified by faith of Christ (*ek pisteMs Christou*) and not by the works of the law” ( Gal 2:16; cf. also Gal 2: 20; 3: 22; Phil 3:9).

Many commentators<sup>16</sup> and translators take the expression “faith of Christ” in the Greek as objective genitive (i.e., faith *in* Christ,<sup>17</sup> Christ being the object of man’s faith), rather than as subjective genitive (i.e., faith *of* Christ, Christ being the subject or agent of the act of faith). Actually, both these genitives are in keeping with Pauline thought. However, in the passages mentioned above it seems more appropriate to take them referring to the faith *of* Jesus.

We know that in Pauline thought Jesus is considered as the second Adam, an inclusive representative of the whole humankind (cf. Rom 5:12-19; 2 Cor 5:14-15; etc.). As such he took upon himself *our* curse. “God made him who knew no sin, to be sin *for us* (*hyper h-mn*), so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). In the first Adam the whole humankind died (1 Cor 15:22), that is, all were estranged or alienated from God. *In Christ*, the second Adam, the whole humankind was reconciled to God. “As through one man’s offence judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man’s righteous act the free gift has come to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Rom 5:18).

This act of Jesus by which he surrendered himself completely to God the Father in filial trust and in perfect obedience to His plan of salvation of humankind, was his act of faith. In fact, the whole earthly life of Jesus was a life of faith, i.e., of total self surrender to the will of the Father in perfect obedience, reaching its climax in his death on the cross (Phil 2:8; Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; Heb 10:5-7).

Through this act of faith Jesus died to the power of Sin and all that held humankind in bondage and alienation from God. As we have seen before, humankind was bound in the servitude of Sin, established in the ‘flesh’. Thus the natural, flesh-and-blood life of human beings was the territory, so to speak, of Sin, and all dwellers on that territory Sin claimed as its own.

Christ, by his Incarnation, became a denizen of the ‘flesh’. Sin put in its claim. In other words, Jesus was tempted to sin as we are all tempted, in such forms as sin might take for one in Jesus’ situation. But instead of yielding, and acknowledging Sin’s dominion, as we all do, Jesus rendered a perfect obedience to God — in opposition to Adam’s disobedience (Rom 5:19) — becoming obedient even unto death on the cross (Phil 2:8). Jesus, in plain terms, died rather than sin; and so his death, instead of being a sign of the victory of Sin over man’s ‘fallen’ nature, was a sign of the complete rout of Sin in a decisive engagement.<sup>18</sup> That Jesus’ death on the cross, the supreme expression of his faith, was salvific and liberating from all sin for the whole humankind, was effectively shown by God by His raising Jesus from the dead: “He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised up for our justification” (Rom 4:25).

Now there is only question of the individual human being entering through faith and baptism ‘into Christ’ (*eis Christon*), the movement of incorporation into Christ, i.e. his death and resurrection, and thus becoming a partaker of a new life ‘in Christ’(*en ChristM*).

## **Man’s Sharing in the Christ event: Faith-Baptism**

### **Life into Christ**

As Paul says repeatedly, the gift of redemption or justification which God offers to sinful man through the Christ-event, is

appropriated by man through faith. “We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the work of the law” (Rom 3:28).

## Faith

For Paul faith is that attitude in which, acknowledging our complete insufficiency for any of the high ends of life, we rely utterly on the sufficiency of God. It is to cease from all assertion of self, even by way of effort after righteousness, and to make room for the divine initiative. “It is to trust God fully and let Him have His way with us”(C.H. Dodd).<sup>19</sup> By such faith we enter into life in every sense in which that phrase can be used.

### **Justification (= Redemption, Expiation, Reconciliation)**

Right at the start it is good to note that the above expressions are *metaphors or picture phrases* used by Paul to express the reality of **God’s salvation in Christ**.<sup>20</sup> What he is saying all the time is that in Christ God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. The criminal could not effect his own acquittal, nor the slave set himself free, and God alone could ‘expiate’ the defilement we have brought upon ourselves. Only God could rectify the estrangement or alienation we had caused and bring us back to Himself.<sup>21</sup>

### **Baptism into Christ (*eis Christon*)**

We saw that for Paul man is justified by faith, i.e., through an act of personal self surrender to God in Christ. Now Baptism is the *seal* of the reality of this faith. It is ‘the sacramental complement of faith, the rite whereby man achieves union with Christ and publicly manifests his commitment to him’. The two notions ‘faith’ and ‘baptism’ are essentially and intimately connected for Paul as for all early Christian preachers. “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through *faith*. For as many of you as were baptized *into Christ* have put on Christ” (Gal 3:26f.).

For Paul, as for his Christian predecessors, baptism was the rite of initiation into the community of believers, i.e., the Church, the Body of Christ, the ‘new humanity’ of which he is the head. The faith which committed the Christian to Christ committed him also

to the community of Christians as a member of the body. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body —Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12f.)

In Rom 6:3ff. Paul describes baptism as the believer’s ‘*co-dying*’ with Christ to the old life of sin, and ‘*co-rising*’ with him unto newness of life. To understand the ‘realism’ of his language here, we must remember that behind Christian baptism stands the great ‘baptism’ of Christ himself (Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50), unique and all-inclusive, undertaken by Christ himself for the sins of the whole world.<sup>22</sup> What has been done *for us* all, is now represented and effected in us who commit ourselves to Christ in faith-baptism. That is why Paul uses verbs compounded with *syn* (= with), to express the identification of the Christian with the preeminently redemptive acts of Christ’s life, viz., his passion, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and glorification. Thus he uses the expressions ‘co-suffer with Christ’, ‘co-crucified with Christ’, ‘co-die with Christ’, ‘co-buried with Christ’, ‘co-raised with Christ’, ‘co-glorified with Christ’, etc.

## (2) Salvation as *Present* Experience

### Life in Christ

We saw in the previous paragraphs that a believer, through his faith-baptism commitment, is torn from his original condition of sin (“in Adam”, 1 Cor 15:22), from his self-centred, earth-oriented inclinations (“in the flesh”, Rom 7:5), and from his religio-cultural background (“under the law”, 1 Cor 9:20; “idolaters”, etc., 1 Cor 6:10-11), and is solemnly introduced into Christ (*eis Christon*), he is incorporated into Christ, he begins to participate in that Spirit and that Life, which Paul often calls life in Christ (*en ChristM*), or life according to the Spirit (*kata pneuma*).

### “In Christ”

The expression “in Christ”, counting by-forms like ‘in him’, etc. occurs some 200 times in Paul’s letters. The most common use of this phrase ‘in Christ’ is to express the close union of the risen Christ

and the Christian, an inclusion or incorporation that connotes a symbiosis of the two. This vital, personal union can also be expressed as ‘Christ in me’: “It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). A Christian, so to say, has no longer a separate existence. He is merged into Christ.

There are also at times ecclesial or communitarian dimensions to the phrase (Gal 1:22). The Christian so incorporated in Christ is actually a member of the Body of Christ, he is part of the whole Christ.

### **Life in Christ: Personal Dimension**

A Christian is one who by the act of God’s grace in Christ becomes in all truth an adopted son of God in the Son. God shares His very life with a Christian, communicating the Holy Spirit, i.e., His own self-gift to him. Paul says: “God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). “You have received the Spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:15-16).

Though remaining still human, ‘in the flesh’ (*en sarki*), he is divinized at the same time through the immanence of Christ (‘Christ in me’, Gal 2:20; Rom 8:10).<sup>23</sup> This transformation into the image of the risen Jesus, which began at the moment of the faith-baptism event, is an on-going process in the life of a Christian (2 Cor 3:18). He is destined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom 8:29).

### **Life in Christ: Christian Ethics**

According to Paul, while *faith* expresses the Christian’s relation to God (Christ), *love* expresses most often his/her relation to the fellow humans. This horizontal dimension, that of the Christian’s way of living in relationship with others, or in other words, *the Christian ethic is but a natural, spontaneous expression or consequence of the vertical dimension, that of the life of faith-union with Christ*. In fact, the whole Christian ethical life can be summed up, in Paul’s own words’, as “faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:6). These works of love in the life of the Christian who is led

by or walks according to the Spirit, *kata pneuma*, are called by him “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22f.). According to Paul, the Spirit is to be recognized as the mode in which Christ himself is personally present in his church, inspiring and directing his members and shaping the whole body to his own pattern.

Paul’s whole Christian ethic is grounded in the ‘imperative’ flowing from the ‘indicative’, our response in Christian living (the ‘imperative’) to the wonderful kindness of God to us sinners in Christ (the ‘indicative’).

For example, Paul indicates in Gal 3:27: “You have put on Christ.” In Rom 13: 14 he exhorts: “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” While in Rom 6:2 he says, “We died to sin”, in Rom 6: 11-12 he reminds them: “ So you must consider yourselves dead to sin. . . Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies.”

These imperatives or hortatives in Paul are for driving home the need for working out ethically all that is involved in being in Christ. The maxim all through is: ‘Werde das was Du bist’ (*Become what you are*). Paul’s language varies. In Phil 1:27 it is: “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ”; in 1 Thess 5:8: “Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”<sup>24</sup>

## **Life in Christ: Ecclesial Dimension**

The baptism ‘into Christ’ is no mere individualistic experience for Christians, but a corporate one. They all put on the same risen Christ. In this oneness of Christians with Christ and in Christ all barriers of caste and creed, colour and sex are superseded. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one person in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).<sup>25</sup>

The Christian vocation is a call by God to belong to the *New Covenant*<sup>26</sup> in the Spirit foretold by the prophets in the OT (Jer 31:31ff.; Ez 36:26f.), the covenant sealed in the blood of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. It is a call to belong to the new ‘Israel of God’ (Gal 6:16), to be His people in Christ, the *qahal Yahweh* or the *ekkl-sia tou theou*, i.e., the Church of God in Christ.

Paul refers to this communion of the Christians, the Church, as the Body of Christ (cf. Rom 12:4ff; 1 Cor 12:12ff.). Baptism introduces the Christian into the ‘Body of Christ’: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so also (is) Christ; that is to say, we all have been baptized through one Spirit into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all have been made to drink of one Spirit. .... You are the body of Christ and each on his part a member of it (1 Cor 12:12-13, 27).<sup>27</sup>

### (3). Salvation as *Future* Hope

#### Life with Christ

##### Being ‘with Christ’

Being with Christ is the heart of the Christian hope. Christ, the first-born among many brethren, is already risen and reigning. He is the ‘firstfruits’. What happened to him will happen to those who are his; for we are joint-heirs with Christ’, and ‘if we have died with him, we believe that we shall also live with him’ (Rom 6:8). ‘So shall we be always with the Lord’ (1 Thess 4:17). We have already observed before that according to Paul, the Christian has been given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee, pledge (*arrabMn*, 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5), as firstfruits (Rom 8:23) of his final glorification. This is often referred to as the “resurrection of the body.” This would take place at the parousia of the *Lord*:

Christ the first fruits, then at his parousia those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power...The last enemy to be destroyed is death... When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the One who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:23-28).

## The Relevance of Paul's Teaching in the Socio-economic, Religious and Cultural

### Context of India

In the foregoing pages we dealt with the Christology of St Paul according to his Jewish-Hellenistic world-view. If Paul were to come to India today, what would be the content of his preaching?

How would he proclaim Christ in the situation of religious pluralism in our country?

I think Paul would proclaim the same message of the gospel of God's grace in Christ to the people in search of salvation, adapting himself to the religious and social culture of the people, becoming "all things to all" for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:22). He would say that the same God whom they worship has revealed himself in the history of humankind fully in the person of Jesus Christ. He himself has had the "experience of Christ" on the road to Damascus (Gal 1:16); he says: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the *knowledge* (= personal, intimate communion) of *the glory of God* (i.e. God himself in his external manifestation) in *the face* (i.e. the person) of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

Thus Paul would say to one and all, "The Jesus whom I proclaim, is the visible image of the one and only invisible God. The one and the same God, who is the creator and saviour of us all, is inviting you to surrender yourself to him in the person of Jesus Christ. Through this act of faith you will experience the gift of his salvation. Look at me! I have received the same gift when I believed in Jesus Christ with utter trust in his loving kindness. I have 'experienced God' (*anubhava*) in the person of this living Christ."

If some people (e.g. Like Hindu holy men, Tukrm, Dnyneeshwar, etc.) come forward and say that they too have the experience of God (through private revelation) in their own religion, Paul would certainly listen to their experience with interest and respect, dialoguing with them, maintaining, however, the historical and public nature of his Christian revelation. After thus *witnessing* to Christ he

would leave the matter to God. His personal life lived among them will show whether his “God-experience in Christ” is authentic or not. The person’s ‘conversion’ is a personal matter between him/her and Christ (God). “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor 1:17).

Incidentally, Paul never preaches to the Jews to be ‘better Jews’ in their own Judaistic religion. No, he preaches “Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23).

How would Paul find his dictum, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one person in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28), being lived among the Christian communities in India?

In all humility we shall have to confess that we have failed miserably in this regard. In a number of Catholic communities in various parts of our country there is rampant casteism; there are, for example, dalit Christian groups fighting openly with the high caste Christians. This is seen not only among the laity, but also among the clergy in particular. Women are given a secondary place in social or even in religious matters, where “one person in Christ” should be evident. This “caste system” is a great scandal to the growth of the gospel among the non-Christians. They don’t see anything of our being “one person in Christ” or our “faith working through love (*agap-*)” being lived in practice.

Why is it so? Perhaps, in spite of having been baptized in Christ, we Christians have never really met Christ; we really don’t *know* Christ, though we may know a lot about him and discuss or preach about him. In that sense, we are Christians only in name, not different from the Hindus with their caste system. Our priests are mainly busy with the external sacramental ministry and social work. Perhaps they have no time to ‘know’ their Lord in personal communion. The result is that *Christ*, who is the source and dynamism of all their ministry and social work, is not *witnessed to*.

## What about ‘the resurrection of the dead’ in Christ, and the Hindu belief of the cycle of re-birth?

In his dialogue with Hindus, Paul would stress this aspect of Christian experience. The Christian has received the gift of the Holy Spirit as a pledge or guarantee of his/her final resurrection. We are already sharing in the life of God here and now as Christians, and we are looking forward with certain hope of our total glorification after our death. This could be a great source of joy and relief for our Hindu brethren who are caught up in the cycle of re-birth.

## The Christ-experience of a Christian and the Hindu mysticism

According to the *advaita* form of Hindu mysticism, the person is ultimately ‘absorbed’ into the divine or ultimately ‘realizes’ his own identity with *brahma*. Paul would tell the Hindu philosopher that a Christian, though merged in Christ so that he/she can truly say that ‘his/her life is Christ’, or ‘it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me’, yet in this so-called Christian mysticism a Christian never loses his/her identity. It is the ‘experience’ of ‘participation’ or ‘sharing’ in divine life in Christ. This truth of Christian faith should be appealing to our non-Christian brethren. No one likes to lose one’s identity at any cost!

## Notes

1. J.A. Fitzmyer, “Pauline Theology”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Bangalore: TPI, 1990, art. 82:28.
2. *Ibid.* art. 82:29.
3. C.H. Dodd, “The Thought of Paul”, in *A Source Book of the Bible Teachers*, Walton R.C. (ed.), SCM Press, 1970, p.317.
4. “in me” (*en emoi*) fits in better than “to me” (RSV) in the context. Paul proclaims “Jesus” whom he has “experienced” in him. Cf. J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, Macmillan and Co., 1921, p. 83: St. Paul bore *in his person* the strongest testimony to the power of the Gospel.

5. Paul went to Arabia, a gentile country, presumably to preach there. Arabia probably refers to the Nabatean kingdom of Aretas IV Philopatris, in Transjordan, E and S of Damascus.
6. J.A. Fitzmyer, *Ibid.* art. 82:14.
7. F. Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ – The Mind and Heart of St Paul*, Bombay: St Pauls, 1990, p.33. In Ex 33:20ff. : I = My face = My glory.
8. *Ibid.* pp. 33-34; 2 Cor 4:6: “For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge (i.e. personal, intimate communion) of the glory of God (i.e. God himself in his experiential manifestation) in the face (i.e. the person) of Christ.
9. Paul’s doctrine thus goes contrary to the tenet of “re-birth” of Hinduism.
10. *hyper h-mMn* is fundamental to Pauline soteriology. Jesus is the second Adam, an inclusive representative of all humankind. The biblical principle of solidarity is evident here. Cf. F. Pereira, *ibid.* p.98.
11. This was one of the most fundamental tenets of Judaism. Cf. F. Pereira, *ibid.* pp. 51-54.
12. Paul takes pride in calling himself ‘an apostle to the gentiles’ (Rom 11:13).
13. This scheme is followed by A.M. Hunter, *The Gospel According to St Paul*, London, 1966, chapters 2-4.
14. F. Pereira, *ibid.*, pp.81-98.
15. F. Prat, *Theology of St Paul*, Vol.I, London, 1959, p. 205.
16. J.A. Fitzmyer, *ROMANS*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 33, 1993, p.345.
17. This is seen in most of the English translations, e.g., RSV, NRSV, NIV, etc. The NRSV text of Gal. 2:16 reads: “we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through *faith in Jesus Christ*. And we have come to *believe in Christ Jesus*, so that we might be justified by *faith in Christ*, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.”
18. C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Collins: Fontana Books, 1959, pp. 109-110.
19. *Idem*, “The Thought of Paul”, p. 315.
20. By taking the literal meaning of the words *justification*, *redemption*, *expiation*, and *atonement*, many authors have misunderstood Paul’s doctrine. His gospel is what was foretold in the OT scriptures; hence

the meaning of these expressions should be found from their usage in the Greek Septuagint bible. Cf. F. Pereira, *op. cit.* pp. 83-96.

21. C.H. Dodd, "The Thought of Paul", p. 316.
22. Cf. O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, London, 1950, p. 23. 'According to the New Testament, all men have in principle received baptism long ago, namely on Golgotha, at Good Friday and Easter.'
23. This is Christian mysticism. It is a sharing or participation in the life of the risen Christ. The Christian is merged in Christ; however, he retains his identity. It is not, as in some forms of Hinduism, an absorption in or identity with the divine: *tat tvam asi; aham brahmāsmi*.
24. These 'reminders' are not some sort of external laws *imposed* on the Christians. They are 'signals' to show them where they really stand as Christians. Paul, as a pastor and a realist, knows that they are still in the 'flesh', which tends to act in conflict with the 'spirit' (Gal 5:17). Their Christian vision may become blurred at times; hence they need these 'signals'. Basically they are the life and teaching of Jesus. Primarily, however, they should be led by the Spirit of the risen Lord immanent in them. Cf. F. Pereira, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-120.
25. It goes without saying that if this reality of the Christian vocation is loved seriously, Christians should be able to revolutionize and transform the whole world making it a better and happier place to live in, where the 'kingdom of God' has really come.
26. The Old Covenant made by God with Israel was: "*I am your God, you are My people.*" The New Covenant made by God in Christ is: "*I am your God (=Abba), you are My people (= sons / daughters in the Son).*"
27. The image of Christ as the head of the body, the church, is developed more specifically in the Deutero-Pauline letters, Colossians and Ephesians.

## **Paul and Justification: The Relevance of Paul's Doctrine of Justification for Today**

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*Abstract:* Here the author deals with the contemporary relevance of Pauline doctrine of justification/righteousness/salvation. This paper intends to study the Pauline concept of justification and related ideas in the Indian context characterised by rich religiosity and spirituality on the one hand, and the increasing polarisation on the basis of ideology, religion, sex-gender stereotypes, class and caste on the other. Towards this purpose we begin the paper with a brief analysis of the Indian situation with special reference to its socio-cultural and religious aspects.

The paper is divided into two parts. Part I will analyse the meaning of justification/salvation and related ideas. In the process of investigation we shall delineate the salient features of Paul's theology of justification. Part II will deal with the implications of Pauline theology for today. Owing to constraints of space, our study shall be restricted to issues pertaining to women and religious pluralism.

Thus moving away from the legalistic and fundamentalist notion of justification, the fact of being saved by the faith of and *in* Christ (Rom 3:21-26) enables us to live humbly (example of Abraham) before God in a spirit of gratitude to God's gracious gift. It urges us to move towards the realisation of Paul's egalitarian vision (Gal 3:26-29). Our identity as human beings created in God's image and likeness and our 'oneness' in Christ shall not to be obscured by divisive forces. Our personal experience of the justifying act of God manifested in Jesus' love and poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) empowers us to be committed to the liberative mission of Jesus in today's Church and Society.

**Keywords:** Justification/righteousness/salvation, Indian context, religious pluralism, women, liberative mission of Christ.

Pauline notion of justification/righteousness/salvation (Rom 3:21-4:25; Gal 2:16-20; 3:21-4:25) has been a subject matter of intense exploration and debate in Christian churches. Ancient and contemporary scholars alike have grappled with the phrases "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom 3:22) and "a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (Rom 3:28). As Pathrapankal observes, almost every influential Christian thinker has dwelt with the letter to the Romans that has contributed significantly to the history of Christian doctrine.[1]

This paper intends to study the Pauline concept of justification and related ideas in the Indian context characterised by rich religiosity and spirituality on the one hand, and the increasing polarisation on the basis of ideology, religion, sex-gender stereotypes, class and caste on the other. Towards this purpose we begin the paper with a brief analysis of the Indian situation with special reference to its socio-cultural and religious aspects.

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## **The Indian Context**

**Religion:** Indian Society is distinguished for its diversity of cultures, languages and religions. This pluralistic feature has been woven in to the very fabric of our nation from time immemorial. We regard the diversity of religions and mutual interaction of religious traditions as a special blessing of our times that can contribute to the building up of an egalitarian society capable of overcoming the caste, creed, class, sex and gender based divisive forces.

Despite many positive signs and events, the present Indian scenario is rather bleak. Clashes between religions, conflict, hatred and mass killings have become the order of the day. The recent brutal

activities by religious fanatics in Orissa and other parts of the country are an example of this phenomenon.[2] Particularly disturbing is the trend towards politicisation of religion and fostering of an aggressive fundamentalism for political and economic ends.

**Socio-cultural and economic:** Indian society with its culture, predominantly rooted in Hindu ethos that is strongly entrenched in the caste system, is diametrically opposed to God's design for a dignified and just social order. It has not only caused deep divisions among the people, but also is "mainly responsible for keeping a large section of the Indian populace backward, socially, economically and educationally." [3] Sadly the 'casteist mentality' is deeply ingrained also in the psyche of most sections of the Indian Church.[4] Equally shocking is the economic system that has widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

Another feature of the Indian reality is the **discrimination against women**. Like most communities across the globe, Indian society too is highly patriarchal. Women are victims of multiple inequalities, which are the by-products of centuries-long socio-cultural, religious, economic and political discriminatory practices. In the laws of Manu, their social mobility, economic freedom and personal liberty are almost fully curtailed and brought under the control of the men folk in the family.[5] No wonder then that Manu, the greatest lawgiver of the Hindus, assigned to women "perpetual legal minority, making them subject to fathers in childhood, husbands in youth and sons in old age." [6] Despite its declarations affirming the dignity and vocation of women, the Church too operates on patriarchal lines.

Nevertheless, today women from all walks of life are forging ahead to reclaim their rightful place in society and religion. The various women's movements and organisations bear witness to women's vision of a society/religion free from sexism, casteism, classism, communalism and all dehumanising praxis. In a spirit of sisterhood among themselves and solidarity with like-minded groups, women have begun to demand leadership positions in public and private arena.

Against this paradoxical context of our society and church, we shall delve into the Pauline concept of justification/righteousness/salvation and examine the relevance of Paul's teachings for us today.

## **Part I**

### **Justification through Faith in Jesus (Rom 3: 21-4:25; Gal 3: 1-4:31)**

#### **1. Preliminary remarks**

The Pauline notion of justification through faith (3:21-31), the dominant theme in Romans, is a key category in Paul's thought. Scholars unanimously agree that Romans (c. 56-57) enjoys primacy over all the other Letters of Paul. For instance, Kizhakkeyil considers it the first well-developed theological statement that has come down to us and has exercised immense influence on the formulation of Christian theology ever since.[7] Translating Kuss, Thekekara writes, "The theological and architectural summit of the letter to the Romans is represented by the pericope 3: 21-31, more precisely, by the verses 21-26."<sup>[8]</sup> In the words of Cranfield, it is indeed "the centre and heart"<sup>[9]</sup>of Paul's theology of justification, righteousness, salvation and faith. Montague is of the view that "justification is not the centre of Pauline doctrine. Rather it is an application of his 'in Christ' theology to the question raised in forensic terms by his adversaries."<sup>[10]</sup>

There exists a close thematic affinity between Romans and Galatians. Although the context and purpose of the Letters differ, the theme "Justification through faith in Christ" is common to both. They complement each other and must be read together to comprehend the full implications of Paul's teachings.<sup>[11]</sup> While the tone of Galatians is angry and hurried as Paul is reacting to the Judaizers over the circumcision controversy, Romans is reflective and systematic. According to Smith, "Romans is Galatians remembered in tranquility."<sup>[12]</sup> In all probability, Romans was written from Corinth between 56-57 AD during Paul's three-month stay there (Acts 19:21; 20:3; Rom 15: 22-33; 16:1), prior to his departure for Jerusalem with the alms for the poor (Rom 15:25-26).

The 'why' for writing a letter to the Christians at Rome is a matter of deliberation. To use the expression of Ellis, "One has to wonder why he wrote his most deeply theological letter to a church that he

had not founded and did not even know except by hearsay.”[13] Considering Paul’s personality, his passionate love for Christ and his mission, we can perceive Paul’s ‘hidden agenda’ for writing to the Romans. In his enthusiasm to preach the Gospel in Spain (Rom 15:28), Paul needed the support and understanding of the influential Roman church.

## 2. Exploring the meaning of righteousness (*dikaiosyn-* of God

The doctrine of justification is spelt out in Paul’s letter to the Romans as follows:

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness...; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteousness and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus....For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law (Rom 3: 21-26, 28).

In the biblical tradition, as described by Newman, “the noun *righteousness* and the adjective *righteous* denote the character, behaviour and status appropriate to the covenant relationship God formed through Israel.”[14] God’s righteousness is demonstrated through God’s fidelity to Israel that evokes obedience and loyalty from the people. According to Pereira, “The expression *dikaiosyn-* of God in the LXX is most often the translation of the Hebrew word *sedaqah* (righteousness).”[15] Translating the word ‘righteousness’ as “virtue,” “justice,” “justification,” “uprightness,” Ellis draws our attention to ‘covenant theology,’ which denotes fidelity of covenant partners – God and Israel to each other.[16]

Now “the covenant relationship was prior to all law and to all demands of the law.”[17] Yahweh’s choice of Israel and Israel’s conviction of being the elect of Yahweh constituted the basic fact of its existence. God’s choice of Israel did not depend on its merits,

but on God's gracious and unconditional love: "It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you....It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand ..." (Dt 7:7-9; 9:4-5; Ex 19: 4). Far from being righteous, the Israelites were a stubborn people (v. 6). Thus the notion of righteousness excludes legalistic claims and attitudes in the Old Testament and fosters a relationship based "on the grace of the covenant." [18]

Closely related to the idea of righteousness (*sedaqah*) is the notion of salvation. The occurrences of *sedaqah* in the Old Testament is often associated with salvation / deliverance: "There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour" (Is 45:21); "I bring near my deliverance, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry. I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory" (Is 46:13). The Psalms further illustrate the close association of *sedaqah* with salvation (e.g., Ps 40:10; 62:2).

Another point to be underscored is the association of *dikaiosyn-* with *hesed*, translated as 'steadfast love' or 'loving kindness' and *emeth*, i.e., God's fidelity to God's promises. In fact, as Schrenk points out, "In the LXX the use of *sedaqah* for God's dispensation of salvation is carried to such a point that *dikaiosyn-* can even be used for *hesed* (Gen 19:19; 20:13; 24:27; 32:10; Ex 15:13; 34:7; etc.), when *eleos* is the more usual rendering. We also find *dikaiosyn-* used to render 'emeth' (Gen 24:49; Is 38:19; 39:8; etc.)." [19]

The Hebrew word for compassion, *rahahim* expresses the feminine aspect of God. According to Semitic thought, *rahahim* conveys the "instinctive attachment of one being for another," thus indicating that it has "its seat in the maternal bosom, *raham*: 1 Kings 3:26." [20] God's motherly love readily translates itself into tenderness and act of compassion/mercy as seen in the life of Israel (Ps 106:45; cf. 2Cor 1:3).

Scholars are of the view that the *dikaiosyn-* of God in the Old Testament is not used to denote God's punishment of the chosen people for their sins of infidelity, even though they are often reminded of their unfaithfulness and the need for repentance. Moreover, as Pereira observes, the *dikaiosyn-* of God is never equated with the

'wrath' (*orge*) of God; instead, frequently it is expressly contrasted with it (Ex 15:7, 13).[21]

Thus the salvific nature of the *dikaiosyn-* of God or God's righteousness is explicit in the biblical texts. It may be described as God's saving love and mercy (*karuna*) in action, whereby the faithful God, in accordance with God's promises, liberates God's people from slavery to sin and brings them back to Godself. God takes initiative to put them in right relationship with Godself. The Exodus story powerfully illustrates this: "In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode" (Ex 15:13).

Salvation in the Indian tradition and religion is perceived in varied forms and shades. Indians understand salvation as "*loka-samgraha* (welfare of the society and the cosmos) and also as *moksa* (individual liberation) from the *samsara* (the cycle of birth and death)."[22] Constraints of space do not permit us to develop these notions at this point. A lucid understanding of the various shades of salvation in Indian traditions and religions has been provided by the scholars of Indian Theological Association (ITA).[23]

### 3. Meaning of Righteousness / Salvation in Paul

Paul's arguments about "righteousness through faith in Jesus and not through the law" have been transformed into a "timeless theological principle." [24] Paul sees righteousness as God's saving activity wrought through the crucified and risen Christ. Jesus on the cross becomes the manifestation of God's righteousness, God's activity of "putting right" and humans' state of "being put right" with God. In other words, "righteousness" is God's gift to sinful man/woman to be received through faith. A person then becomes righteous, 'justified' or holy, before God as God's son/daughter in Christ. At four distinct points in Romans, Paul speaks of "the righteousness of God":

- (i) Rom 1: 16-17 emphasises the faithfulness of God in terms of the "righteousness of God," denoting God's saving power.
- (ii) Rom 3: 1-8 relates the truth and faithfulness of God to "the righteousness of God."

- (iii) Rom 3: 21-26 speaks of “the righteousness of God” as the self-expression of God, that is, God’s salvific action.
- (iv) Rom 10: 1-4 sees “the righteousness of God” as God’s power at work unto salvation.[25] Obviously, Paul’s focus in each of these instances is on the saving-power character of God.

Beginning with “the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1), which is God’s power of salvation (1:16), Paul emphatically states that this gospel in which God’s righteousness is revealed (1:17) comes as a gift to humanity, estranged from God because of its disobedience. Paul’s expression ‘the gospel of God,’ understood as a *subjective genitive* focuses on God’s own good news proclaimed and accomplished in Christ. The fact that Paul also speaks about “the gospel of his Son” (1:9) and the “gospel of Christ” (15:19) suggests that God is the subject and Christ is the object of the gospel.[26] Taken as an *objective genitive*, *dikaiosyn-theou* “refers to the righteousness that God graciously confers upon the ungodly. This is certainly the sense of the expression in 2 Cor 5:21 and Phil 3:9, but here and in Rom. 3:5, 21, 22 and 10:3 the righteousness of God is best construed as a subjective genitive that points to God’s own uprightness...God’s covenant faithfulness in the face of human infidelity.”[27]

Paul insists that human beings have nothing to boast about. Justification is not the achievement of humans through the observance of the law, but God’s gratuitous gift in virtue of the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24). Fitzmyer expresses this idea in terms of “vindication and acquittal of sinful human beings” by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[28] He also lists ten different images in Pauline writings which the apostle uses to explain this reality: justification, salvation, reconciliation, expiation, redemption, freedom, sanctification, transformation, new creation and glorification.[29] Each of these highlights a distinctive aspect of the mystery of Christ and his redemptive work.

## **Redemption in Christ**

Having dealt with the deplorable situation of humankind in Rom 1:18-3:20, Paul sets out to elaborate his theological treatise on the righteousness of God (*dikaiosyn-tou Theou*) apart from law (3:21), through the redemption in Christ (v.24) and faith in Jesus Christ

(v.22). He maintains that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23); they are under the power of sin and incapable of justifying themselves on the basis of legal observance. Hence they are justified through Christ Jesus, “whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith” (3:25).

To get a clear grasp of the word ‘redemption’ we turn to the Old Testament once again. The frequent use of the verb ‘to redeem’ (*lytrousthai*) in the LXX denotes the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (Ex 6:6; 15:13; Deut 7:8; 9:26). It is Yahweh who takes the initiative to liberate them from bondage in order to make them Yahweh’s own “possession” (Ex 6:7; Deut 7:6). This fact is reiterated in Ex 19:4-5 and Deut 7:8, which proclaim God’s tender compassion, God’s maternal and paternal love.

The verb ‘to redeem’ is also used to indicate Israel’s deliverance from their sins solely because of God’s merciful love. God is so rich in mercy (*hesed* or *eleos* in the LXX) that God’s compassionate love not only forgives Israel’s iniquities, but also revives their hope of salvation/redemption. The accent is on plenteous redemption (Ps 130:7-8) offered by God: “You shall be redeemed without money” (Is 52:3); “For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem” (Ps 130:7).

Paul’s vocabulary of justice and justification discloses his legal frame of mind. The concept of redemption (*apolytrMsis*, 3:24) in the Graeco-Roman world referred to the buying back of slaves or prisoners. By applying this notion to humanity’s sinful situation, Paul “suggests that Christ’s death ransomed and rescued humanity from the power of sin that enslaved and held it captive.”[30] Paul’s usage of the term takes us back to his polemic situation. Montague aptly puts it: “He (Paul) was combating the extreme Pharisaism which had a totally legalistic concept of the righteous life, reducing the ‘gift’ and interpersonal aspect of man’s (humans’) religious life to an innocuous residue.”[31].

The Pharisees regarded Judaism as a religion centered upon the observance of the Torah. Their proud exclusiveness (Mt 9: 9-13; Mk 2: 13-17; Lk 5:27-32; Jn 7: 49) made them believe that they could find favour with God by their meticulous practice of even the most minor precepts. They understood salvation and sanctification

in terms of their own merits, and not as a gift of God. Against this mindset Paul reacts violently, insisting that justice is not acquired by keeping the prescriptions of the law (Gal 3:11; Rom 3:21; 5:1; 9:30; 10:6), but by faith in Jesus as discussed above. It is the justice of God that justifies the believer. It is the faith of Christ Jesus “who humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8) that restores the strained relation between God and humans and among human beings themselves.

Paul’s reference to “redemption through his blood” (Eph 1:7) and his reminder “you were bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23) may convey the notion that “Jesus has bought us back by paying the price of his blood.”[32] Paul seems to project a God who can be appeased only by blood sacrifice. Sinful humans are incapable of restoring the broken relationship between them and God. The only device to re-establish the lost friendship with God (Rom 5: 12-17; cf. Gen 3: 1-19) is Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. However crude may be Paul’s expressions and metaphors, his purpose transcends legalistic concepts.

Drawing on the cultic imagery of the day of atonement (Lev 16:14-16), Paul writes that “God put forward Christ as a *hilast-rion* (Rom 3:25), the new mercy seat sprinkled with Christ’s own blood, thereby atoning for the sins of humanity”.[33] In other words, Jesus is the meeting-place for humans and God, the place where humans experience the ‘atoning love’ of God. Jesus is depicted as the new ‘mercy seat,’ the compassionate and forgiving God, whose mercy does not evoke the idea of chastisement. Pereira categorically states that it is “totally unbiblical” to consider the shedding of blood in the death of Christ on the cross as a punishment for our sins.[34] On the contrary, it is Jesus’ supreme act of love for us: “He loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20; cf. Eph 5:2, 25; Jn 10:11, 15, 27; 15:13; 1Jn 3:16).

Keeping in mind the significance of the doctrine of justification in ecumenical perspective, we do well to highlight the theological position of some of the Protestant scholars. Karl Barth is regarded as the most explicit of the leading theologians on the subject of justification. Montague observes that Lutheran Hofer’s survey of Protestant research on the theology of justification in 1940 indicated

the contemporary trend “toward a more mystical interpretation consonant with the entire life of salvation,” thus moving away “from a purely juridical and imputative meaning.”[35] Similar views highlighting the renewed understanding of protestant theologians are found in recent articles by Pathil and Keerankeri.[36] Thus, “justification in Paul is not only the forgiveness of sin but also a vocation, transformation, mobilization, a ‘new’ life and activity.”[37]

## Need for Faith (Rom 3:22)

At the heart of Paul’s gospel stands his deep rooted conviction, “A person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith of Jesus Christ (*dia pisteMs Iesoun Christou*)...we have believed *in* Christ Jesus (*eis Christon Iesoun episteusamen*) that we might be justified by faith of Christ and not by the works of the law” (Gal 2:16; cf. Gal 2:20; 3:22; Phil 3:9).[38] Jesus on the Cross is the greatest demonstration of his faith in God, who justified and reconciled humanity apart from the law (Rom 3:28).

For Paul, faith is always faith in a person, the person of Jesus Christ in whom the righteousness of God has been revealed (Rom 3:21-22). Pauline faith cannot be reduced to a mere intellectual acceptance of a body of doctrines. It is a firm belief in God and in God’s promises as exemplified in the life Abraham (Rom 4:1-25; cf. Gen 12:1), who believed God and God reckoned it to him as righteousness (Rom 4:22; Gal 3:6; Gen 15:6). Just as the promise made to Abraham was realised through faith in God (Rom 4:13; Gal 3:15-18) and not through the law (Rom 4:11; Gal 3:17-18), so too, Christian faith should rest on the person of Jesus. Paul thus underscores the unmerited nature of faith: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

Because faith is central to Paul’s preaching, the purpose of his ministry is “to bring about the obedience of faith (*hypako-n pisteMs*) among all the Gentiles” (Rom 1:5). Faith comes from hearing. If the gospel is not proclaimed, it will neither be heard nor believed. When the gospel is proclaimed, “the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith” (Rom 1:17), that is “it begins and ends with

faith.”[39] Paul is so convinced that “the one who is righteous will live by faith” (Rom 1:17b).

At this juncture it must be noted that Paul is speaking of a very different kind of faith from that of James, who criticises those whose faith is dead and hence does not result in doing good works (Jas 2:14-26). Paul thus assumes that there are works which follow justification by faith. In Gal 5:1-6 Paul speaks of “faith working through love” (v.6). In fact in all his letters, Paul exhorts his people to live up to their faith in Christ by sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:1-11). Ultimately, both Paul and James expect the Christians to have a living, genuine faith.

In short, Pauline conception of faith requires personal belief in and surrender to Jesus through whom God has justified us. To use the expression of Barclay, “Christianity is not a system; it is a faith.”[40] To borrow Paul’s vocabulary, “righteousness is by faith unto all that believe” (Rom 3:22). Faith, then, is the response that Paul expects from his people.

## Part II

### 1. Justification by Faith and Women

In the context of a patriarchal society of Paul’s time and of today, the declaration “justification through faith in Christ, not through the works of the law” assumes special significance for Christian women. In exploring the meaning of ‘justification’ (righteousness), we underlined the emergence of this term from **covenant theology**. The sign of the covenant in Jewish community was male circumcision (Gen 17:10-14). Consequently males were regarded as full members of the covenant, i.e., those belonging to God’s own family with Torah as their guide. As Tatha Wiley, drawing on the scholarship of Ross S. Kramar observes, references to the “People” Israel referred to a community of males: “So Moses went down from the mountain to the people...and he said to the people, ‘Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman’ (Ex 19:14-15).[41] Women shared in the covenant through the circumcised males. In other words, women were considered part of Israel through relations of dependence on their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons.

It must be noted that “the function of the law is inescapably bound up with gender... the law is gender-specific.”[42] Formulated from a male perspective, the law fosters patriarchal ideology and claims divine legitimacy for women’s subordination and victimisation in the social and religious spheres. We have ample examples of this in biblical texts (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:17-21; Gen 18:12; Num 27:1-11; 30:4-9; Deut 24:1; Sir 23:22-26; Lev 12:1-5, etc.) and in Manu, who provided a legal framework for the support and continuation of the institution of patriarchy.[43]

Undoubtedly, the hallmark of Judaism is its “emphasis on correct action in every sphere of life, technically called ‘orthopraxy’...”[44] The Torah creates and maintains a separate and unequal spheres for women and men by its divisive strategy of allowing or restricting its full observance. As Phyllis Bird points out, religious law is addressed only to men and only men were required to obey “the whole law”.[45] A study by Jeremias reveals that schools were only meant for boys. A woman was educated merely in household tasks that would enable her to serve man’s needs.[46]

Against this patriarchal background with its portrayal of women as minors, dependent and inferior, Paul’s assertion that “a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom 3:28) is of great significance. The sign of the covenant membership is no more circumcision but faith in Christ Jesus. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul gives us an emotionally charged illustration of his thesis, which throws further light on our discussion.

In the context of the Galatian controversy over the law of circumcision (Gal chs. 1-3), Paul’s emphasis is on justification by faith (Gal 3:24) and not by the law (3:11). The clause “that we might be justified by faith” (*hina ek pisteMs dikaiMthMmen*) expresses the ultimate purpose of the law in its function as disciplinarian (*pайдагогос*, cf. v. 19). The justifying act of God in Christ obliterates the partition erected by the law between Jews and Gentiles, men and women. They have become *one* in Christ; they have “put on Christ,” the underlying reality of Christian existence (3:26-27). Justification (*dikaiosun—*) comes through the faith *of* and *in* Christ, i.e., Jesus’ self-surrender to God and faith of the believer, who joins Jesus in his act of faith (cf. Rom 6:1-11). Paul reiterates that in

Christ Jesus “the only thing that counts is faith working through love” and not circumcision or uncircumcision (Gal 5:6).

Because of its liberative thrust, Gal 3:28, especially 28c has aroused ‘feminist consciousness’ among women and men scholars. Considered to be a baptismal formula,[47] v. 28 forms part of the pericope (3:26-29) in which Paul defines the status of the baptised before God: “For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (v.26). There is a thematic link between v. 26 and v. 28d. As a result of our sonship and daughterhood, we are all *one* in Christ Jesus (v. 28d).[48] The parallelism between v.26 and v.28d shows that the phrase “in Christ Jesus” determines the phrase “you are all sons and daughters of God” in v.26 and “you are all one” in v.28d.

Paul’s contention that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but faith working through love (Gal 5:6, 13-15; 1 Cor 7:9) is of utmost importance, especially for women whose covenant partnership was realised only through the circumcised male. By his emphatic statement that baptism provides all that circumcision offers in order to enter into a covenant relationship with God (cf. Gen 17:1-27; Ex 4:24-26), Paul introduces a revolutionary idea.

Having been baptised into Christ, both woman and man become a new creation (Gal 6:15). A person’s state before her/his call makes no difference since the circumcised and the uncircumcised are justified by faith. God is the God of all (Rom 3:29); Christ is all in all (Col 3:11). Therefore, the woman enters into the covenant relation of God’s people through her own faith and baptism; she is a full-fledged member of God’s family. Paul’s statement in Gal 3:29 “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” is applicable also to the woman.

Within the overall scheme of Galatians, Paul’s proclamation of the overcoming of the male-female division reflects the optimism of the early Christians that in their community the new age had dawned. They have entered into a world of new relationships based on faith and baptism common to all. The significance attached to ethnic, legal and sexual status has been dissolved in the “all-embracing corporate existence in Christ.”[49] The formula “no male and female” (Gal

3:28c in the neuter) does not mean abolition of sex differences in the biological sense. It points to the quality of the “new creation in Christ” (Gal 5:6; Col 3:10). It is also an assertion of the fact that both woman and man are created in God’s image and likeness and are entrusted with a common mission (Gen 1:26-28).

In our Indian situation with its deplorable caste system and sex-gender stereotypes and atrocities against women, Paul’s egalitarian vision paves the way for the creation of a society built on the principles of human dignity, love and forgiveness, justice and peace, equality and liberty, partnership and participatory decision-making. The male-female relationship which has become one of subordination and domination can no longer be maintained in Christ.

Although the teaching Church has long upheld, in principle, the biblical revelation enshrined in Gal 3: 26-29, the Church’s practice contradicts its belief. In spite of its pronouncements on equality and co-responsibility in its official documents,[50] for all practical purposes the Church still remains a hierarchically structured institution firmly established on the rock of patriarchy. It perpetuates gender discrimination through its androcentric theology, biblical interpretation and an all-male Church leadership.[51] It must now recapture the original vision of Jesus and move towards the establishment of the Messianic community of what Schussler Fiorenza terms “discipleship of equals.”[52]

The fact that women and men are equal sharers of a common human nature signifies equality of rights, mutual respect of each other’s personhood, a common vocation to image God and to take on responsibility for the rest of creation so that all may attain the fulfilment willed by the Creator. Going a step further, as believers in Christ we ought to affirm the fact that having “put on Christ” and become “one” with him through baptism, women and men are equal in grace, despite their God-given biological differences. A radical following of Jesus, the Liberator/Saviour, entails individual and collective criticism with a view to exploring possibilities to overcome the social, cultural and religious hurdles standing in the way of discipleship of equals.

## **2. Justification by Faith and Religious Pluralism**

In my search for an apt beginning of this section, I found the questions formulated by Pathrapankal relevant and loaded with theological insights.

- How are we to understand the role and significance of Jesus Christ in the context of the recognition of other religions also as ways of salvation?
- Is Jesus Christ one among those who are called saviours?
- Is he one who is superior to all others? Or is Jesus Christ unique in such a way that all are saved only through him?[53]

In their attempt to develop a relevant Christology in a religiously pluralistic world, theologians of both the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches have introduced new terms such as *exclusivism*, *inclusivism* and *pluralism*.[54] It is beyond the scope of this section to engage in a discussion about the merits and demerits of these terms. The paper will limit itself to highlighting some key issues for today.

### **The Universal Thrust of Jesus' Teaching**

Because of our faith in Jesus and commitment to his mission, Jesus of Nazareth remains the model and inspiration for theological discourse. Despite his Jewish upbringing, Jesus tried to transcend the narrow boundaries of Judaism. That he refused to be a conformist is beyond doubt (see Mk 2:23-26; 3:1-6; Lk 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Jn chs. 5 & 6). He proclaimed the good news of liberation to all (Lk 4:18-21) irrespective of social and religious status. Poor and rich, women and men, sinners and saints, Jews and Gentiles – all received a warm welcome in his kingdom.

The basic content of Jesus' mission was the inauguration of Kingdom (Reign) of God, characterised by God's motherly and fatherly love and care for all people and the whole creation. Commenting on the content of Jesus' preaching and the frequent occurrences of the expression 'Kingdom of God' in the Gospels, Pathrapankal says, "The Kingdom of God meant not a territory but rather a situation, a state and quality of being..."[55]

Although the original message of Jesus was theocentric, in the latter part of the Gospels we see Jesus demanding commitment to and confession of his unique identity (Mt 10:32-33).[56] Thus the focus is shifted to the person of Jesus. Knitter observes: "If the original message of Jesus was theocentric, the pervasive message of the New Testament is undeniably Christocentric..., the original message of Jesus was transformed, not lost." [57]

This Christocentrism of the early Church is revealed in 1 Jn 1:1-4; Jn 1:1-18; 14:6; Acts 4:12 and other passages in the New Testament. In Part I of this paper we noted the radicality with which Paul explains the unique role of Jesus as Saviour of the Jews and the Gentiles, men and women alike. Leaving aside all theological debates on the universal significance of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5), we shall try to respond briefly to issues related to the salvific role of Jesus in our multi-religious context.

How do we interpret Paul's concept of justification through faith in Jesus in our specific situation of religious pluralism? Should our faith-claims about the crucified and risen Christ make us exclusive and aggressive? What does it mean to be a Christian today?

Paul's statements on the uniqueness of Jesus in God's plan of salvation have to be understood in the context of his Damascus encounter and apostolic experiences in different churches. Having realised the futility of the Torah to make him justified before God, Paul focused on the righteousness of God effective through faith in Jesus Christ. Legrand expresses it succinctly: "Justification by faith and not by the works of the Law was thus implicitly contained in the Damascus vision and the manner in which it subverted Saul's religious outlook. Now was the time when the new Covenant was fulfilled, covenant written in the hearts (Jer 32:31-34; 32:40; Ez 37:26), and universally opened to all peoples" (Zech 2:15; Is 19:19-25).[58]

As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul's approach to people of other faiths in today's society would have to be distinguished by reverence and cordiality. He would emphasise that "God shows no partiality" (Rom 2:11) and that "God will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and uncircumcised through that same faith" (Rom 3:29-30). Paul's Christ-centredness would enable him realise the irrelevance

of an aggressive mission amid religious pluralism. Presumably he would accept the paradigm shift proposed by the ITA scholars: "Christians must proclaim a Jesus: a) who is not a threat to the religions of India; b) who is related to the other ways of salvation present in India not as their fulfillment but as offering them service (kenotic Christ)...; f) who is present through his Spirit in the whole of creation." [59]

## Challenges and Tasks Ahead

Religious pluralism being a fact of history, religious belongingness should not be an obstacle to harmonious living and interfaith partnership. One can discover expressions of pluralism in Biblical texts.[60] Describing religion as "a divine-human relationship," Amaladoss accentuates the need for learning from other religions: "...what I am suggesting is that each religion, while believing in its specificity and uniqueness, can - and does – accept the legitimacy of other religions as facilitating divine-human encounter. Each religion will explain this in accordance with its own faith-vision." [61] Critiquing the people who brand pluralistic approach as "relativization strategy," Pathrapankal stresses: "It is to be forcefully maintained that when we speak of a pluralistic approach, it is not a relativization of one's own faith in Christ that is proposed, but rather an objective approach to the reality of religions in God's plan of salvation." [62]

In the present socio-economic, religio-cultural and political context of India, Christians should be encouraged to work with all people of good will in furthering the Reign of God. Theologians have a great responsibility to educate the laity about the teachings of Vatican II that express openness to the riches of other religions and cultures (*Gaudium et Spes* 86, 59; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37; *Ad Gentes* 11) and recognise that they contain the seeds of the Word (*Ad Gentes* 11; *Lumen Gentium* 17). Soares-Prabhu has pointed out that the aggressive mission of the colonial period and mission exclusively understood as "Church growth" based on the great commission (Mt 28:16-20) has to be balanced and corrected by mission as witness based on the text of Matthew 5:13-16.[63]

Dialogue with people of other religions provides a platform to learn from one another's religious traditions and values, combining deep commitment to one's faith and openness to others' experience. Genuine dialogue presupposes equality, freedom and mutual respect. It fosters communication and makes each other's faith intelligible. In the process we learn to respect diversity, recognise unity and celebrate the presence of the Spirit in all religions. As Samartha says, "faith cannot be imposed from outside; it emerges out of a long experience."<sup>[64]</sup>

The negative role of religions as witnessed in contemporary India does not negate the positive role religions can play in building a better nation and a better world. Examples abound in this regard,<sup>[65]</sup> including my own experience in interreligious ministry. There are liberative streams or prophetic voices in every religion. There are ample opportunities for networking with all people of good will. What is important is the quality of our involvement, the humility to work *with* and not merely *for* people. "Involvement in the struggles of people has to become the source of theology and liturgy; a faith commitment born of this will lead to a spirituality ..., of solidarity with and liberation of the poor and the oppressed."<sup>[66]</sup>

## Conclusion

In the course of our study on Paul and Justification, undertaken in the socio-cultural and religious context of India, we have made a modest attempt to explore the meaning of justification/righteousness and related terms, and underscored their theological impact and implications. The doctrine of justification by faith "removes all grounds of human boasting and human hubris, as both justification and sanctification are God's gift."<sup>[67]</sup> The fundamental thrust of Romans is that God's salvation is offered to all (3:29) and "Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith..." (1:16). In other words, "the contents of Romans are a development of the theme of God's righteousness."<sup>[68]</sup>

Having established that it is faith *of* and faith *in* Jesus that makes us righteous, we dealt with the significance of justification by faith for women. Reflecting from a feminist perspective, we have affirmed that in Christ Jesus we are all daughters and sons of God through

faith. Because **all** are made **one** in Christ, and have equal status before God, discrimination of any sort is incompatible with the Christian spirit. It goes against the plan of God to liberate and unite all people in Christ. It also obstructs our mission of inter-faith partnership in furthering the Reign of God.

On the issue of justification and religious pluralism, we have highlighted the need for cultivating healthy attitudes towards followers of other religions (*Nostra Aetate* 2) and fostering interreligious partnership. Every Christian is called to emulate the example of Jesus, who abolished distinctions on the basis of ethnic (Jew & Greek), legal (slave & free), and sexual (male & female) status. The Church's proclamation of the uniqueness of Jesus should not be to the exclusion of other manifestations of the divine. On the contrary, it must challenge us to follow the path of Jesus, who acknowledged and appreciated the faith found in others (Mt 8:10-12; 15:28; Lk 10:25-37; 17:17-18; Mk 9:38; Jn 4).

Thus moving away from the legalistic and fundamentalist notion of justification, the fact of being saved by the faith *of* and *in* Christ (Rom 3:21-26) enables us to live humbly (example of Abraham) before God in a spirit of gratitude to God's gracious gift. It urges us to move towards the realisation of Paul's egalitarian vision (Gal 3:26-29). Our identity as human beings created in God's image and likeness and our 'oneness' in Christ shall not to be obscured by divisive forces. Our personal experience of the justifying act of God manifested in Jesus' love and poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) empowers us to be committed to the liberative mission of Jesus in today's Church and Society.

## Notes

- [1] In his introduction to the Letter of Paul to the Romans, Joseph Pathrapankal has reviewed the scholars from Patristic period till the last century. See *The New Community Bible* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2008), p. 2012. See also Reginald White, *Meet St. Paul* (London: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1989).
- [2] See Francis Gonsalves, "Listen to the Spirit: Paul Crucified with Christ – Paul's Master Motif," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 72/3 , March 2008, p. 217.
- [3] Kurien Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity – Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005, p. 11.

- [4] Leslie J. Almeida, "The Indian Church and the Invincible Virus of Casteism," in Sebasti L. Raj and G.F. Xavier Raj, eds., *Caste Culture in Indian Church*, New Delhi: ISI, 1993, p. 31.
- [5] Ravi Tiwari, "Women in Manu," in Prasanna Kumri, ed., *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis*, Chennai: Gurukul L.T.C. & Research Centre, 1999, p. 132.
- [6] Vera Agustus, "Women in Indian Society," in Prasanna Kumari, ed., *Feminist Theology*, p. 41. See also Felix Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope – At the Dawn of the Millennium*, Delhi; ISPCK, 2000, pp. 145-177.
- [7] Sebastian Kizhakkeyil, *The Pauline Epistles: An Exegetical Study*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2006, p 159.
- [8] Otto Kuss as cited in M. Thekkakara, *The Face of Early Christianity – A Study of the Pauline Letters*, Bangalore: KJC Publications, 1988, p. 193.
- [9] C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980, pp. 1, 199.
- [10] George T. Montague, *The Living Thought of St. Paul*, Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966, p. 169.
- [11] George Keeranker, "Listen to the Spirit: Paul – Justification by Faith," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 72/7, July 2008, p. 539.
- [12] Bernard Smyth, *Paul: The Man and the Missionary*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980, p. 85.
- [13] Peter F. Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters*, Collegeville: Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1982, p. 200. The author has summarized the objectives of the letter on p. 201.
- [14] C.C. Newman, "Righteousness," in Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1997 p. 1053.
- [15] Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God Christ – The Mind and Heart of St Paul*, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1991, p. 84.
- [16] Peter F. Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters*, p. 208.
- [17] Joseph Pathrapankal, *Christian Life – New Testament Perspectives*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1982, p. 37. The word *dharma* could be an appropriate Indian term for the biblical word righteousness. Dating back to the Indo-European root *dher* (*dhar*) (= to support, to hold fast), *dharma* with its diverse meanings and rich nuances can be described as righteousness, justice, religious observance, order, sense of duty, etc. For more information on the various aspects of *dharma*, see pp. 20-21, 42-48.
- [18] Ibid.
- [19] G Schrenk as cited by Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God Christ*, p. 85.

- [20] Xavier Leon-Dufour, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969, p.309.
- [21] Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God*, p. 85.
- [22] See "Workshop Report," in *What Does Jesus Christ Mean? – The Meaningfulness of Jesus Christ amid Religious Pluralism in India*, Errol D'Lima & Max Gonsalves, (eds.), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001, p. 162.
- [23] Ibid., pp. 163-164.
- [24] Pheme Perkins, *New Testament Introduction*, Bombay: St Paul Publication, 1992, p. 210.
- [25] See Marion L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul: An Introduction to His Writings and Teaching*, New York: Paulist Press, 1987, p. 170. I have paraphrased these points. See also 2 Cor 5: 11-21 and Phil 3: 2-11.
- [26] Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology – Exploring Diversity and Unity*, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007, p. 170.
- [27] Ibid., p. 171.
- [28] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Ab 33; New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 106.
- [29] Fitzmyer as cited by George Keerankeri, "Listen to the Spirit...", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol.72/7, July 2008, p. 538.
- [30] Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology*, p. 181. Although Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were purchased at a price, neither in 1 Cor nor here does he develop the image further, as if a price were paid to the devil in order to release humanity.
- [31] G.T. Montague, *The Living Thought of St. Paul*, p. 169.
- [32] Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ*, p. 88.
- [33] Frank Matera, *New Testament Theology*, p. 181. See also William Barclay's analysis of the word *hilasterion*, *The Mind of St. Paul*, Glasgow: Collins, 1981, pp. 65-68.
- [34] F. Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ*, p. 93. Cf. Frank Matera, pp. 181-182.
- [35] G.T. Montague, *The Living Thought of St. Paul*, p. 171.
- [36] K. Pathil, "Historical Divisions in the Church: A Fresh Look at Old Issues," *Jeevadharma*, Vol. XXX VIII, No. 226, July 2008, pp. 285-287; George Keerankeri, "Listen to the Spirit: Paul. Justification by Faith," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 72/7, July 2008, pp. 544-545.
- [37] Quoted in H. Kung, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, New York: T. Nelson, 1964, p. 284; see also pp. 282-284.
- [38] Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ*, p. 96. For further discussion on faith of Christ and faith in Christ see also pp. 96-98.
- [39] Frank Matera, *New Testament Theology*, p. 187.
- [40] William Barclay, *The Mind of St. Paul*, p. 105. See also pp. 101-116.
- [41] Tatha Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women – Reframing Galatians*, New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2005, p. 81.
- [42] Ibid.

- [43] Ravi Tiwari "Women in Manu" in *Feminist Theology*, Prasanna Kumari, (ed.), , pp. 114 – 134.
- [44] E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63BCE-66 CE*, Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1992, p. 191. On the law and its observance, see pp. 51-57.
- [45] T. Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women*, p. 152.
- [46] J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, translated by F. H. & C. H. Cave, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969, pp. 374, 384. See also J. C. Pallares, *A Poor Man Called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark*, Indore: Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, 1986, p. 54.
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## **Paul and Baptism: Paul's Understanding of Baptism and its Relevance for us in India Today**

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

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

### **I. Introduction**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Paul and Baptism**

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

### **Baptism and Sonship**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Incorporation into the Community**

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

## **Washed in Christ**

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

## **Putting on Christ**

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

## **Paul and the Trinitarian Nature of Baptism**

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

### **Baptismal Formula**

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

### **Incorporation: in Prepositional Phrases and in "the Body of Christ"**

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

#### **(a) Prepositional Phrases**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **III. Origins of Christian Baptism**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 1. The Radical Newness Given by Baptism

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

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

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

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

As Gispert-Sauch further explains:

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

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

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

Thus as Gispert-Sauch emphasizes:

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

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

## 2. Baptism as the Provider of Equality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Present Actuality of Baptism in the Indian Church

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Eucharist in Paul: Table-Fellowship with Charity

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*Abstract:* In this article the author explores the Eucharist theology Paul in terms of radical fellowship and unconditional charity. He presents Paul's views on Eucharistic celebration as reflected in 1 Cor 11/17-34 and calls attention to some salient aspects of the Eucharist celebrated in the community, especially in Indian conditions.

*Keywords:* Eucharist, Eucharist as celebration, Eucharist as meal, Indian context, Liturgical movement, Vatican II.

### Introduction

The Synod on the Eucharist in October 2005 brought the year of the Eucharist to an end. During that year, the faithful were exhorted to cultivate a deeper devotion to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In many dioceses Eucharistic rallies were held and efforts were made to have short refresher courses so that people could come to a better understanding of the Eucharist. The cult of the Eucharist outside mass was given prominence. Holy hours and visits to chapels or churches where the Blessed Sacrament was preserved were encouraged.

Already in 2003, Pope John Paul II had written his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* whose purpose was to rekindle Eucharistic "amazement" (no. 6). At the same time, the encyclical mentioned certain shadows that had come about with regard to the Eucharist. (no. 10) These shadows included (a) abandoning the practice of Eucharistic adoration in some places; (b) stripping the Eucharist of its sacrificial character and reducing it to a mere fraternal meal, (c)

obscuring of the necessity of a ministerial priest and viewing the Eucharist as a mere form of proclamation, and finally, (e) engaging in ecumenical initiatives that were contrary to the discipline of the Church in matters of faith. In no. 52, and with pointed reference to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians 11/17-34, the pope called "for a renewed awareness and appreciation of liturgical norms as a reflection of, and a witness to, the one universal Church made present in every celebration of the Eucharist." He asked "the competent offices of the Roman Curia to prepare a more specific document, including prescriptions of a juridical nature, on this very important subject."

In 2004, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments published *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), an Instruction on certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist. Beginning with a preamble it contains six chapters and a conclusion. The Instruction treats of the Eucharist primarily as Real Presence under the species of bread and wine.<sup>1</sup> Attention is mostly focused on the "substantial presence" of Christ (*situs Christus*) in the species, the ritual observances that should be kept in mind when celebrating the Eucharist and the specific function of the ministerial priest (*in persona Christi*). The active participation of the Eucharistic community in the Eucharistic celebration as indicated by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* nos. 7 and 11 is touched on cursorily.

In this paper, it is my intention to present Paul's views on Eucharistic celebration as reflected in 1 Cor 11/17-34 and to call attention to some salient aspects of the Eucharist celebrated in the community, especially in Indian conditions.

## **Part One: Eucharistic Celebration in Paul, 1 Cor 11/ 17-34**

Paul refers to the Eucharist as the Lord's Supper (20); hence one must first address the aspects present in a meal. To exist, living organisms need nutrients found in food. Their survival depends on food that is ingested and assimilated. Animals, birds and fish are examples of organisms for whom to live is to exist. With human persons more is required. Since human beings are also organisms,

they also require food to exist. However, for a human being to live is not only to exist but also to relate. Such relationship brings about a greater sense of humanization and therefore a greater sense of bonding, caring and loving. Through the process of sharing a meal, human persons build up relationship in a deeper way. Unlike mere animal organisms for which living is merely existing, for human beings to live is both to exist and to relate, and to relate is to love!

As a sacramental sign, the Eucharist begins by being a meal that brings persons together, unites them into a community and enables them to identify more completely with God-incarnate, Jesus Christ. Participation is not confined to being merely present. Participation implies a free act of the human person that engages him/her in a community. The meal that Paul describes presupposes such engagement. It has Passover moorings and is referred to by Paul in 1 Cor.<sup>2</sup> In chapter 8, Paul has something to say about food and in chapter 10 after cautioning his audience against building up false security because they frequent the Eucharist, he pronounces on two meal-situations and their meaningfulness. Chapter 11 deals specifically with the Eucharist that Paul calls the “Lord’s Supper”.

Chapter 8 describes a situation where a Christian who is educated and presumably can think for him/herself, eats food offered to an idol. Such a person knows that “an idol has no real existence” (4) and feels at liberty to partake of meats that he/she knows have been offered to idols. Paul does not find this action as such reprehensible but is concerned that the liberty exercised by such a Christian may “somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” (9) Paul suggests that consideration for one’s neighbour—who may be led to eat meat offered to idols at great cost to his conscience—be the guiding principle of one’s actions. The “knowledge” of one should not contribute to another’s destruction (11). “Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother’s failing, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.” (13) May we not conclude that charity towards one’s neighbour is an overriding principle for Paul?

In chapter 10, Paul begins by reminding his audience to learn lessons from events surrounding the people of Israel on their way to the Promised Land. In spite of being led by Moses and sustained by supernatural food and drink (3), God was not pleased with them; so

too, the fact that one is baptized and nourished by the Eucharist should not make a person over-confident. In the light of the caution, Paul exhorts the faithful to shun idol-worship since when one participates in a pagan meal (of sacrifice) such idol-worship is indicated irrespective of the participant's intention. Even while allowing that the idol is not real, such a meal effectively unites one to those who believe in the sacrifice they offer to demons. (19-20) Paul's conclusion is peremptory: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons." (21) Paul does not inveigh against idols as though he has to prove them insubstantial, but he calls attention to the objective signification—that is socially recognizable when one eats meat offered to an idol—that manifests one's union with demons. Such a manifestation does not build up the community's faith and unity, and to that extent is not an expression of charity.

In vv 23-33, Paul considers a case where a Christian is invited to the house of an unbeliever and partakes of a meal where the meat provided by the host has been purchased from the market. Midway through the meal, someone—probably a believer who could be scandalized more easily—informs the Christian guest that the meat he is enjoying had been offered in sacrifice. This fact by itself should not prevent the Christian guest from continuing to enjoy the hospitality of his unbelieving host. However, the overriding principle of charity can never be kept aside and Paul asks the Christian to desist from eating that meat: "out of consideration for the man who informed you, and for conscience' sake—I mean his conscience, not yours—do not eat it. (vv 28-29) Paul wants all eating and drinking to be done to the glory of God (v 31) and this is seen to happen when offence is avoided to Jew, Greek and members of the Christian community. (32) He believes that in seeking to bring advantage to the other, he is imitating Christ. Here too, charity towards one's neighbour counts above all.

In chapter 11, Paul first has something to say about the ways (traditions) of worship practised in the Corinthian community (vv 2-16). In verses 17-34, Paul outlines the doctrine of the Eucharist. The seeming togetherness of the members of the community is a

matter of concern because factionalism prevails among the different members and gives the lie to Christian egalitarianism and Eucharistic unity. In fact, Paul bluntly tells his audience: "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat." (20) The Eucharistic action begins with the community of faith that wishes to express its unity in Christ. In this celebration, however, the members' dispositions do not accord with those of a community that practises charity.

A plausible presumption is that an agape preceded the celebration of the Eucharist proper. During the agape in question, rank selfishness was practised since one group was concerned to feed only itself and even get drunk while another was left hungry. Such lack of charity towards one's neighbour could hardly be an acceptable context for Eucharistic celebration. Persons, who want to eat and drink with others of the same social standing—class-wise or financially—should do so in their own houses. Such persons merit the following reprimand from Paul: "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not." (22)

The sacredness of the Eucharistic moment comes about because the sharing of the bread and cup is in remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Do this in remembrance of me" (24) and "Do this, as often as you drink it [the new covenant in my blood], in remembrance of me" (25). Paul informs his readers that this Eucharistic cultic tradition has been "received from the Lord" (23) and in following it the community proclaims "the Lord's death until he comes" (26). If there is no true sharing, i.e. if there is no charity shown to all who are present at the Eucharistic gathering, there is no real love and unity symbolized in the Eucharistic action. Disrespect shown to the neighbour who is participating in the Eucharist is disrespect to the presence of Christ: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." (27)

Is "the body" here [v 29] the same as "The body of the Lord" in verse 27, and therefore is this another admonition to distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary food? Or does "the body"

here mean the community of the faithful? The latter interpretation is to be preferred in the context of the Corinthian Eucharist. Paul is emphasizing both reverence for the eucharistic body and blood and what they mean, and reverence for the community as a necessary consequence. This interpretation is also urged by the composition of the letter, which in the following chapter (12:12-27) turns to a lengthy discourse on the Christian community as the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

One must examine his/her attitude to the neighbour if one is to partake of the Eucharistic meal, for lack of charity shown in excluding others from one's own class of companions will bring judgment on oneself. (29) Paul concludes with the following directive:

So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if any one is hungry, let him eat at home—lest you come together to be condemned. (34)

Paul has no problem with a person who eats because he/she is hungry or needs to party with those of the same social standing. But this should be done within the confines of a person's home and not in the context of a Eucharistic gathering.<sup>4</sup> Sharing and concern for the other are meant to witness to charity for all. This ensures that the sacredness of the Eucharistic remembrance is preserved.

The Eucharistic remembrance concerns not only the species but also the community as a whole—the *Totus Christus*—as was understood by Augustine. For Augustine, sacramentality of the Eucharist was not confined to the Eucharistic species alone but to the whole community that was celebrating the Eucharist. This would imply that just as the Eucharistic species symbolized Christ really present, the actions of the community as a whole along with the word of God would also be symbolizing the presence of Christ. It was much later that the real presence of Christ was predicated with pointed reference to the sacred bread and cup alone.

When pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* no. 10 hopes that his encyclical letter “will effectively help to banish the dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice, so that the Eucharist will continue to shine forth in all its radiant mystery” was he restricting himself to the Eucharist to a cultic celebration alone?

Yet, the testamentary aspect of the Eucharist must not be forgotten. For both the testamentary and the cultic are to be found in 1 Cor 11/17-34. On the one hand there is the witness to Christian charity that the participants in the Eucharist must manifest, and on the other, the cultic ritual expressed in vv 26-29 must also be accepted as the authentic tradition of the Lord's Supper.

The following propositions summarize the main aspects of Eucharistic celebration in Paul:

1. For Paul, the Eucharistic celebration originates in and takes place in an atmosphere of charity that is manifested in the sharing of a meal. The dynamics of a meal celebrated by persons is the first level of signification—in the words of Paul Ricoeur—and the second level of signification (the Eucharistic celebration) can be understood through the first.<sup>5</sup>

2. Concerns about the authentic form of Eucharistic celebration devolve primarily around the community that gathers to celebrate it. Paul's vision of the Risen Christ present in the Eucharist begins with persons of faith who come to celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is at the start of the celebration that the presence of Christ begins to manifest itself—a notion that that Eastern Church reflects in its liturgy.<sup>6</sup>

3. The tradition of the Eucharist that Paul refers to in chapter 11/26-29 can be seen as a description of what is consumed *de facto* at the meal. It is a moot point if Paul wants to affirm the tradition of using bread and wine as non-negotiable elements in the Eucharistic meal. Of course, the widely followed practice of using bread and wine in the mass may suggest more than a mere disciplinary measure adopted by the different churches.

4. When Paul speaks about the “body” that is profaned, he could be referring to either the scandal caused by neglecting one's neighbour in a Eucharistic assembly or the dishonour shown to the Lord present under the species of bread and wine, or both.

In the second part, our attention will be focused on those aspects or factors that contribute to authentic Eucharistic celebration.

## **Part Two: Some Salient Aspects of Community Celebration of the Eucharist**

When Paul writes to the Corinthians, the sharing of the Eucharistic bread and cup had already been separated from the preceding meal. In time, the meal disappeared altogether—for practical reasons—and the Eucharist in the mass began to take on a liturgical form of its own. For the Fathers of the Church, the Eucharist was seen as the coming together of the faithful to celebrate their unity as the Body of Christ. Celebrating the Eucharist was the most suitable expression of such unity. One could also say that the starting point for Eucharistic celebration was the coming together of the faithful to share a meal: the Lord's Supper. However, in a meal the food eaten is not the only thing that matters. The persons present must share a way of life—the values lived and proclaimed by Jesus—in common before they can partake of the meal; they must care for each other, be reconciled to each other and support each other in living out the way of life shown by Jesus.

In 1 Cor the presence of Christ in the celebrating community of faith was not in question; neither was there a doctrine of the Real Presence as in the age of the scholastics. For Paul, the real denial of the Eucharist occurred because a person's disposition towards his/her neighbour did not reflect Christian charity.

Gradually, through a process that seems lost in the mists of history, we observe that the sacramental presence of the Eucharist in the mass was focused on the bread and wine in the meal that symbolized the presence of Christ. The historical foundation for such an understanding already existed and was given its authentic expression in Justin Martyr's description of Eucharistic celebration and the taking of the Eucharist to those who could not be present at the celebration.<sup>7</sup> Such a focus gave rise to many consequences not all of which were helpful in developing a holistic understanding of the Eucharist. One of the first consequences was Reductionism in Eucharistic celebration.

The word 'Reductionism' indicates a process in which what was complete or whole is now no longer so. A part remains of the whole yet the part is considered an adequate substitute for the whole. The

danger of reductionism lies in forgetting or disregarding those aspects of the whole that are essential for assessing the meaningfulness of the whole. Religion may have its scriptures (*norma normans non normata*), its liturgies and its priesthood (clergy) but it will be the community that identifies the true function of religion because of its organic nature. Reductionism tries to make out that one or other aspect in religion can substitute for the whole of religious experience.

## **1. The Celebrating Community is reduced to the Ordained Minister**

The collapsing of different functions and roles in Eucharistic celebration into one person, the ordained minister, must be viewed against a background of other factors. In the Latin Church, the emergence of clericalism, Greek and later Latin being used as the language of the liturgy, the study and development of sacramental causality and the aura of sacredness surrounding the gestures and objects used in Eucharistic worship contributed to an exaggerated importance being given to the ordained minister.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, two monks tried to explain how Christ was present in the Eucharist. Their question was not: Is Christ present in the Eucharist but how is Christ present? Paschasius Radbertus (c. 790-865), one of the two monks and later abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Corbie (France), published a treatise *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* (831/833, revised 844) which stressed the literal (physical) understanding of the Eucharistic presence.

The work is the first doctrinal monograph on the Eucharist. In maintaining the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, Radbertus specified it further as the flesh born of Mary, which had suffered on the Cross and risen again, and which is miraculously multiplied by the omnipotence of God at each consecration. At the same time he insisted on the spiritual mode of this Presence, but without defining it. By eating this flesh the faithful are incorporated into Christ's mystical Body, which is the Church.<sup>8</sup>

Ratramnus (d. 868), the other monk, objected to this type of realism espoused by Radbertus. Hence he also wrote a book with the same title and expounded his own views:

Against Paschasius' perhaps exaggerated realism, Ratramnus (thus) proposed a more emphatically sacramental understanding of eucharistic (sic!) and presence. Like Augustine before him, Ratramnus stressed the spiritual nature of eucharistic eating and drinking, actions that appeal to faith and not to any sensate or materialistic perceptions of flesh and blood. He recognized that the sacrament celebrates both the *corpus Christi mysticum* (eucharist) and the *corpus Christi quod est ecclesia* (church).<sup>9</sup>

In the 9th century, the practice of placing the Eucharist on the tongue of a person began. One can also note the practice of anointing the priest's hands from this time on. Communion by intinction—even though synods/councils, e.g. Fourth General Council of Braga (675), Spain spoke against it—became a more general norm in order to express the full integrity of the Eucharist. It is also useful to remember that it was during the Carolingian epoch (Charlemagne's reforms) that blessings (consecration) of vessels and church furnishings began.<sup>10</sup> The blessings and consecration had a laudable purpose in mind but these unwittingly contributed to establishing an area of holiness that was presided over by the ordained minister alone, and gradually importance was placed on the minister and less on the function that was performed. By the end of the 9th century, laypersons were prohibited from bringing communion to the sick. By the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, 'absolute ordination' was allowed. This implied that one did not need to belong to a specific community as a condition for accepting ordination, but one was constituted a priest by the reception of the sacrament of Orders.

The outcome was that the ordained minister, the priest, alone mattered as far as Eucharistic celebration was concerned and a full-blown articulation of this understanding is reflected in the Tridentine doctrine regarding the priest.<sup>11</sup> Of course, the point at issue concerned the minimum that was required for the validity of the mass. The congregation mattered little if at all! For instance, Trent ruled that it was sufficient if the priest alone consumed the consecrated bread and wine if the mass was to be valid. The sacramental character of the priest was primarily linked to his celebrating the Eucharist. Vatican II would change that.

Involvement of the laity enables all to be responsible for what takes place in the Eucharist. Community participation begins with that premise.

## **2. The Overemphasis on the Cult of the Eucharist outside the Mass**

By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, some persons found it difficult to understand how the sacred species represented the presence of Jesus Christ. Closely associated with the Eucharist was the question of priesthood since the Church affirmed that only a validly ordained priest could consecrate the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The traditional explanations about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist were found to be unsatisfactory by some. Berengar of Tours (c. 1010—88) was one of those whose thinking about the Eucharistic presence was found to be objectionable by the prevailing authorities. He did not deny the Real Presence (RP) of Christ in the Eucharist. He distinguished between the RP under the sacramental species of bread and wine and the RP that was brought about by a physical change of the bread and wine into something else. He could not see how the latter took place. But having been condemned at least twice, he retracted and died in communion with the Church. Berengar is noted for his use of the secular disciplines of logic and grammar to express Christian doctrine and opened the way for the later scholastics to follow in his footsteps. The oath that Berengar subscribed to refers to the substantial change of bread and wine “into the true and proper and life-giving body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Refer ND 1501) From that time on, the Eucharistic presence of Christ was perceived in a static way. The stress on the ontological presence—a static understanding—to express the mystery of the Eucharistic presence of Christ accorded well with the cult of the Eucharist outside the mass.

Pope Urban IV (1261-4) instituted the feast of *Corpus Christi*, officially known as *Festum Corporis et Sanguinis Christi* (1264). Celebrated on the free Thursday after Trinity Sunday, this feast epitomizes the cult of the Eucharist outside the mass for the universal church. In its efforts to affirm the substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species, the Latin Church fostered devotions around

the Eucharist outside the mass. One finds stress on visits to and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Hours, processions with the Eucharist, etc. Much scope was offered for private and individual devotion but the Eucharistic liturgy in the mass remained priest-centred and the lay congregation was relegated almost totally to the position of spectators. One went to mass not primarily to participate in the liturgy but to "receive" the real and substantial presence of Christ. The importance of the coming together of the community and the celebration of the mass proper lost out to the new cult of the Eucharist outside the mass proper.

### 3. Eucharistic Practice after the Reforms of Vatican II

*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and, later, RS noted areas of concern in the practice of Eucharistic devotion. RS put out by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments drew up a long list of "certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist." These matters are regulatory in character and pertain to the "correct" liturgical practice with regard to the Eucharist. But then, what is "correct" liturgical practice? Is it meant to be liturgical usage that is laid down by authorities in Rome? Should it not be rather the practices examined, formulated and articulated by the local church with the intention of doing what the Church intends when the Eucharist is celebrated?

It was due to the Liturgical Movement, the holding of a Liturgical Congress in Malines, the encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947) and finally *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of Vatican II that people's participation in Eucharistic celebration was again revived. The liturgical celebration of the Eucharist was given its proper place and the cult of the Eucharist outside the mass was placed in its proper perspective. In the Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (1967) published by the Congregation of Rites, the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration is recognized not only in the species but also in the assembly of the faithful gathered for the Eucharist, the word proclaimed and the officiating minister (ND 1585). The Instruction stressed the close connection between the mass and the cult of the Eucharist outside mass (ND 1586, 1587). RS is focused on the

actions and ceremonies pertaining to the cultic celebration of the Eucharist and seems to be a throwback to pre-Vatican II times when rubrical exactitude substituted for community participation! Little attention is paid to the need of inculcation, adaptation and creativity in Eucharistic celebration.

Many of the reasons for the prohibitions laid down by RS to counter “abuses” are not apparent, e.g. pouring consecrated wine from the main chalice into other chalices at the time of communion. All are reminded that they have the right to appeal to the higher authority, even the Holy See, if liturgical abuse takes place, as if this right did not apply to other areas as well!<sup>12</sup>

In the year 2008, blanket permission was given by Rome for the celebration of the Latin Mass throughout the world. This was done unilaterally and its application is worldwide. This celebration of the Latin Mass is in addition to the revised mass that was promulgated after Vatican II by pope Paul VI. It is not clear how the Latin Mass coexisting with the Vatican II reformed mass suitably expresses the unity of the Church as a community of love. Was it done to encourage the Lefevrists to come back into the fold? That has not happened. One also wonders at the recently adopted practice, at papal masses, of people having to kneel down to receive the Eucharist on the tongue. Is it meant to signal to the world that the preferred way to receive the Eucharist is that which is observed at papal masses? Would this have been the main concern of Paul when he was unable to recognize the Eucharistic Meal among his Corinthian believers?

#### **4. Eucharistic Observance in India**

The Vatican II document on Priestly Formation, *Optatam Totius*, in the very first number asks that “each nation or rite should have its own *Programme of Priestly Training*.” This was a directive that went almost counter to the mentality that prevailed in the Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. If, however, the Eucharistic ministry everywhere was meant to reflect the Roman rather than the Indian order, there would be little justification for “each nation or rite” to have “its own *Programme of Priestly Training*.” Should not the Eucharistic Meal

express the unity and love of Christ in keeping with a people's habits, customs and their staple diet?

Bread and wine are foreign words for many Christians of Africa and the Far East who do not use them as food and drink. One can legitimately wonder whether it is in accord with Christ's intention to employ signs which in these regions really do not signify anything and if it would not be better to adopt instead some food and beverage in use in the region in question.<sup>13</sup>

The law of the Church sets down what constitutes valid matter for the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the matter concerning wine, the following is said (Can 924, #3): "The wine must be natural wine of the grape and not corrupt." Wine is fermented grape juice and is used universally. However, on June 19, 1995, a circular letter was sent to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. In that letter, the following is stated:

"...the permission to use *mustum* can be granted by ordinaries to priests affected by alcoholism or other conditions which prevent the ingestion of even the smallest quantity of alcohol, after presentation of a medical certificate..."

"...By **mustum** is understood fresh juice from grapes, or juice preserved by suspending its fermentation (by means of freezing or other methods which do not alter its nature.)

It is indeed heartening that the law concerning valid matter is changed to benefit those unable to ingest wine (fermented grape juice), but then one must allow that valid matter in the sacrament pertains to the reality itself—i.e. grape juice whether fermented or not—and not to the priest who drinks it! Would there not be good reason to actively consider the use of fresh grape juice instead of wine in the celebration of the Eucharist? For its sign value, grape juice would be much more suitable in India rather than wine which is classified as alcohol and the associations which go with alcohol?

Would the permission sanctioned by Cardinal Ratzinger for alcoholic priests not suggest that the meal aspect is an overriding consideration in the celebration of the Eucharist? The matter used

is at the service of the Eucharistic Meal, not the other way around. The meal is linked to the community and the Eucharist is the paradigm of Christian unity and love. This was precisely what Paul found missing in the Corinthian situation and hence could not recognize their celebration as Eucharistic.

## Notes

1. RS no. 172 describes *graviora delicta* and no. 173 grave matters. Among the grave matters (i.e. abuses) is “the pouring of the Blood of Christ after the consecration from one vessel to another” (no. 106). Going through the list of abuses, one is struck by the fact that abuses refer to the modes of Eucharistic ritual celebration and not to the expression of the community’s Eucharistic faith! Further, there is an overwhelming emphasis on the specific roles to be carried out by the ministerial priest with insufficient attention to the community’s participation. In addition, there is little awareness of context, inculturated forms of liturgy and celebration.
2. In the body of the letter (1/10-16/18) Paul deals with divisions in the Corinthians community because of different factions, with problems caused by the behaviour of members in the community, with questions put to him for a solution, with charisms and prophecy, with explaining the importance of Christ’s resurrection for the Christian, and finally with collections of money made and Paul’s own travel plans. (See Raymond Brown: An Introduction to the New Testament, Doubleday, New York 1997, p 512.)
3. Jerome Kodell: *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988, p 81.
4. Gerd Theissen: *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Essays on Corinth (edited and translated and with an Introduction by John H. Schutz), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982, p 164: “Within their own four walls they [wealthier Christians] are to behave according to the norms of their social class, while at the Lord’s Supper the norms of the congregation have absolute priority.”
5. Paul Ricoeur: *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Essays in Hermeneutics, edited by Don Ihde, Evanston: North-Western University Press, 1974, pp 12-13.
6. For the Easterners, the Real Presence of Christ is effected not at the time of the consecration prayer but from the beginning of the Eucharis-

- tic celebration where the liturgical signs are patterned to mediate the presence of the Risen Lord.
7. Justin Martyr (c. 100/110-c.165) FIRST APOLOGY, 129: "...when our prayer is ended, bread is brought forward along with wine and water, and the president likewise gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people call out their assent, saying *Amen*. Then there is distribution to each and the participation in the Eucharistic elements, which are also sent with the deacons to those who are absent." Refer William A. Jurgens (editor): *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Volume One, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1984, 129 on p 56.
  8. F. L Cross and E. A. Livingstone (editors): *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, reprinted (with corrections) 1997, p 1227)
  9. Nathan Mitchell: *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982, pp 85-86.
  10. Charlemagne (c. 742-814), 'Charles the Great , first Emperor (from 800) of what was later to be called the 'Holy Roman Empire'.
  11. J. Neuner & J. Dupuis (editors): *The Christian Faith* in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 7th revised and enlarged edition, 2004, ND 1707.
  12. Canon 1417, #1: "In virtue of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, anyone of the faithful is free to bring to or introduce before the Holy See a case either contentious or penal in any grade of judgment and at any stage of litigation.
  13. Philippe Rouillard, "From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist," in R. Kevin Seasoltz: *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, Readings on the Eucharist, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982, p 132.

## **Paul and the Church: The Relevance of Paul's Ecclesiology in India**

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**Abstract:** In this exploratory article the author deals with the ecclesiology of Paul and its relevance for India. Today we are witnessing in our country a scenario where basically two kinds of politics are at play: the politics of division and the politics of unity. The former is by far the more popular even in this age of growing hate and terror campaigns spreading in many parts of the country. The politics of division seeks to form small configurations of caste, language and religion, the better to appeal to particularist identities for vested interests. Aggressive claims of dominant castes and disastrous conflicts resulting from cultural and religious differences are fomenting worldviews of exclusivism and distrust, with transcendent values giving way to pragmatic ones. There is also a new social configuration emerging, due to large-scale migration, unprecedented xenophobia, fundamentalism and terrorism.

In this context, the author opined that an examination of Paul's understanding of *Ekklesia*, of the local ecclesiologies that he developed and his theology of 'communio' will offer significant insights for questions on identity, unity and a relevant way of being church today in pluralistic India.

**Keywords:** *Ekklesia*, theology of 'communio,' pluralism, Church of God, Church leadership.

### **Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing an unprecedented invasion of pluralism in every area of life. Post-modern philosophy has consciously withheld the postulate of unity, opting for pluralism in which universal and absolute values and norms simply do not exist.

But what we are witnessing in our country today is a scenario where basically two kinds of politics are at play: the politics of division and the politics of unity. The former is by far the more popular, writes the columnist of *Times of India* (September 28, 2008), Shashi Tharoor in this age of growing hate and terror campaigns spreading in many parts of the country. The politics of division seeks to form small configurations of caste, language and religion, the better to appeal to particularist identities for vested interests. Aggressive claims of dominant castes and disastrous conflicts resulting from cultural and religious differences are fomenting worldviews of exclusivism and distrust, with transcendent values giving way to pragmatic ones. There is also a new social configuration emerging, due to large-scale migration, unprecedented xenophobia, fundamentalism and terrorism.

The politics of division seeking to form configurations of caste, language, rite and ethnicity has also invaded many churches in India. Fresh challenges to the church are advanced by India's complex realities – with its diverse mosaic of peoples and languages, castes and creeds. Such exuberant diversity is often fertile ground to sow the seed of division and conflict. Domineering tendencies of some local churches or groups over others have been cause for undesirable dissonance concerning how the church should essentially be in India.

In a circular sent on 17 August, 2008, the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council has urged Catholics "to eliminate caste-based inequalities so as to help people of low-caste origin and former untouchables fully participate in church life. The bishops want the caste-based seating in churches and separate burial grounds to end, Dalit children to serve Mass and festival processions to enter Dalit localities. The prelates also wish that Dalits should participate and lead in parish councils."<sup>[1]</sup> Concerns such as these need the urgent attention of any theological discourse engaged in constructing a relevant self-understanding of the church in India. In this context, it is a misnomer to speak of one Indian church. What we can perhaps envision is a communion of local churches in India, a communion that will welcome and recognize the distinct identity of each linguistic, ethnic, caste and ritual group, encourage fellowship and mutual support,

and strengthen a coordinated commitment to our prophetic presence in India.

Two thousand years ago, Paul also encountered situations of diversity and dissension in his mission-field. Agitators with similar strategies of the politics of division and unity - "those who unsettle you" (Gal. 5:12), "some who are confusing you" (Gal. 1:7; 5:10) or with differing claims of "I belong to Paul", "I belong to Apollos" (1Cor. 1: 10-12) disturbed the unity of the early Christian communities. In such situations Paul had to address conflicting local issues that threatened communion within and among the churches of his time. An examination of Paul's understanding of *Ekklesia*, of the local ecclesiologies that he developed and his theology of 'communio' will offer significant insights for questions on identity, unity and a relevant way of being church today in pluralistic India.

## **1. Paul's Theology of the Church**

Paul accepted Jewish ideas into his theology when he found that they could be assimilated into a Christian synthesis. The Jewish idea of 'God's people' is basic to Paul's theology of the church. Paul recognized Christians as God's true people, the real heirs of the privileges such as the covenant and promises, their theocratic constitution, their glory and dignity as children of God. Every *kairos* event of the Israelites prefigured the Church of God, the new Israel. In this Church of God the Christ-event unifies all Christians as God's assembly of believers, and embraces the whole body of Christians.

### **1.1. 'Church of God' in Paul's writings: particular and universal**

In Pauline theology, a church is the assembly of Christians, the bringing together in act of the local church. For Paul the local gathering of Christians is the focus of his kerygmatic mission as Christians did not always come together in a full gathering but formed and met in small groups. He frequently uses *ekklesia* for the community in a particular locus, such as Christians gathered in the house churches of Prisca and Aquila (Rom. 16:3), Nympha (Col. 4:15) and that of Philemon (Philem. 2)[2]; in cities where Paul addresses

the church of God at Corinth (1Cor. 1:2; 2:Cor.1:2) and the church of the Thessalonians (1Thes. 1:1; 2Thes. 1:1), and in the wider region of Galatia (Gal. 1:2), Judea (Gal. 1:22) and Asia (1Cor. 16:19; Rev. 1:4, 11). *Ekklesia* may also designate congregations of a common racial and cultural origin, such as ‘the Churches of the Gentiles (Rom 16:4). In all these instances *Ekklesia* refers to a community of believing Christians gathered together in a particular place to praise God and to break Bread and the Word.

The particularity of the church – whether the term is used in the singular or plural – is implied in Paul’s letters.<sup>[3]</sup> This is evident in the phrase *te ouse en korintho* which means the church of the particular place at Corinth (1Cor. 1:2), or when Paul speaks to the Romans of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1). But the attribution ‘local’ in Gal. 1:13f and 1Cor.15:9, where Paul speaks of “persecuting the Church of God” has been questioned, for here he seems to imply the church as a whole. However, the context suggests otherwise. Paul has the community of Jerusalem in mind when he speaks of “surpassing many of his fellow Jews in zeal for his religion” (Gal. 1:14), and later when he explicitly mentions “the Churches of Christ in Judea” which do not recognize him on his return (Gal. 1:22). Similarly, Paul’s reference to Cephas, James and the Twelve, in 1 Cor. 15:5-9 also implies the Jerusalem milieu.<sup>[4]</sup> Two other instances of Paul’s use of the singular ‘Church of God’, in 1Cor 10:32 and 11:17-22 also suggest the context of a particular assembly of Christians involved in abuses with respect to liturgical practices and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper within their local community.

When Paul uses the phrase ‘Churches of God’ in the plural, it takes on a more concrete local nuance. It refers to several assemblies. 1Thes. 2:14, for instance, conveys the idea of local churches of God in Judea, which the Thessalonians are urged to imitate. Its parallel use in 2 Thes. 1:4 that speaks of persecutions and tribulations confronting the Thessalonians also implies that the ‘Churches of God’ are the local communities in Judea (Gal. 1:22). Moreover, in the expression ‘the Churches of Galatia’ (Gal.1:2), Paul indicates that it is possible to find more than one church in a given region, and that some sort of communication existed among them.

The idea of the ‘local church’ is also present when Paul, appealing to tradition, exhorts the women assembled at public worship to keep their heads covered since “we have no such custom (of uncovered heads) nor have the Churches of God” (1Cor. 11:16), and to keep silence “as do all the Churches of the saints” (1Cor. 14:33). Any question on preserving traditions would obviously be referred to the original communities of Palestine.<sup>[5]</sup>

In the above instances Paul appears to read into the expression ‘Church / Churches of God’ that the one church of God comes into being in and through the local churches (see LG 26). However, one cannot overlook the implied universal element of the ‘Church of God’. This is particularly evident in the deutero-Pauline letters where “the Church as a whole, the universal church, not the local church, is in view.”<sup>[6]</sup> Whether it is used in the singular or plural, the expression ‘Church of God’ in Paul’s letters implies both universality and particularity of the church, none having precedence. Any theory that gives priority to either the local or universal church runs the risk of distorting the Pauline understanding of the ‘Church of God’.

An analysis of the term *ekklesia* in Paul’s letters reveals that the understanding of church in Pauline ecclesiology is analogous.<sup>[7]</sup> It suggests a gathering of Christians in a house, city, or a collection of churches in a region or the church as a whole. These churches are the historical evidence of the mystery of God in Christ, concretely realized in human communities.

## **2. Paul and Church in the First Century Context**

The Pauline letters offers an overview of various approaches used by him to proclaim the Gospel and to establish Christian communities in different contexts, while responding to their distinct concerns and issues. Rediscovery of the relevance of these churches for our times requires a hermeneutic interpretation of the letters. For productive reading and interpretation, hermeneutics must depend on exegesis. It is not possible to arrive at the hermeneutic meaning of the texts without an examination of the ‘text meaning’. However, a scientific historical-critical interpretation of selected texts is beyond the scope of this paper. A small attempt is made to relate text meaning with

theological discussions on Paul's ecclesiology since the two are complementary in nature.

I have selected two pertinent situations from the Pauline writings for study of the hermeneutics at work in the proclamation of Christ's message and establishment of churches at Corinth and Galatia because of their relevance for the churches in India.

## **2.1. Church at Corinth: A Polyglot Community[8]**

### **2.1.1. Its complex context**

Strategically located on the Isthmus that linked Achaia to mainland Greece, Corinth could control the land route between north and south as well as the sea route between the East and the West. 'Wealthy Corinth' as the Graeco-Roman city was often called, developed into a flourishing military, commercial and financial centre.[9]

The polyglot Christian community at Corinth included residents of the great city as well as new settlers, mainly freedmen who were formerly slaves from Rome, Greece, Syria, Judea and Egypt (1Cor. 7:20-24). With the huge influx of people from the West and the East, Corinth was a melting pot of Greek religion, philosophy and art, the mystery cults of Egypt and Asia, the Roman cult and culture and the pagan worldview and customs of the Gentile freedmen.[10] The religious spectrum in Corinth was as diverse as the population. The social make-up of the church in Corinth was largely of people of low status (1:26). Besides, as with any other great seaport of the period, Corinth was not without its lurid reputation.

In spite of the unwarranted character of this great metropolis, Paul chose to reincarnate Christianity in Corinth. In this pluralistic setting the Corinthian Christians gradually assumed a new identity based on their own language and ethical guidelines – at times even out of step with orthodox Christian teaching. The Christian message had to penetrate radically to transform their attitudes and way of life to those of Christ.[11]

## **2.1.2. Conflicting State of Affairs**

The members of this young church were faced with problems concerning their Corinthian Christian identity. Paul's letters reveal his personal concern and theological conviction in addressing various issues that affected the identity, integrity and unity of this polyglot Christian community.

Internal factions resulting from a questioning of Paul's leadership (1Cor. 1:11; 4:3, 15; 9:1f), privileged treatment afforded to the affluent at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:18-22), exploitation of the poor to the benefit of the wealthy members of the church (1 Cor. 6:1-8), rejection of the Resurrection (15:12) demanded Paul's urgent attention. Other disputes threatening the integrity of the Corinthian community included immoral practices (5: 1-5; 7:1-40; 6:12-20), the attendance of believers at pagan courts (6:1-6) and pagan feasts (10:11-22), and the eating of food offered to idols (8:1-13; 10:23-30) – none of which went unchallenged by Paul.

The wider social setting of Corinth caused Paul to intervene in divisive issues in the Corinthian community. Status and power, for instance, occupied pride of place in the Graeco-Roman society. A small minority which claimed high status based on worldly wisdom, power and noble birth (1Cor. 1:26) polarized the church of Corinth. This elite minority looked down on others of lowly birth or slave origin, or because of gender or occupation.

Paul had also to deal with other socio-cultural issues such as sacrificial meat, veiling and silencing of women, etc. which continued to discredit the young church. A dispute over market-place sacrificial meat (1Cor 8:10) was the result of a clash between the indigent 'weak' and the affluent 'strong', and the conflicting perceptions held by the two groups on eating habits.<sup>[12]</sup> Paul also strictly prohibited Christians from participating in any meal of an explicitly cultic or idolatrous character (10:1-22). Since it was not the food that destroyed but the idolatry inherent in eating sacrificial food in temples, there was always the risk of converts reverting to idolatry.<sup>[13]</sup>

### **2.1.3. Re-inculturating the Gospel at Corinth**

A city like Corinth could have proved an unsatisfactory milieu for inculturation of the Gospel. However, in spite of the complex and ambiguous social situation, a flourishing church came into being (2 Cor. 3:1). Paul's theological contribution to the local church of Corinth proved an invaluable chapter in the history of the church. He brought the Gospel to bear witness in the marketplace, with the truth of the Gospel tested by the demands and realities of everyday life. Paul evidently did not challenge existing political, economic and social institutions, customs and structures – except when they overtly clashed with Christian belief and conduct.

Since the Corinthians were tending towards positions that could threaten the unity of the church and the integrity of the Gospel itself, Paul had to convince them to change both their theology and conduct. His response to various issues that emerged was mostly in terms of advising or correcting the people with ethical warnings and imperatives, always with the addition of a theological justification.<sup>[14]</sup> He places his theological thinking within a Christological and eschatological framework – focusing on the Christ-event, his death and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:1-6; 7:29-31; 10:11).

For instance, concerning the question of veiling of women (1Cor. 11:2-16), traditionally exegetes have conjectured that Paul insisted on maintaining the subordinate role of women, symbolized by the veil in respect of the Jewish patriarchal order in the church.<sup>[15]</sup> While supporting the idea of gender equality (Gal.3:28) on grounds that all forms of discrimination had been eradicated by the Cross, Resurrection and the Holy Spirit, it is more likely that Paul was simply commenting on appropriate behaviour for women and men at public worship. Man's unveiled head was a mark of his freedom, in the image and glory of God (11:7). The veil symbolized the new authority given to woman to pray and prophesy in public worship (11:5), which hitherto had been denied to her.<sup>[16]</sup> The custom of bound-up hair indicated a woman's prophetic-charismatic power, while loose hair had the sinister suggestion of uncleanness and morally lax character, in the Jewish context (cf. Num. 5:18, Lev. 13:45).<sup>[17]</sup> Paul's injunction could have been aimed at playing down

the ecstatic frenzy typical of orgiastic cultic worship. He advanced convincing theological argument for ‘proper’ hairstyle, as accepted symbolism for women’s spiritual power and equality in the Lord. Paul’s purpose and arguments were not for the re-enforcement of gender differences, but for order and propriety in the Christian worshipping community.[18]

By virtue of the pluri-religious and cultural context of Corinth, Paul’s approach for re-inculturation had to constantly encounter Judaism and other religions. His preaching and argument were totally Christian but he pursued them with sensitive awareness of the environment. He for instance attempted to transform pagan festivals of communion with gods into Christian feasts of communion with the one Lord. Since the church of Corinth was of predominantly Gentile converts, Scripture held priority and was fundamental in Paul’s response to social conflicts and to his instructions on ethics. Contrary to Corinthian expectations for eloquent speeches and impressive Gnostic theology he resorted to rhetorical and even aggressive language to communicate the message (1Cor. 3:16; 5:6; 6:2)

Paul’s most significant contribution to the faith of the Corinthians was a comprehension of the nature of the church, especially regarding the need for using local phraseology. What was at stake in the Corinthians’ theology and conduct was not only the Gospel, but also its tangible presence in the local community of believers. Conscious of a growing rift, Paul tactfully addressed the whole assembly as the ‘Church of God in Corinth,’ to bring unity in a divided church (1Cor. 1:26-31).

Paul appealed to imagery for defence of the integrity of the local church. He taught that the church is God’s temple in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:16-17) where the Holy Spirit abides. Every believer was a sanctuary of the living God, and desecration of that temple through reversion to pagan practices, worldly wisdom, false pride and exploitation of the weak, would result in its destruction (3:17).[19] The need for unity in the church at Corinth was emphasized through the imagery of the Body of Christ (10:17; 11:29; 12:12-26). However, unity does not imply the numbing uniformity as valued by Corinthians (12:15-

20), but unity in diversity as manifested by the various gifts of the Spirit (12:4-11).<sup>[20]</sup>

Furthermore, to establish unity among the churches, Paul launched the project of a collection for the poor in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26) as an expression of sharing and solidarity. His description of this monetary issue had all the earmarks of church – proclamation, celebration, and the sharing of new life (2 Cor. 9:8-15). The Gospel itself was re-conceived in economic terms (2Cor. 8-9)<sup>[21]</sup> with Paul's intent that the act of collection would encourage communion among the Christians in Corinth and between the Gentile and Jewish churches (Gal. 2:11-21; Rom. 15:31).

## 2.2. Churches in Galatia: Mixed Communities

### 2.2.1. Occasion and Context

Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia<sup>[22]</sup> is a short document packed with historical, social and theological material of the highest significance. We are distanced from its creation by two thousand years and by a vast expanse of geographical and cultural space. We shall attempt to read this letter interculturally and rediscover its significance for the many churches in India where mixed communities based on rites, castes, languages, cultures and ethnicity are found.

Paul had preached the good news of salvation available in Christ in Galatia, and founded mixed communities that included Jews and Gentiles, free persons and slaves, men and women. Paul's letter to the Galatians is about the condition on which Gentiles enter the people of God. It is about the entrance requirements for Gentile Christians who want to be recognized as full members of the new Israel that believes in Jesus, the Messiah. Must they, therefore, adopt the cultural practices of Jewish Christians in order to enter the congregation of Israel's Messiah, the church? Must they accept circumcision, practise specific dietary regulations and follow the Jewish religious calendar? Or can they be accepted as full members of the church on the basis of faith in Christ, apart from doing these works of the Mosaic Law?<sup>[23]</sup> Seen in this perspective, Galatians is not primarily a letter about individual salvation. For Paul it was

first and foremost a defence of the rights of the Gentiles to enter the church on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ without adopting the cultural practices of Jewish Christians.

The letter is explicitly a response to a crisis in the churches of Galatia (1:2). The occasion of the letter was that Paul had received news of people who had visited his Galatian mission-field and were persuading his converts to accept a teaching different from that which he had preached.

### 2.2.2. The Crisis and Paul's Deliberative Rhetoric

#### *Righteousness Through Law or Faith in Christ*

The crisis in Galatia was primarily social in nature: how are Gentile Christians to interact with Christians who are Jewish by birth? Must they accept the customs, practices, and culture of Jewish believers, or do they become members of the commonwealth of the Christians solely on the basis of what God has done in Jesus Christ? The agitators supported a doctrine which might anachronistically be called cultural imperialism. This was particularly evident in their insistence that Gentile Christians observe certain nomistic Jewish practices like circumcision and in their ban on full table fellowship.

Paul's opponents[24] or Judaizers who preach a 'different gospel' (1:6) have disturbed the equilibrium of the Galatians. This disturbance has endangered the gospel message which Paul preached to the Galatians. Paul accuses the agitators of perverting the Gospel of Christ and impeding the progress that the Galatians were making in the Christian life. The Judaizers persuaded the Gentile members of the Galatian communities to believe that righteousness could be acquired through circumcision and doing the works of the Law. The Law, they claimed, is not opposed to faith in the Messiah. Rather, it brings this faith to completion (3:3) and provides a way of overcoming the desires of the flesh.

Fearing that the Gentile members would succumb to pressure to be circumcised, Paul was intent on presenting righteousness as a benefit of faith in Jesus Christ and not through the law (3:1-5; 6-14) for "if righteousness came through law, surely Christ died in vain." (Gal. 2:21). Paul urged his converts in Galatia against indulging in

the “works of the flesh” which posed the most deadly threat to unity in the churches of Galatia. He warns them, “If you go on fighting one another tooth and nail, all you can expect is mutual annihilation” (5:15). The course which he recommends to them is a larger measure of that faith which is ‘active in love’ and in that love to be “servants to one another” (5:6, 13).[25]

## The Problem of Mixed Table-Fellowship

The particular issue which generated Jewish hostility to the Pauline type of mixed community was the practise of Eucharistic table-fellowship, characterized by the participants sharing the one loaf and the one cup. The ban on full table-fellowship is a matter of fundamental importance for the history of the early Christian-movement and to understand the problem in Galatia that Paul is addressing. There is adequate anthropological evidence of the antipathy of Jews towards table-fellowship with Gentiles.[26] This problem arose not merely because of the existence of food laws, but also because commensality, given that it was ‘an action expressing the warmest intimacy and respect,’ involved a serious threat to the separate identity of Jewish people.[27]

Paul strongly objected to this ethnic-based discrimination practised at table fellowship. The fact that Christ had accepted Gentiles in the same way as Jews at Baptism is sufficient ground for Christian Jews to accept them also in table fellowship. It was tantamount to dividing Christ himself when Christian Jews who mingled with Christian Gentiles were accused of ‘living like a Gentile’ (2:14) and behaving like ‘Gentile sinners’ (2:15).

Paul’s response to the crisis at Galatia is an example of deliberative rhetoric. In order to persuade them to adopt his point of view, he arranges his arguments in such a way that by the end of the letter the Galatians find themselves in a rhetorical maze with only one exit: an absolute and resolute refusal to be circumcised. Should the Galatians refuse to accept this, they will be cut off from Christ.[28] The heart of Paul’s argument is found in 3:7-29. In Christ they are a new creation so that the distinction between circumcision and the lack of it is abolished. He warns the Galatian Christians that to submit to the new teaching is to turn away from God (1:6), to be

severed from Christ, to fall from grace (5:4). Even if only a token measure of law-keeping is demanded from the Galatians, this demand involves acceptance of justification by works of the law which is contrary to the law-free gospel that Paul preached.

Paul was not concerned to make Gentiles into Jews, but introduce Jews and Gentiles alike into a new community through faith in Jesus as Lord. In this new community circumcision was irrelevant and any attempt to treat it as essential was unacceptable. Circumcision, with many other features of the law of Israel – food restrictions, sacred days, months and seasons (4:10), and the like – had traditionally kept Jews and Gentiles apart; such things had no place in the ‘new creation’ (6:15) where there was ‘no such thing as Jew or Greek’ (3:28).

His policy was to conform to Jewish ways in Jewish company and to Gentile ways in Gentile company, so as to commend the Jews and Gentiles alike. But to observe sacred occasions as a matter of religious obligation, making them the essence of gospel faith and church membership, was a step backward from liberty to bondage, which Paul refers to as a token of submission to the ‘elements of the world’ (Gal. 4:3, 9).[29]

### **3. Some Ecclesiological Issues**

#### **3.1. Identity of the ‘Church of God’**

Paul’s reference to the ‘Church of God’ in Gal. 1:13 indicates his understanding of the church as continuity with the people of Israel met in assembly. Paul also speaks of ‘churches’ in the plural – ‘the churches of Galatia’ (1:2) and the ‘churches of Judea’ (1:22). This is in contrast with the regular OT usage, which is almost always singular. The point here is that despite the OT precedent, Paul evidently did not think in terms of a single ‘church’. Wherever and whenever Jews and Gentiles gathered ‘in Christ’ (1:22), they were the ‘Church of God’.[30]

The identity of these gatherings as ‘church’ depended for Paul not on an organizational link-up or structure, but was given by their shared reception of the gospel and experience of the Spirit, and by

their common incorporation into the ‘Israel of God’. At this stage it was evidently more important for Paul to affirm the ‘church-ness’ of each individual gathering of believers in Judea and Galatia than to affirm that all these churches together formed one church.[31]

### **3.2. Church leadership**

Paul held in high esteem the pillar apostles of the church of Jerusalem. However, his acknowledgement of the authority and reputation of the Jerusalem leadership (2:3, 6, 9) also includes a note of questioning. The dismissive note in 2:6 “what they once were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality” suggests something of interest about Paul’s ecclesiology. The letter to the Galatians questions the practicality of a centralized authority seeking to impose a uniform church and life-style on all churches.

A gospel which can be both ‘for the circumcised’ and for the ‘uncircumcised’ (2:7) manifests great diversity in the way of being church. Galatians underline the importance of maintaining a vital tension between charismatic initiative and the constraints of tradition. Just as Paul wanted to maintain continuity with the church of God and the Israel of God, while affirming his conviction that he had been called to spread the gospel to the nations, so in the Galatian context, Paul attempted to maintain the recognition of the leadership of the Jerusalem apostles (2:2) while insisting that any authority, whether ecclesiastical or apostolic, was to be subordinate to the gospel, since the gospel of the cross and Spirit was itself the source and measure of that authority.

### **4. Conclusion**

Paul’s letters were in no way meant to prepare a blueprint or offer fixed guidelines to the church of Corinth or churches in Galatia or Judea. Nor did he want to comply with traditionalists or ‘agitators’ who wanted to plant the Palestinian church at Corinth and Galatia. He employed innovative missionary strategies at Corinth, Galatia and for that matter at other places, for addressing the needs and concerns of a cosmopolitan or multi-ethnic or homogeneous population. His technique for crises resolution was to reinforce community boundaries, appeal to unity in the Lord when groups

disagreed, provide relief to the socially exploited and voiceless in the community, and restore identity and confidence to confused groups. Paul has no specific teaching on church order or hierarchy, and no hints regarding the nature, form, frequency and leadership for worship gatherings. Rather, he stressed the communion nature of the church and the corporate nature of worship, with the participation of everyone – for the glory of God (1Cor. 11:13; 14:14-17) and edification of the whole community.

The churches at Corinth and at Galatia demonstrate unique features of ecclesial communities and different approaches of responding to issues of particular contexts. The approaches used to make the Christian message relevant in specific contexts, can be very relevant for today, though they can hardly serve as models for replication.

The theology of the church of Corinth for instance offers a paradigm of contemporary challenge confronting the church in rapidly increasing cosmopolitan and mixed settings in pluralistic India. Paul saw the Graeco-Roman city of Corinth, with its heterogeneous metropolitan culture and the mixed communities of Jews and Gentiles in Galatia as a springboard for reincarnating the Christian faith, even though the complex social and religious settings presented many obstacles for the Gospel. The profound theological teachings which he enunciated concerning conflicting local issues were an important contribution to the later history of ecclesiology and ethics and apply to questions of unity, integrity and identity that are pertinent even today.

The church in India is a church divided by ethnic, linguistic, caste, gender and ritual boundaries. There are Christians who wish to keep the church in India, Syrian or Roman. There are Christian communities who wish to keep the caste divisions within the church. There are others who wish to keep the gender prejudices and discriminations of the patriarchal tradition of church and society. The theology of the church that Paul articulated in his letters to the Corinthians and Galatians present relevant theological pointers to meet the contemporary challenges of the politics of division and the politics of unity infesting the church in India. It presents

ecclesiological insights for promoting communion among and within the local churches in India as well.

Paul's vision of communion also enables us to face the problem of re-incarnating ecclesial communities in the contemporary 'Corinths' of India like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore where migrant Christian settlers from varied ethnic and language groups and rites are found. The same tenet of Acts 2 "one faith, one baptism, one Lord" would be the foundational experience of realizing a communion of communities (EA 25) in such cosmopolitan contexts where the language of love would overcome cultural, linguistic, caste or ritual barriers. Paul believed that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, for we who believe in Him are all one in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

A church is always in a process of becoming as a result of interaction between the Gospel message and a given milieu. The churches that Paul had established had a distinct local identity without losing the catholic character of the Pentecost. Any approach of incarnating the Gospel that does not respect the presuppositions and dominant concerns of the target group will not transform anything. Dialogue with outsiders or 'trouble-makers' may be uncertain – even hazardous, but refusal to dialogue with culture and religion and in the case of the churches in India, with fundamentalists and traditionalists like caste Christians may likely result in alienation, division and impoverishment. True ecclesial communion recognizes and embraces difference and diversity of rites, races, tribes, cultures and languages, and promotes mutual understanding, acceptance and collaboration among different groups for a much-needed 'communion for prophetic mission' in India.

## Notes

- [1] *The New Leader*, Vol. 121/18, September 16-30, 2008, Chennai, p.35.
- [2] Raymond Brown suggests a possible range of house Churches resulting from different Christian missions: a house Church of Christian Jews, of mixed Jewish and Gentile Christians, of mostly Gentiles from the Pauline mission, a Johannine house Church of those who believed

they were God's children from birth. *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrine*, New York: Paulist Press, 1985, p. 123.

- [3] W. F. Orr & J. A. Walther, *I Corinthians, Introduction with a Study of the Life of Paul, Notes and Commentary*, London: Doubleday, 1976, p. 141.
- [4] L. Cerfaux, *Church in the Theology of St Paul*, New York: Herder & Herder, 1959, pp. 109-110.
- [5] Ibid., p.110.
- [6] The captivity letters of St Paul have specific references to the Church as the Body of Christ, and particularly describe its eschatological and mystical aspects. The idea of Christians as God's people strongly affirms the organic and universal dimensions of the Church. R. Brown, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 125. In the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, *ekklesia* is further developed in a specifically cosmic sense where the Church realizes itself not only in human space but in the heavenly city as well.
- [7] For a more detailed study of this, see Evelyn Monteiro, *Church and Culture: Communion in Pluralism*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2004. pp. 4-8.
- [8] Evelyn Monteiro, *Church and Culture*, pp. 93-99
- [9] J. Murphy-O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 4.
- [10] G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987, p.2.
- [11] Ibid., p. 3-4.
- [12] For the indigent weak consumption of meat was cloaked in taboo. It was eaten only at pagan religious celebrations. However, the wealthy 'strong' had no taboos attached to meat eating. G Theissen, "The strong and the Weak in Corinth: A Sociological Analysis of a Theological Quarrel," *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982, p. 128.
- [13] GD. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp 357-363, 387
- [14] Ibid., pp. 4-7.
- [15] Contemporary feminist exegetes might interpret it as an argument for the 'creational' or 'symbolic' difference between women and men despite their equality in Christ, or as advocacy for the emancipation of women. E. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, New York: SCM Press, 1983, pp. 227-230.
- [16] C.K. Barrett, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 250-251, 255. In the Graeco-Roman society, as in many modern veiling cultures, the veiling of women constituted an important symbol system. It represented the honour-shame culture with multiple meanings of social order, hierarchy, authority, subordination, sexuality, etc. related to it. The actual practise of veiling and its ideological functions, however, vary with time

and place. D. B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, Michigan: Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 233-35.

- [17] E. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. 228.
- [18] The exegetical misrepresentation of the androcentric note of Paul's injunctions (1 Cor. 11:2-16, 14:34-35, 1 Tim. 2:11-15) gradually led to the exclusion of women from ecclesial office and to the patriarchalization of the whole Church. E. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, pp. 230, 233.
- [19] The imagery of the temple (*naos*) was pregnant with meaning both for the Jews and the Gentile Christians. It reflected the OT concept of God who chose to dwell among the people (Ps 114:2). It was also familiar to the Corinthian Gentile Christians who often frequented the pagan temples and shrines (*naoi*) in the city. G D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 146-147.
- [20] G D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 18-19.
- [21] Gunton and Hardy, *On Being the Church*, pp. 227-229.
- [22] In addition to addressing his letter to the 'ekklesiai of Galatia' (1:2), Paul also refers to other groups, especially Israelites, sinful Gentiles and those advocating circumcision of the Gentile Christ-followers (6:12-13), who in various ways constitute a threat to the communities he had founded in Galatia.
- [23] Frank, J. Matera, *Galatians*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 29
- [24] There are about five texts in which Paul directly refers to the agitators as misconstruing what God has done in Christ in the Church of Galatia: 1:7; 3:1; 4:17; 5:7-12; 6:12-13.
- [25] F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 25.
- [26] As a general rule, Israelites in the first century CE did not dine with Gentiles. This prohibition is reflected very clearly in Acts and Galatians, and is implied in Mark 7 and Matthew 15. There is also evidence of Jewish sensitivity to ritual purity at meal fellowship in Dan 1:3-17, Judith 10-12, Esther 14:17, in many non-scriptural Israelite works and in the Mishnah and Talmud.
- [27] Philip F. Esler, *Galatians*, New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 94
- [28] Frank, J. Matera, *Galatians*, pp. 18-19.
- [29] F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 29.
- [30] James D.G Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 125.
- [31] Ibid., p. 125.

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## **Paul's Ways of Community Building**

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**Abstract:** The author shows in this article that Paul was the genius behind the evangelizing mission of the early Church, not only because of the fact that he founded and built up many communities, but also because of the vision and strategy he provided to carry on this movement. Soon after the Jerusalem Council, he moved into Gentile territories, established and nurtured the communities (cf. Acts 15; Gal 2:9-10). His theology, methods and strategy grew out of his concrete experiences. *He was both an active missionary-pastor and an insightful pastoral theologian.*

Once he experienced the risen Lord, there was an inner urge and contagious enthusiasm to share that experience with others by proclaiming Christ (1 Cor 9:16). Nothing could separate him from Christ and nothing could stand in his way of proclaiming Him (Rom 8:31-35). Christ, and only Christ mattered and everything else was a waste in comparison with 'the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ' (Phil 3:7-8a). His enthusiasm to proclaim Christ resulted from this conviction.

He concludes by affirming that Paul's methods of building communities can provide very useful insights for developing a relevant missionary-pastoral theology and praxis. Pastoral presence and availability, adaptability, a Word-centred ministry and Christ-centred spirituality, peace-making, participatory leadership with focus on team ministry, building up the local Church by developing contextual theologies and inculturated forms of worship, and communion model of the Church, are some of the aspects that have special relevance for India.

**Keywords:** Damascus experience, apostle, community-builder, proclamation by example, contextualising, empowering communities

## **Introduction**

Paul was the genius behind the evangelizing mission of the early Church, not only because of the fact that he founded and built up many communities, but also because of the vision and strategy he provided to carry on this movement. Soon after the Jerusalem Council, he moved into Gentile territories, established and nurtured the communities (cf. Acts 15; Gal 2:9-10). His theology, methods and strategy grew out of his concrete experiences. *He was both an active missionary-pastor and an insightful pastoral theologian.*

Once he experienced the risen Lord, there was an inner urge and contagious enthusiasm to share that experience with others by proclaiming Christ (1 Cor 9:16). Nothing could separate him from Christ and nothing could stand in his way of proclaiming Him (Rom 8:31-35). Christ, and only Christ mattered and everything else was a waste in comparison with ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ’ (Phil 3:7-8a). His enthusiasm to proclaim Christ resulted from this conviction.

## **Preliminary Considerations**

### **1.1. The Damascus Encounter and Beyond**

The event that was most decisive and that had a determining influence on Paul was his encounter with the risen Lord on the way to Damascus.[1] In this revelation of God’s Son, he was converted, called and sent to the Gentiles.[2] He considered his conversion and the call to preach the Gospel as inseparable.[3]

This event marked a change from commitment to a religious system (Judaism) to commitment to the PERSON of Jesus Christ.[4] Phil 3:4-11 speaks of the radical nature of this experience in which his value system was reversed, his understanding of the saving significance of the law was changed and his life took on new directions. Since then, his life was centred on Christ alone (Phil 3:7-9). This new belongingness is described by him as ‘being possessed by Christ’ (Phil 3:12) or ‘possessing the Spirit of Christ’ (Rom 8:9). *Paul thus experienced in his own life the gospel that he was to proclaim.*

Gal 1:11-17 brings out *two important points*. (a) The distinctive manner in which Paul received his commission and the gospel was a personal disclosure of Jesus Christ or revelation of God, and Jesus Christ, crucified and raised from the dead, was its content. *He felt that God had 'set him apart' from his mother's womb like Jeremiah* (Gal 1:15; cf. Jer 1:5), and *the Servant of Yahweh* (Isa 49:1, 6). (b) He also understood that this gospel was meant not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles (Eph 3:1-13; Rom 15:16).[5] He linked his preaching of the Gospel with the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham according to which blessings would be extended to the Gentiles as well (Gal 3:8; cf. 3:14-19, 29; 4:28).[6] The universal and eschatological dimensions are presented in a way that suggests that he was fulfilling the salvation historical work of the Servant (cf. Isa 40-55).[7]

### **1.2. ‘Called to be an Apostle’**

The title that Paul claimed for himself more often and that he used to describe his ministry, is, “Apostle.”[8] He describes himself as ‘apostle by vocation’ (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1) or ‘apostle by the will of God’ (2 Cor 1:1 Eph 1:1; Col 1:1). He is “an apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead” (Gal 1:1). He viewed his suffering as an authenticating sign of his call as an apostle (1 Thess 2:1; 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:8-12).[9] It is important to note the semantic affinity between the words *apostle (apostolos)* and *missionary (missio)*. The Latin equivalent of ‘missionary’ stands for the Greek *apostolos*: one who is sent. Paul considered himself first and foremost an apostle, one invested with a mission.[10]

## **Paul, the Builder of Communities**

### **2.1. Commitment to Jesus and his Mission**

Paul shared the conviction of the Jews that the followers of Christ were undermining the foundations of Judaism. He understood that any threat to the Temple and to the Law was a deathblow to the very existence of Israel as the chosen people of God. Such was his zeal that he began a fierce campaign to destroy everyone who professed the name of Jesus, the Christ (Acts 8:3).

Thus we find in Saul a man who is clear in his mind, zealous, committed to a cause and persevering till the end to achieve the set goals.

Now Paul, after the Damascus experience, directs these qualities to the realization of his new ideal. He vigorously confronts the opponents of the Gospel (Acts 13:10). His presence was commanding and his words carried conviction (Acts 14:2; 16:18). His courage to speak the full truth (Acts 20:20, 27), enthusiasm (Acts 9:21) and fearlessness (Acts 20:23) are proverbial. He courageously stood up to Peter for being an obstacle to the 'law free' Gospel (Gal 2:11-14).

The realization that the Son of God loved him and sacrificed himself for him was indeed the compelling force behind his zeal (Gal 2:20). 'The love of Christ' (2 Cor 5:14-15) was an absolute value, and nothing could 'separate him from this love' (Rom 8:35, 39). He was *passionate* about Jesus and this passion overwhelmed everything else in his life. To preach his Gospel, therefore, was for him a 'love-obligation' to be fulfilled with single-mindedness and urgency: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). He considered this responsibility a grace to be accomplished with joy and gratitude (Rom 1:5; 15:15-16).

## 2.2. Dependence on God

### 2.2.1. Apostolic Prayer

Paul's prayer was related to his ministry.[11] In the silence of Arabian deserts he deepened his experience of the risen Lord before launching his mission (Gal 1:17). L. Cerfauix characterizes him as an "Apostle in the presence of God." [12] What we hear about him after the Damascus encounter is what the Lord said to Ananias, "At the moment he is praying" (Acts 9:4).[13] In prayer Paul found the strength for his mission; in prayer he also recognized his own fragility and vulnerability (2 Cor 12:8-11; Phil 4:13). He was aware that his vocation and mission were wholly dependent on divine grace (Rom 15:15; Gal 1:15; 2 Cor 4:1; Eph 3:2).[14] This awareness directed him further to prayer as an expression of gratitude to God.

As Jesus prayed for the disciples and the world (Jn 17) Paul prayed for his communities' growth in Christ: "... so that your love may

grow ever more *in the knowledge and every kind of perception*" (Phil 1:9; cf. 3:11).[15] Paul's missionary prayer was like Jesus' prayer). He asked Timothy to pray for his community (1 Tim 2:1). As he found strength in prayer, he exhorted others to do the same (Rom 12:12). So he commended himself and his ministry to the prayer support of the Christians (Rom 15:30-32; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Cor 1:11). Luke presents Paul surrounded by the prayer of the community.[16] His own prayer (1 Thess 1:2; 3:10; 1 Cor 1:4; Phil 1:3-4) and his exhortation to others to pray (1 Thess 5:17-18; 1 Cor 7:5; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2), bring out the importance of prayer for the effectiveness of ministry.[17] By means of prayer he cultivated communion as it united him and his churches in their relations "both with each other and with their heavenly Lord." [18]

### **2.2.2. Guided by the Spirit**

According to Acts, *Paul was entirely at the disposal of the Spirit*, and was guided by the Spirit (Acts 16:6; 19:21).[19] Every decisive step was taken by the early Church under the guidance of the Spirit (e.g. Acts 2; 6). The Spirit demanded that Paul and Barnabas be set apart for the work for which they have been called (Acts 13:2). The Spirit set a seal of approval on the admittance of the Gentiles (15:28). It is the same Spirit who intervened in their journeys (16:6-10). Paul went into captivity as a prisoner of the Spirit (20:22; cf. 21:4, 11). The new horizons of mission were opened up to Paul by the Spirit (Acts 16:6-10). It is the Spirit who bestowed greatness on him and whose creativity even surprised him as he went into 'endless ecstasies over this mystery.'[20]

### **2.3. The Power of the Word**

From his Jewish background Paul had understood that the word of God is effective and laden with power (Isa 55:10). So he declared that the Gospel, as the word of God, is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16; cf. 2 Cor 2:4-5; 1 Thess 1:5).[21] He knew that the Scriptures are able to instruct people for salvation because it is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:15-17). So convinced was he of the necessity of communicating the Word that he considered it an obligation 'under the pain of death' (1 Cor 9:16). He even dared to say that he was sent primarily to proclaim the Word than to baptize (1 Cor 1:17). He considered preaching the Gospel as a *priestly cultic*

*act* (Rom 15:16).[22] He urged Timothy to “preach the Word in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2). He was truly a *servant of the Word*.[23]

What he proclaimed was what he believed (2 Cor 4:13). His gospel was a lived experience of the person of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:6-9). Because of this conviction he could write, “Faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17; cf. vv. 14-17). He made sure that he handed down the correct tradition (1 Cor 15:3-8). His knowledge of the Old Testament was of great help to him to present Jesus as the fulfilment of the messianic hope, to interpret his own experience of salvation and to present his teaching (Rom 15:4).

## **2.4. Building up Communities: An Ongoing Process**

In his letter to Christians at Thessalonica, Paul states the purpose of sending Timothy was to build them up by strengthening their faith, and encouraging them to live accordingly (1 Thess 3:1-5).[24]. This was seen as necessary because of external threats, internal problems, and also because of the ongoing nature of building up communities. In order to describe this ministry, Paul used *images* or *metaphors* instead of terms such as missionary or pastor.[25]

The paternal images focus on the generative dimension of ministry (1 Cor 4:14-15; Phlm 10) whereas the maternal images emphasize the nurturing aspect (1 Thess 2:6-8; 1 Cor 3:1-2; Gal 4:19). [26] In 1 Cor 3:5-17, Paul elaborates the images of *field* and *building/temple (agricultural and architectural Images)*. [27] *First*, Paul sees Church as *God's field* and *building* where he and other ministers are called to labour. *Second*, community-building as an on-going process involves continuous nurturing - watering // planting, and laying the foundation // building upon it, demands long-term commitment and requires a team of ministers. *Finally*, as the one who planted and laid the foundation, Paul emphasizes his *unique initiatory role* and *authority*.[28] The expansion of the building image into that of temple (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:21) highlights the goal of his ministry as building up the community as the dwelling place of God (1 Cor 6:19-20; 2 Cor 6:16) and the household of God (Gal 6:10; cf. Rom 8:14-17; Eph 2:19).

#### **2.4.1. Generative or Foundational Role**

As an apostle Paul thought of his work as founding communities. The father image allowed Paul to communicate to his churches that his relationship with them was reciprocal but unequal. It shows that leadership and exercise of authority need not be opposed to love. He considered himself a mother in birth-pangs to form Christ in his 'little children' (Gal 4:19). The foundational role of Paul is also emphasized by means of the agricultural and architectural images (1 Cor 3:5-17).[29] He planted and as a master builder laid the foundation, the foundation itself being Jesus Christ. He was a pioneer, and wanted to remain so (Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 10:16).

#### **2.4.2. Nurturing Function**

Paul understood that his task was also to nurture them until they grew into maturity in faith. His parental responsibility clearly included nurturing his 'children' through instruction, admonishing, urging behavioural change and encouraging (1 Thess 2:11-12). It is a gradual process of growth from childhood to adulthood (1 Cor 3:1-2). The image of a nursing (mother) taking care of her children (1 Thess 2:6-8) was helpful to soften the authoritarian edge normally associated with paternal image.[30] He told Timothy and Titus to guard the faith of the community by handing down the apostolic tradition, teaching sound doctrine and ensuring observance of the customs. He reminded the elders of the church at Ephesus of their duty to build up the community (Acts 20:28-32). The parental images bring out qualities of devotion and responsibility, tenderness, total self-giving and personal attention, which are required to found and nurture a community (2 Cor 12:14-15).

#### **2.4.2. 1. Personal Visits and Sending Emissaries**

As a ground-breaking missionary-pastor, Paul travelled extensively (Rom 15:19; Acts 27:14-20).[31] An important aspect of his strategy was pioneering, that is, after founding a community and preparing local leaders, he would move on to another place. Though his work was very demanding, he made it a point to visit his communities or at least expressed his earnest desire to do so (1 Thess 2:17-3:5; 2 Cor 2:12-3:4). It was necessary because his stay in a community was rather short and he had very little time for the much

needed nurturing of faith.[32] He considered that *personal presence* was *necessary and effective* (Acts 18:11; 1 Cor 4:19; Phil 1:24-26).

When Paul could not visit the communities he continued to strengthen them through his trusted emissaries. They were to make him present in the communities and as such their visit was seen by them as that of the apostle himself: *apostolic presence (parousia)*.[33] It was not just a second best, but was at times a pastoral strategy to keep his distance by sending an emissary.[34] Therefore, he took utmost care in the choice of his emissaries. Two of them deserve special mention: *Timothy* and *Titus*. Timothy, his ‘beloved son’ had played an important role in the mission of Paul in founding Churches (Acts 16:1-3). His visit to Corinth was to teach them Paul’s ‘ways in Christ’ (1 Cor 4:17) and to Thessalonica to strengthen them in faith and to prevent them from false teachings (1 Thess 3:1-3). Titus, called Paul’s ‘brother’ (2 Cor 2:13; 8:22-23), was sent to Corinth to deal with a very difficult situation which went to the extent of questioning Paul’s apostolic authority (2 Cor 10-13; 7:13b-15), and to organize the collection (2 Cor 8-9).

#### **2.4.2. 2. Correspondence**

Though he was more concerned with ‘founding communities,’ Paul considered that his work was incomplete until he formed mature and settled communities. Understanding the permanent value of the written word, he sent them letters.[35] They show how integral was nurturing the communities to Paul’s ministry. They are in fact an extension of his preaching (Gal 4:20).[36] Through them his churches had access to basic Christian traditions. They deal with almost all important aspects of Christian faith and life, though some of them only seminally.[37] Being essentially a pastoral theologian, he approached theological issues with pastoral orientation.

The first letter to the Corinthians is a typical example of how Paul, wanting to see their growth in faith (Gal 4:19; 1 Thess 3:1-5), handled various questions with love, pastoral prudence, sensitivity and firmness. Of great significance is the way he dealt with moral issues. Rather than presenting legal solutions or indulging in casuistry, he approached them pastorally. He built up strong theological arguments from which he could draw practical conclusions: from the *indicative of being a Christian, to the*

*imperative of its ethical demands* (1 Cor 6:15-18, 19-20; Col 3:1-3). He focused on the essentials, never compromising on the fundamental truths, even at the risk of becoming unpopular.

## 2.5. Suffering and Ministry

Suffering as the characteristic mark of the ministers is a constant theme in Paul's letters. He shows that it is integral to the Gospel (1 Cor 1:23-25; 2:1-2) and links it with its proclamation (1 Thess 2:1; 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:8-12).[38] It "validated and legitimated his message."[39] He had to undergo opposition and persecution from his communities (including companions), from religious and political authorities[40] and to face threat to life itself from natural calamities.[41] They were not only physical but was also mental like the accusations made by the Corinthians (1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 10-13) or indignity associated with tent-making (2 Thess 2:9; 2 Cor 12:13-14).[42] But he told the Corinthians that it is his suffering that commended him as a true and authentic *ambassador of Christ*.[43] He saw that his ministry was a corollary of Christ's suffering inasmuch as it was the 'intended means by which the Gospel was brought to the Gentiles' (2 Cor 11:2-4).[44] In this way the ministers imitate Jesus, by actualizing the gospel of the Cross, and they in turn become models of imitation (1 Cor 11:1).[45]

Paul's ministry was to fill up in his body the suffering of Christ on behalf of the church (Col 1:24).[46] He made it clear that his suffering was for the community (2 Cor 1:6; Phil 1:7).[47] He also considered suffering a minister's destiny (1 Thess 3:3) and accepted it as part of his parental role: 'to spend and to be spent' (2 Cor 12:14-15). Further, suffering was a way of manifesting God's power in the midst of human weakness (2 Cor 12:9-10; 1 Cor 1:25). In a special way, suffering and weakness reveal that ministry is rooted in and is carried out by God's power. The power of God can be revealed only when the messengers and the message (of the Cross) are consonant with each other (1 Cor 1:18). The communities too became models and witnesses of the gospel of the Cross (1 Thess 1:6-7; 2:14).

## 2.6. Proclamation by Example

The parental responsibility required of Paul that he nurtured his 'children' through personal example for imitation (1 Cor 4:16). As

their 'father' he tried to embody Jesus in himself and give visibility to Christian life for his 'children' to see and to imitate.[48] So he would say that the ministers were 'carrying in their body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in their bodies' (2 Cor 4:10). Hence, he could make a genuine claim that he was mediating Christ and appeal to the communities, "Become imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1; cf. 1 Thess 1:6; Phil 3:17) and ultimately 'become imitators of God' (Eph 5:1).

As he thought of himself not only as a teacher, but as a father and mother he could say with some personal authority that his communities should take him as a model. According to him, this is what distinguished him from other teachers and guides (1 Cor 4:15; 1 Thess 2:6-8; cf. 2:1-12). He proposed his hard work and financial self-support as examples to be imitated (2 Thess 3:8).[49] He presented himself as a model to the church elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:18b-35) and to Timothy (2 Tim 4:10-11), who himself was projected as an example (Phil 2:19-23). His message was effective because of the kind of the person that he was (1 Thess 1:5). The messenger was the message.

Paul proposed his co-workers too as models. He commended them for their integrity of life.[50] Understanding the importance of personal credibility, he warned Timothy regarding the choice of leaders (1 Tim 3:1-13; 4:12; 5:22). The communities also were models.[51] The churches in Judaea were models for the Thessalonian community (1 Thess 2:14), who in turn became example of Christian life for those in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess 1:7-10). Their authentic lives bore witness to the power of the Word already at work in them (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 1:4, 11). The Christ-like life of Paul (Gal 2:20; Phil 1:21) and others contributed to a large extent to their pastoral effectiveness.

## **2.7. Building up the Local Church**

Paul exercised his mission beyond geographic boundaries or ethnic groups. He was one who 'thought globally, but acted locally.' The local Church was at the centre of his Ecclesiology: the Church of God in Corinth, Thessalonica, and so forth. According to him the universal Church comes to life in the local Church.[52] He shared

the global vision of Jesus (Acts 1:8), but was committed to the task of building up the *local* church.

The house churches served as the nucleus of the local church, and bringing them together contributed further to building up a local church in a city.[53] Household baptism was rather common in Paul's time.[54] He appointed house church leaders as community leaders and promoted collaboration among the local churches by sending missionaries to various churches.[55]

### **2.7.1. Flexibility and Adaptability**

Paul is often pictured as a person with strong convictions and uncompromising positions on issues. But adaptability characterized his pastoral strategy, particularly because he was dealing with varied and diverse areas, peoples and situations.

*Ways of keeping in touch.* After founding a community and preparing local leaders, Paul would move on to another place. But he kept in touch with them in *different* ways: through re-visits, through emissaries and correspondence. This made possible mobility, essential for a wider mission, and contact with the already existing communities.

*Choice of setting for preaching.* Paul had no fixed setting. Every situation provided a setting for the proclamation of the Good News. [56] But usually he would look out for a synagogue in the new town where Jews gathered for worship and discussion on matters of faith.[57] Basing his discussions on the Scriptures, he would demonstrate that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Acts 17:11; 18:5). He would further elaborate that in the crucified Messiah was revealed God's true wisdom and power (Acts 17:32; 1 Cor 1:18-2:5). He chose also religious / cultural centres (e.g. the Areopagus – Acts 17:16-34) or private houses (Acts 17:5; 18:7).

*Mission at work-place.* Paul had learned a common trade, tent making (Acts 18:2-3), which enabled him to provide for his own support (Acts 20:34).[58] As a skilled tentmaker he would never have been out of work. His workplace was a centre of evangelization since the Greeks used the work place as an arena for philosophizing.[59] As is clear from Acts and his letters, Paul would

never have missed the opportunity to speak about life in Christ, while earning his sustenance.[60]

*Choice of Centres.* While it is not so clear whether Paul had a definite plan for his journeys, there are some indications to this effect with regard to the second and third journeys.[61] He targeted two or three hub cities in a province that opened up wider networks through trade, transport, presence of intellectual activity, and strategic location (e.g. Corinth, Pamphylia and Lystra) which naturally brought together a large cross-section of the people. In general, they were places under the influence of Greek civilization or with considerable Jewish presence.[62] The residents of these centres were influential people, educated, socially accepted and financially sound.[63] But in Macedonia he chose Boroea, not the more important Pella. He combined the methods of the itinerant teachers, the Jewish rabbis, and Greek philosophers. He was creative and always open to the Spirit.[64] Because flexibility itself was a strategy, the centres became strategic points.[65]

*Personal Life.* Adaptability is reflected in his lifestyle, and in his responses to the socio-cultural and religious situation of the people (1 Cor 9:19-22). He could identify himself with every type of social, ethnic or religious group, as he was guided by the principle of becoming “all things to all in order to save some at any cost” (1 Cor 9:22). His concern for the ‘weak’ made him to adapt himself to avoid scandal (1 Cor 8:13). He expected the same from others too (Rom 14:1-4; 1 Cor 8).[66]

*Teaching.* Similar approach was shown by his readiness to adjust his teachings if circumstances demanded it. He circumcised Timothy, but gave the reason, though he did not consider it necessary for salvation (Acts 16:3). He made a distinction between his opinion on the one hand, and the teaching of Jesus and the tradition of the Church on the other (1 Cor 7). He was non-compromising on the fundamentals (Gal 4). But there are instances where he seems to have changed his views though this might have caused some confusion. His guiding principle was: “Whatever I do, I do for the sake of the gospel” (1Cor 9:23).

## 2.7.2. Contextualizing the Gospel

Paul knew that he was trying to communicate a message that far surpassed human comprehension (Rom 11:33). It was not easy to communicate the Gospel in philosophical concepts of his time. He had to make it intelligible to the people in relation to their socio-cultural and religious situation. His letters are more like theological conversations between him and his communities. It may be better to speak of an *interactive theologizing* than contextualized theology as a product. He was 'becoming all things to all people' through *this theologizing process* (1 Cor 9:19-23). He used:

(a) *Literary Forms.* There are numerous literary forms in Pauline writings which are functional in nature – thanksgiving, greetings, liturgical hymns, summaries, exhortation and sayings.[67] (b) *Images.* Paul used abundantly images and metaphors drawn from Jewish and Graeco-Roman sources.[68] In that way he was able to communicate the Gospel by relating it to the thought patterns of his readers. They reflect mostly the life in the great cities – games of the stadium, military affairs, the theatre, sea voyaging, etc...

© *Theological Language and Vocabulary.* His creative adaptability helped him to develop a *theological language* to express the message of the Gospel. Though he had recourse to both the Hebrew and Greek Old Testament (LXX), and the religious language of the Greeks, they were still inadequate to explain the unique mystery of Christ. His experience of the risen Lord could not be transferred literally into Greek.[69] His use of vocabulary points to both the inexhaustibility of the event, and the limitedness of human expression and formulation.[70] He went beyond standardized forms of speech and used a language that would bring out the meaning better for the community.[71] (d) *Style of Argument.* His use of *midrash* (Rom 4; Gal 3:6- 18; 4:1- 31) and *rhetoric* in building up his arguments, and the letter writing style of the Graeco-Roman world deserve attention. In his arguments he used more frequently the Septuagint (LXX) than the Hebrew text.[72]

### **2.7.3. Dialogue Approach**

Paul was a pioneer in the area of religious and cultural Dialogue. The *Areopagus* speech is an attempt towards understanding mission as dialogue, but not the only one (Acts 17:22-34. cf. 14:13-17). He showed genuine appreciation of their longing for God, but challenged the cult of pagan gods. He took a positive stand towards the Greek religion when he said echoing the thinking of the Greek poets, “in him we live and move and have our being, for we are all his offspring” (Acts 17:28). He was prepared to express the message of the Gospel in the categories of the culture and history of the receivers. In this *Kerygma* and *Sophia* meet each other. Jerusalem and Athens begin to understand and dialogue with each other.’[73] In whichever situation he was or whatever he did, he was creative and innovative.

### **2.7.4. Self-supporting Communities**

Paul’s trade provided for his support without being a weight on the Churches (Acts 20:34-35; 2 Cor 12:13-14). He tells the Thessalonians quite proudly, “We worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you” (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8). This made his longer stay in a place possible and he could be free from the accusation that he was preaching in order to make a living (1 Thess 2:3-6).[74] However, he gratefully acknowledged the material support of the Philippian community which he saw as ‘a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God’ (Phil 4:15-18; Rom 15:25-28). Besides, there were house church leaders and individuals like Lydia, a trader in purple (Acts 16:14) and Epaphras, probably a textile dealer (Col 1:6-8). But he refused to be controlled by others on account of financial needs (2 Cor 11:8-9). He was not one who would take undue advantage of others’ generosity (1 Thess 2:5; Acts 20:33-34). As a rule he wanted himself (1 Cor 9:6-7, 12b-18) and the communities to be financially independent (Gal 6:6; Acts 20:34-35).

At the same time, he was concerned for the needs of others as is illustrated by the collection project organized among the Gentile churches for the poor in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4; Rom 15:25-28).[75] But it was meant not only to meet the material needs of a

community (Gal 2:10), but also to serve as a sign of gratitude that the ‘daughter churches’ owed to their ‘mother church.’ He made sure that it became an expression of fellowship between the Jewish and Gentile Christian communities (Rom 15:25-28) and an act of missionary support and partnership among the local churches (2 Cor 8:4; 9:13). 2 Cor 8-9 describes it by terms such as grace (*charis*) service (*diakonia*), fellowship (*koinonia*) and worship (*leitourgia*).

## **2.8. Ambassadors of Reconciliation**

Jesus made commitment to the cause of peace and reconciliation an essential feature of Christian community, as they imply a new type of relationship with God and with others (Mt 5:9). Though God is the source of reconciliation, mediated by Jesus Christ, the task is now entrusted to the ministers as his *ambassadors* (2 Cor 5:18-6:2).[76] God’s love initiative (Rom 5:6-9; 2 Cor 5:14) became a reality in the self-emptying love unto death of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 2:8; Gal 3:13). It is God himself who is at work in them as they are His ambassadors (2 Cor 1:18; 5:20; 6:1). Their task is to represent Christ’s once- and-for-all reconciling death (2 Cor 4:7-12; Rom 15:16). This was Paul’s model of the ministry of reconciliation.

The reconciling death of Jesus unites all in the one commonwealth of God (Eph 2:12-13), thus reversing the disintegrating process that was at work due to sin. This reflects the horizontal aspect of reconciliation. Though Paul was not a peace-negotiator, he worked towards unity in and among the communities. The accommodating spirit that he manifested at the Jerusalem Council is an indication of the spirit of dialogue and reconciliation. His insistence that irrespective of social, cultural and gender distinctions all form a new unity in Christ illustrates the point (Gal 3:26-28; Col 3:11). The collection project too was intended to bring about fellowship among the Jewish and Gentile Christians and among various churches (Rom 15:27).

## **2.9. Community Participation**

Paul is often presented as a solitary genius who went about proclaiming the Gospel and founding Christian communities.[77] That he had many co-workers has been recognized. But his vision of ministry itself as participatory requires greater attention. Paul was

a team-man, and ministry was team-work. His understanding of the Church as the body of Christ,[78] his use of ‘we’ as a real plural,[79] teaching on charisms and ministries, the designations for the ministers and use of agricultural and architectural images are indications of his vision and praxis of participatory ministry.[80] They demonstrate diversity and complementarity of functions, unity of purpose and inclusiveness, and highlight the possibilities which diversity offers for building up communities.

### **2.9.1. House Church Leaders**

Paul ensured that the communities were actively involved in his ministry, particularly through house churches. The gathering in private homes for worship created an environment for the coming together of the believers as a family, and personal relationships developed. The members shared responsibilities. *From this model of the Church emerged local leaders, especially lay leaders, and even more notably women leaders.*[81] The head of the household was usually a prominent person of the place, well-known, trusted and with financial means, and had considerable influence in the society. Therefore there would be some sympathetic ears to hear the presentation of the Gospel. The house churches provided *the much needed networking* for ministry as they provided a base and ready-made set of contacts, and *Paul built this into his mission strategy.*[82] They were not only self-supporting, but could also provide for the needs of the travelling missionaries (1 Cor 16:5-12; Rom 15:22-24).[83]

### **2.9.2. Individual Co-Workers**

The long list of co-workers mentioned in Rom 16, provides a wide spectrum of participatory ministry, variety of scope and areas of ministry. Paul selected his co-workers carefully, who were known for their integrity and commitment (1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:19). Of circa 100 ministers mentioned by Luke (Acts) and Paul, some 36 are named with special titles of recognition. They belong to the Jewish and Gentile communities, ordained and lay ministers, women and men. These designations indicate their special role in building up and strengthening the communities. Their functions included hosting

a house church, instructing the believers, offering hospitality to travelling missionaries, working as emissaries and establishing local contacts. It was to Paul's credit that he was able to ensure effective collaboration of so many. He planted, others nurtured; he laid the foundation, others built upon it (1 Cor 3:5-15).

It was *Barnabas* who introduced Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:27) and guided the latter in the first phase of their missionary journey (Acts 9:27; 11:25-26; 13:50). Both of them went to the Jerusalem Council to present the case of the Gentile Christians (Acts 15:2; Gal 2:9).[84] He is named among the apostles and teachers along with Paul (cf. Acts 13). *Silvanus* (Silas) was Paul's companion during the latter's second missionary journey (Acts 15:40).[85] He was so closely associated with Paul that he is mentioned as co-sender of some of the letters.[86]

### 2.9.3. Empowering Lay Leaders

There were *lay people* too among his close co-workers (Rom 16:1-16). The renowned couple – *Prisca* (*Priscilla*) and *Aquila* are among the more prominent lay leaders (Rom 16:3-5a).[87] They corrected *Apollos* on certain theological points and instructed him in faith (Acts 18:26). Some other outstanding lay leaders were *Epaphroditus*, who is qualified as co-worker and fellow-soldier (Phil 2:25) and *Epaphras* who evangelized the Lycus valley (Col 1:6-8; 4:13; Phlm 23).

Paul understood the power and effectiveness of feminine genius. Among the prominent women collaborators of Paul we find *Phoebe*, *Prisca* and *Junia*. *Phoebe* (Rom 16:1-2) is mentioned as an active community leader as *diakonos* [88] like Paul himself (1 Cor 3:5). He also calls her *prostatis*,[89] thereby reaffirming her leading role in the church of Cenchrae. *Prisca* was Paul's generous hostess, during his prolonged stay at Corinth and Ephesus.[90] With the addition of 'in Christ Jesus' to her work he wanted to emphasize her participation in the service of the Gospel like her husband even by risking her life.[91] She may be considered the first woman theologian who instructed the learned Alexandrian *Apollos*. Paul presents *Junia* (Rom 16:7) as a fellow prisoner more in the sense of 'being prisoners together for the same cause,' than being in the same place.[92] She

is designated as *outstanding among the apostles*.[93] She along with her missionary team member (Andronicus) received high praise.[94]

Considering certain tendencies to relativise their mission on the claim that Paul subordinated the role of women, it is significant how he esteemed them as his colleagues in mission and recognized their leadership role like their male counterparts.[95] What was seen as a barrier (e.g. male-female distinction) was considered by him as complementary roles for building up communities. He was just putting into practice his vision of humanity in Christ where religious, social and gender discrimination does not exist (Gal 3:26-28).[96] Thus, he shared the vision of Jesus who re-defined radically the place and role of women in his community.

#### **2.9.4. Inspiring Leadership**

Paul's leadership role should not be reduced to some sociological phenomenon. Though he had a wide circle of co-workers at various levels, he exercised leadership *as apostle par excellence* (1 Cor 9:1-2; Gal 1:1.15-16), father and founder of communities (1 Cor 3:10; 4:15). The participatory dimension of ministry helped him to understand that ministers are only *servants* (1 Cor 3:5; 5:20), and ministry is *diakonia* and grace (1 Cor 3:5-6).

He understood leadership as empowering others. He exercised his authority in order to inspire, encourage and to build up as he himself states: "for building up, and not for tearing down" (2 Cor 13:10). He trusted his co-workers, delegated power and commended them for their significant contribution as is indicated by the titles and the type of ministry they were engaged in (Rom 16:1-21). He not only wrote about diversity of charisms and ministries (1 Cor 12; Eph 4), but also put this insight into practice.

#### **2.9.5. Promoting Relationships**

Paul understood that leadership is a relationship. One should not consider Pauline model of collaborative ministry merely from a functional point of view, i.e. for the sake of effective management and results. He worked through his relationships. His co-workers were not mere instruments and agents. He cultivated deep and sincere relationships both with his communities and individual ministers. This personal attention qualifies him to be a transformational leader.

Many of the terms that Paul used to qualify his co-workers emphasized this relationship dimension and indicate his genuine appreciation of them. An experience of communion led to a ministry of building up communities for communion. In other words, he was creating the social capital that would contribute to the success of his mission.[97]

But there were also instances of strained relationships e.g. between Paul and Barnabas with regard to John Mark (Acts 15:36-41). Later, Paul seemed to have made up with Barnabas (1 Cor 9:6) and Mark (Col 4:10), and wanted to welcome him back (2 Tim 4:11). He appealed to Euodia and Synteche to bury their differences and to be reconciled with each other for the sake of the Gospel (Phil 4:2-3). He was gracious in commending Apollos to the Corinthian community (1 Cor 16:12) in spite of their earlier disagreement (1 Cor 1:10-17). Even though he had serious differences with Peter, Paul submitted himself to his authority (Gal 2:6-14). He was respectful in dissent, magnanimous in the face of opposition, forgiving and caring in the face of rejection. He had the ability to look beyond personal interests to wider horizons of mission. For the sake of the Gospel, he could transcend differences and transform them into opportunities (Phil 1:18).

## **Paul, Then and Now**

Though the situations and circumstances then and now are different, Paul's vision and practice can throw up insights that are helpful, particularly in the Indian context.

### **3.1. Witnessing to the Gospel**

It is said that faith cannot be taught, but can only be shared as a lived experience. This was the starting point of Paul. He emphasized this experiential dimension in all his teaching: "For me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21) or "It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). He was not just imparting knowledge about Christ. He insisted on personal integrity in his own life and that of his co-workers for effective witnessing (1 Cor 4:15-16; 11:1). Paul outlines certain features that should characterize the life of those who proclaim the gospel: commitment, basic convictions, sincerity, honesty and

integrity, love of justice, transparency in life, perseverance, adaptability and flexibility. They are necessary for *responsible stewardship and credible witnessing*. There is no better way of mission than the witness of a transformed life (see 1 Jn 1:1), as Pope Paul VI has it so well formulated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”[98]

### **3.2. Ministry of the Word**

The mission of the Church is to be grounded in the *word of God*. One of the priorities of the missionary task proposed by the first Asian Mission Congress is “a deeper study and living of the word of God in such a way that the power of Jesus’ story transforms our life.”[99] Prophet Malachi pronounces a condemnation on all those who neglect this ministry (Mal 2:8-9). The temptation to abandon the ministry of the Word, for other more visible and measurable forms of ministry is an ever-present one (Acts 6:2), and the cry of the Ethiopian seeking an interpretation of the Word is felt even more strongly today (Acts 8:31).

The role of the ministers of the Word is to help the community to see life against the backdrop of God’s plan. Thus ministry of the Word becomes telling a story that is both “Good” and “News”, giving life to the Scriptures. What is needed today is a *meaningful interpretation* of the Scriptures that can recreate the Emmaus experience of the disciples (Lk 24:13-35), or a *prophetic proclamation* of the Word, as Jesus did in the Synagogue of Nazareth (Lk 4:16-21) that can provide a vision for the future and help people to see it as challenging and energizing their lives.

### **3.3. Relationship Model**

Paul attached great importance to personal relationship as can be seen by his use of a set of terms and expressions which are very personal. His personal approach is evident in relation to his co-workers and to the communities. The way he described the communities gives a clear indication of his personal relationship with them (1 Thess 1:2-10; 2:17-20; Phil 1:3-8). Small Christian Community (SCC) model is a viable and practical model to promote personal relationship and fellowship within the community. In this

way, community-building becomes a life-giving activity and creates in the people an awareness of 'belonging to each other.' Personal relationship in building up communities has become all the more necessary and requires urgent attention as Pentecostal groups/sects are making inroads into established churches.

### **3.4. Participatory Leadership**

Paul's idea that a minister is co-working with God (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1) implies that all ministers are fellow-workers among themselves (1 Cor 3:9). The leadership has to support and empower the co-workers. The beauty and fruitfulness of the vine is in the beauty and fruitfulness of its branches (Jn 15:1-10). When Jesus noticed that the people had no food, without intervening immediately, he empowered the disciples: "You give them something to eat" (Lk 9:13).

The task of the leaders is to facilitate the emergence of various ministerial gifts in the communities, particularly of the lay faithful. Leadership is exercised in such a way that people are challenged to go beyond themselves. Following the house church model, the Small Christian Communities can help to identify talented community leaders and provide opportunities for participatory leadership.

The vision of the intellectuals, the generosity of women, the dynamism of the youth and the resourcefulness of lay movements offer immense possibilities and can be of great assistance. But it calls for creative approaches, openness and readiness to collaborate. It may be a worthwhile to think of *relevant and functioning models of participatory structures and leadership*, particularly where participatory decision making is a constituent element of society particularly in the tribal societies of North-East India.

Paul provided the theological basis for understanding the *role of women in the Church* in terms of "reciprocal partnership and inclusive leadership." [100] The concluding Statement of the 28<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the CBCI can be considered a reflection of an awakening in the Church. [101] The Bishops, after reaffirming the pain expressed in their 1992 Assembly Statement, commit themselves to more purposeful action. [102] A meaningful celebration of the Pauline Year

provides an opportunity to initiate such a mission. Let us hope for the days when the ‘Priscas’ in the Church are given recognition, so that they can instruct and guide the ‘Apollos’ of our time.

### **3.5. Involvement in *Peace-efforts***

In the world and in India particularly, there are conflicts at various levels: social, ethnic, economic and even religious. Fear and suspicion characterize modern society. But there is also a deep desire for peace. The ministry of peacemaking responds to this longing for peace. Reconciliation precedes peace. Ultimately it should lead to harmony and communion. The prophetic mission of the Church should include efforts to usher in peace and harmony among various groups of people, by promoting justice, cultivating appreciation of others, and initiating structures for communion and fellowship. This also means freeing human beings from selfishness and isolation, from fear and threat (real or perceived) and opening up new possibilities for harmonious co-existence and meaningful collaboration. This can be done by facilitating constant interaction and creative and meaningful dialogue within the Church and in relation to others. The Church as the bearer of the *Good News* must offer it in such a way that it truly becomes so.

### **3.7. Inculturating the Gospel**

Pope John Paul II presented Paul as a model of cultural and religious dialogue.[103] Images, metaphors, symbols and terms existing in the socio-cultural and religious context of the people can communicate better than what is expressed through literal translation.[104] They have a more effective evocative and communicative power, and as they are drawn from the life of the people, they experience some kind of connaturality with them.

*Knowing the people* requires total insertion which includes knowledge of their language, culture and religious beliefs, traditions and practices, myths, stories and folklore, and above all the values that are embodied in them (EA 20f). Inculturation has to help the integration of the Christian experience of the local Church into its cultural ethos, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of a culture, but becomes a force that animates

this culture. This can also contribute towards the promotion of a ‘peoples’ theology.’[105] Inculcation of the message has to “bring the power of the Gospel in the very heart of culture and cultures.”[106] The cultural sensitivity and creativity that Paul showed can serve as a model for communication of the Gospel without compromising its non-negotiable aspects.[107]

## Conclusion

Paul’s methods of building communities can provide very useful insights for developing a relevant missionary-pastoral theology and praxis. Pastoral presence and availability, adaptability, a Word-centred ministry and Christ-centred spirituality, peace-making, participatory leadership with focus on team ministry, building up the local Church by developing contextual theologies and inculcated forms of worship, and communion model of the Church, are some of the aspects that have special relevance for India.

## Notes

- [1] A discussion on the two types of texts i.e. from Acts (9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:4-18) and from Paul (Gal 1:11-17; Phil 3:7-12; 1 Cor 15:8, 44-45; 2 Cor 4:6) or distinction between Acts 9 which is a third person narrative and Acts 22 & 26 which are speech narratives, is beyond the scope of this paper.
- [2] See F. Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament* (ed.) Frank Clarke (London: SCM, 1965) 68.
- [3] P. T. O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul. An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI/Carlisle: Baker Books/Paternoster Press, 1995) 5. Opinions are divided whether or not Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus can appropriately be called a ‘conversion.’ Kreister Stendhal argued that we should speak, not of Paul’s conversion but rather of his call. Paul receives a new and special calling in God’s service... Paul was called to a specific task – made clear to him by his experience of the risen Lord of apostleship to the Gentiles. However, the Jewish scholar Alan Segal insists that Paul was both converted and called. As cited by D. Horrell, *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* (London: Continuum, 2002) 26-27.
- [4] His conversion was not a mere change of religion. He was neither tormented nor guilt-ridden because of his sins; nor did he experience an

inner conflict from which he needed to be delivered. Therefore he was not just rescued from a life of aimless dissipation to a life of Christian virtue. See F. Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ: The Mind and Heart of St Paul* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1993) 32.

- [5] Crossan and Reed discuss the question whether Paul was primarily focusing on Gentiles as a whole or the devout Greeks and semi-Jews or pagan *sympathizers*. See J. D. Crossan & J. L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: A New Vision of Paul's Words and World* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2004) 34-41.
- [6] O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 11.
- [7] This is the *eschatological* dimension of his ministry in so far as his preaching is meant together the Jews and the Gentiles. O'Brien. *Gospel and Mission*, 12, 45-46.
- [8] It is the title by which he introduces himself in his letters the exception being 1-2 Thess. Crossan and Reed think that for Luke, “Paul was not an apostle and could never be one” because he insists on ‘presence with earthly Jesus’ as a criterion and considers the Twelve as a closed group, whereas for Paul “Apostolicity derives from revelation and vocation by the risen Lord” (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:1, 15-16; 1Cor 1:1; 9:3; 15:8-10; 2 Cor 1:1). See, *In Search of Paul*, 28-30. He is less an apostle as he was not an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry and did not belong to *numerus clausus* of the Twelve, but is a great apostle as *servant of the Word and the Spirit and a pioneer of inculturation*. See L. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality. Mission in the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988) 111.
- [9] *Theologia crucis* was central to his understanding of the gospel. In a way he makes it as a characteristic that distinguishes him from his rival ‘apostles’ who believed in ‘signs, wonders and mighty works’ (2 Cor 12:12). See C. Roetzel, *Paul: The Man and the Myth* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 54-60. In Gal 1-2; 6:11-18 1 Cor 9 as well as in 2 Cor 10-13 he defends at length his right to this title.
- [10] In his early letters the term apostle was used in the sense of missionary (1 Thess 2:7; Phil 2:25). Though he did not consider himself as one of the twelve and he did not have contact with earthly Jesus, he defends himself and the mandate he received from the Lord (Gal 1:1.11-16; 2:7-10). See Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 117-118. Crossan & Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 28-30.
- [11] L. M. Bermejo, *Paul, Missionary, Mystic, Martyr* (Anand: Gujrat Sahitya Prakash, 2007) 310-319; F. Pereira, “Prayer in St. Paul,” *Bible Bhashyam* 5 (1979) 40-62. See also J. Varickasseril, *Prayer and Min-*

istry: A Harmonious Spirituality of Contemplation and Action in the Acts of the Apostles (Studies in Spirituality -1; Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2007) 328-365.

- [12] As cited by Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 129.
- [13] T. d'Aquino Sequeira, "Prayer: A Pauline Perspective," *Jeevadhara* 33/104 (2003) 148-149.
- [14] O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 30.
- [15] Rom 1:8-10; 1 Cor 1:4-5; Eph 3:16-19; Col 1:9-11.
- [16] Acts 16:25; 20:36; 21:5, 20; 27:35; 28:8, 15.
- [17] Most of his letters begin with a prayer e.g. Rom 1:8-12; 1 Cor 1:4-9; 2 Cor 1:3-5; Phil 1:3-11; 1 Thess 1:2-4; 2 Thess 1:3-5; Phlm 4-5; Eph 1:3-13; Col 1:3-11. See L. Legrand, "St Paul the Missionary," *Vaiharai* 12/2 (2007) 13.
- [18] S. C. Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," in J. D. G. Dunn (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 46.
- [19] Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 111.
- [20] Rom 11:33-36; 1 Cor 2:6-10; Eph 3:1-12, 20-21; Col 1:25-29. See Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 127.
- [21] J. Murphy- O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 124.
- [22] Rom 15:15-16 presents him as a liturgical minister (*leitourgos*) and his ministry of the Word as priestly service (*hierourgein*). O'Brien speaks of a new type of cultic act that takes place 'out in the world' rather than in the Temple, thereby transcending the cultic barrier between sacred and secular. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 30-32, 39-41. Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 39.
- [23] Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 111.
- [24] T. Manjaly, "Missionary as Builder of Communities: Mission Strategy in 1 Thess 2, 1-12," *Indian Missiological Review* 18/3 (1996) 83-96.
- [25] See T. Manjaly, "Missionary and Pastoral Images in 2 Tim 2, 1-26," *Indian Missiological Review* 19 (1997) 81-90, especially pp. 82-89; T. Manjaly, *Collaborative Ministry: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Synergos in Paul* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2001) 39-48.
- [26] Beverly Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2007) 6.

- [27] For the following images see Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 37-38.
- [28] Paul's role is referred to as evangelism in the sense of sowing the seed of the Gospel through preaching (cf. Mk 4:1-20; 4:34-38): planting (1 Cor 3:6-9; 9:7, 10, 11), laying the foundation (1 Cor 3:10; Rom 15:20), giving birth (1 Cor 4:15; Phlm 10) and betrothing (2 Cor 11:2). See O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 42.
- [29] See above section on images of community building. See also T. Manjaly, "Mission as Mothering," *Bible Bhashyam* XXV/3 (1999) 165-185.
- [30] Roetzel, *Paul: The Man and the Myth*, 52. According to Gaventa, paternal and maternal images are not interchangeable. Whereas the former emphasizes the singular act of begetting, the latter focuses on nurturing over a longer period of time. Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 12.
- [31] Barton says that Paul may have travelled as much as ten thousand miles. See "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 40; R. Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979) 59-61.
- [32] The exceptions are Corinth about two years and Ephesus for about three years (during the third journey).
- [33] R. W. Funk, "Apostolic Parousia, Its Form and Significance," in W. R. Farmer, C.F.D. Moule & R.R. Niebuhr (eds.) *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies presented to John Knox* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968) 249-268, especially 252-255.
- [34] Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 46.
- [35] Of the 260 chapters in the New Testament, Paul has some 87 of them, which constitute nearly a third of the New Testament.
- [36] Titus was sent to Corinth in the midst of tension between Paul and the Corinthians. Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 46.
- [37] Paul presents theological issues such as justification by faith and redemption (Rom-Gal), Christology (Phil-Col), mystery of the Church (1 Cor-Eph-Col), baptism (Rom 6) the Eucharist (1 Cor 11), resurrection and eschatology (1 Cor 15; 1 -2 Thess) or ethical and moral questions (1 Cor 5-7), and pastoral issues such as Eucharistic gathering (1 Cor 11) diversity of charisms (1 Cor 12-14).
- [38] Roetzel, *Paul: The Man and the Myth*, 53.

- [39] T. R. Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downer Grove, IL / Leicester: InterVarsity / Apollos, 2001) 88.
- [40] Paul faced opposition from Jews and Gentiles (cf. 2 Cor 11:24-26). See Crossan & Reed, *In search of Paul*, 39-40.
- [41] Gloria Patmury, *The Disappointments of St Paul in his Missionary Endeavour* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1992) 28-93 for details.
- [42] See R. F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 31-37.
- [43] 2 Cor 4:10-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-28; Phil 4:10-13; 1 Thess 2:1-12. His credentials – suffering and hardships - are hardly ambassadorial credentials (2 Cor 4: 8-12; 6:4-5). But he wanted to make it clear that he is an ambassador of the sinless one who through his death reconciled the world to God. Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 36-37.
- [44] Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 99, 102.
- [45] 1 Thess 2: 1-4; 3: 3; 1 Cor 1:18-25; 2 Cor 4: 10-11; Col 1: 24. In 1 Cor 4:9-13 Paul presents *theologia crucis* along with a *theologia gloriae*.
- [46] Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 102.
- [47] Paul refers to the suffering of the ministers as their actual living out of the suffering of Christ (1 Cor 4:10-13a; 2 Cor 4: 8-9; 6: 4b-5; 6: 8-10; 11:23b-29; Rom 8: 35; Phil 4, 12).
- [48] Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 45.
- [49] For details see the section on *self-supporting mission*.
- [50] *Timothy* - 2 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:19-23; 1 Thess 3:1-2; *Titus* - 2 Cor 8:22-24.
- [51] The Philippian community is proposed a model of authentic Christian life and missionary collaboration (Phil 1:3-7; 4:14-18). Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 124.
- [52] W. Kasper, "On the Church: a friendly reply to Cardinal Ratzinger," *Furrow* 52 (2001) 326 - 328.
- [53] Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 236. See also V. P. Branick, *The House Church in the Writings of Paul* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989); D. Birkey, "The House Church: A Missiological Model," *Missiology* 19 (1991) 69-80; H. Hendrickx, "The "House Church" in Paul's Letters," *Theology Annual* 12 (1990-91) 154-166.
- [54] E.g. Lydia - Acts 16:11-15; Crispus – 18:8. The household was more than a modern nuclear family: it included members of the family, slaves,

hired labourers, tenants, business associates and more distant kinsmen. The house church of Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15), Gaius (1 Cor 1:14; Rom 16:12-13), Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2), Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3-5; Acts 18:2) Philemon (Phlm 2) and Nympha (Col 4:15) were prominent among them.

- [55] ‘To send someone on’ was a technical term in the NT to offer support for a missionary journey (Rom 15:23-24; 1 Cor 16:6.11; 2 Cor 1:16; Tit 3:13; Acts 15:3).
- [56] Paul did his preaching in houses (1 Cor 1:16; Acts 16:15, 40; 17:5-6 18:3, 7), while recovering from sickness (Gal 4:13-15), or from persecutions (1 Thess 2:2), or in prison (Phil 1:12-14; Phlm 10).
- [57] Synagogues in Antioch of Pisidia: Acts 13:13-49; Iconium: Acts 14:1; Thessalonica – Acts 17:1; Beroea – 17:10; Athens – 17:17; Corinth - 18:4; Ephesus – 18:19; 19:18. See Crossan & Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 35-40.
- [58] See also 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8; 1 Cor 4:11-12; 9:6-7, 12b-15, 18; 2 Cor 12:13-14. Prisca and Aquila provided Paul place for practising his profession of tent making. See R. F. Hock, “The Workshop as social setting for Paul’s missionary Preaching,” *CBQ* 41 (1979) 438-450.
- [59] Even 1 Thess 2:1-12 does not conclusively show that he preached while working. It is only an inference, mostly based on the practice of Greek philosophers (e.g. Socrates in the house of Cynic Simon). If he actually did, that would have provided him with an opportunity to reach out so many people, as he seems to have practiced his trade in many places. Hock, “The Workshop as social setting,” 438, 444-450.
- [60] K. J. Hanlon, *Paul: Pastor of Communities for today* (Middlegreen: St Paul, 1991) 12.
- [61] R. Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983) 10-12.
- [62] Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 14-17.
- [63] The business contacts of Lydia, or Prisca and Aquila could provide useful missionary network.
- [64] Legrand, “St Paul the Missionary,” 10.
- [65] Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 17.
- [66] J. Patmury, “Concepts and Strategies of Paul’s Mission” in J. Kavunkal and F. Hrangkhuma (eds.) *Bible and Mission in India Today* (FOIM Series 1; Mumbai: St Pauls, 1993) 157.

- [67] G Soares-Prabhu, "The New Testament as a Model of Inculturation," *Jeevadharma* 6 (1976) 269-270.
- [68] For a very exhaustive treatment of metaphors in Paul, see David J. Williams, *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).
- [69] The Torah is much more than *nomos*; *Dikaiosyne* is more than legal justice. *Mysterion*, as used in Greek mystery cult, could not explain adequately the mystery of Christ.
- [70] For example, the meaning of the death of Christ is expressed as reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20; Rom 5:10-11; Eph 2:16), sacrifice (Rom 3:25; 8:3), redemption (Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 7:21-23; Gal 4:5) self-giving/emptying (Gal 1:4; Phil 2:7), etc. D. Fleming., *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns of Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005) 106.
- [71] Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 107.
- [72] E.g. 2 Cor 4:13 = Pss. 114:6 & 115:1; Phil 2:8 = Ps 114:6-9.
- [73] L. Legrand, "The Missionary Significance of Areopagus Speech," in G Gispert-Sauch (ed.) *God's Word among Men* (Delhi: Vidyajyoti, 1973) 69-71; cf. T. Manjaly, "Gospel – Culture interface: A Biblical approach," *Omnis Terra* 36, no. 324 (2002) 68.
- [74] Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 42.
- [75] 1 Cor 16:1-4; Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25-27; Acts 20:16.22; 24:17.
- [76] Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," 36-37.
- [77] D .J. Harrington, "Paul and Collaborative Ministry," *New Theology Review* 3 (1990) 62.
- [78] Rom 12:3-8, 27; 1 Cor 6:15; 10:16-17; 12:12, 27; Eph 1:23; 4:11-16; 5:22; Col 1:15-20.
- [79] Traditional interpretation considers Luke as Paul's travelling companion. But there are difficulties e.g. Chronology. E. Stourton, *Paul of Tarsus .A visionary Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2005) 80-82.
- [80] Paul began his ministry at the invitation of Ananias. Later on, Barnabas became his mentor and presented Paul to the apostles. As a team Barnabas and Paul were sent to Antioch (Acts 11:30). When the two separated (Acts 15:37-40), he started a new configuration of co-workers: first Silas, later on Timothy and Titus, gradually inducting new members, such as local and house Church leaders including women.

- [81] T. Manjaly, "The Pauline House Church: Some Pastoral Reflections," in G. Kottuppallil and J. Varickasseril (eds.) *He Taught: A Festschrift in Honour of Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh*, SDB (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996) 12-41.
- [82] Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 234-235. Prisca and Aquila were in Rome (Acts 18:1), in Corinth (1 Cor 16:19) Ephesus (2 Tim 4:19) and again in Rome (Rom 16:3-5a). Through business Epaphras too had wide contacts.
- [83] The travelling missionaries made use of such occasions for deepening the faith of the house church members. It is perhaps for this reason that the early Church considered refusal to provide for the needs of itinerant missionaries as equivalent to working against the gospel (3 John 1-10).
- [84] Paul seemed to have had three categories of co-workers: the inner circle consisting of Barnabas, Silas, Timothy and perhaps Titus; independent co-workers like Titus, Priscilla and Aquila; ad finally local community leaders like Epaphroditus, Epaphras, Gaius, Euodia and Syntechi etc... W.-H. Ollrog, *Paulus und Seine Mitarbeiter. Untersuchungen zu Theorie und Praxis der paulinischen Mission* (WMANT 50; Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1979) 119-125.
- [85] In Philippi (16:19-40), in Thessalonica (17:1-9), in Corinth (1 Cor 1:19).
- [86] In the section on emissaries we have referred to Timothy and Titus. They are given Paul's favourite title for co-workers: *synergos*. The largest use of *syn* compounds in the NT is in Paul, circa 120 words. See T. R. Glover, "A Preposition of St. Paul's," *Exp. VIII Series 12* (1916) 292; McGrath, "Syn Words in Saint Paul," *CBQ*, 14 (1952) 219; Manjaly, *Collaborative Ministry*, 49-58.
- [87] P. A. Sampathkumar, "Aquila and Priscilla: A Family at the Service of the Word," *Indian Theological Studies* 34/1-3 (1997) 185-201.
- [88] In the light of 1 Tim 3:8-13, where Paul lays down qualities for a deacon (*diakonos*), Phoebe can be considered a minister in the Church. See, R. Bieringer, "Women leadership in Romans 16: The leading Roles of Phoebe, Prisca and Junia in Early Christianity," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 44 (2007) 228-230. Susan Smith, "Women Coworkers and Apostles with Paul," *The Bible Today* 46 (2008) 93-98; Mary Ann Beavis, "I Command to You Our Sister: Women in Romans 16:1-16," *The Bible Today* 46 (2008) 227-232.

- [89] The term as applied to Phoebe probably means 'benefactor' or 'patroness', underscoring her protective role towards those under her care, by offering financial support to travelling missionaries, social networks and probably defending Christian causes before secular authorities. The use of *prohistemi* in Rom 12:8 & 1 Thess 5:18 indicate this. See, Bieringer, "Women leadership in Romans 16," 230-232; J. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993) 731.
- [90] In four of the six references to the couple, Prisca is named first (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19), and in Acts 18:2 & 2 Cor 16:19 after Aquila. The leadership role of Prisca is significant. She is called *synergos*, Paul's favourite title for co-workers like Euodia and Synteché. See Manjaly, *Collaborative Ministry*, 256-258 & 282-291.
- [91] See Acts 18:2-3.18.26; Rom 16:3-5; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19. In the Acts there seems to be a tendency to play down their role to that of being hosts and fellow tentmakers, may be in an attempt to give greater importance to Peter and Paul. See Bieringer, "Women leadership in Romans 16," 320-321.
- [92] For a discussion on the gender of Junia see Manjaly, *Collaborative Ministry*, 259-260 and footnotes 72-75, Bieringer, "Women leadership in Romans 16," Part II, 322-325 and E. J. Epp, *Junia: The first Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 69-81.
- [93] Bieringer concludes that Paul was speaking of a woman Junia, that she was prominent among the Apostles because of her role in the mission of the church (not just considered eminent by the apostles) and that he was speaking of her as apostle in the real sense because of her leadership role. Bieringer, "Women leadership in Romans 16," 328. See for discussion, ibid. pp. 325-328.
- [94] Epp thinks that Junia and Andronicus were probably a missionary couple. See *Junia*, 69-81.
- [95] There were other women co-workers: Tryphana and Tryphosa (Rom 16:12); Persis (Rom 16:12); Mary (Rom 16:6), and Julia (Rom 16:15); Nympha, who hosted a house Church (Col 4:15); Euodia and Synteché, Paul's close co-workers in his struggles for the Gospel (Phil 4:2-3); Apphia, a missionary colleague (Phlm 1-2) and Eunice, mother of Timothy who served the missionaries in journey (2 Tim 1:5).
- [96] Paul applied titles to his women co-workers just as he did to his male co-workers.
- [97] R.S. Ascough & Sandy Cotton, *Passionate Visionary. Leadership Lessons from the Apostle Paul* (Indian Edition; Mumbai: St Pauls, 2006) 79.

- [98] Pope Paul VI, Address to the members of the *Consilium de Laicis* (2 October 1974): *AAS* 66 (1974) 568 as cited in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) no. 41.
- [99] Chiang Mai, 18-22 October, 2006. See *L'Osservatore Romano* (English Ed. 24 January, 2007) 9.
- [100] R. Chennattu, titles her recent article, "Reciprocal Partnership and Inclusive Leadership." See in S. J. Pukunnel & J. Varickasseril (eds.) *Learning from St. Paul. Reflections for the Pauline Year* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute and DBCIC Publications, 2008) 139, 141-146.
- [101] At Jamshedpur on 13-20 February, 2008 on the theme "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society." See *Vidyajyoti* 72/4 (2008) 301-305 for the Statement, and 72/6 (2008) 402-475 for the Keynote Address and the Responses.
- [102] "With a sense of sorrow we must admit that the women feel discriminated against, even in the Church" quoted in the *2008 Statement*, 302. "We commit ourselves as a body to evolve within a period of one year from now, a gender policy developed by each Regional Bishops' Conference with time bound action plans for their region with monitoring mechanisms." See *Statement*, 304.
- [103] The Pope says, "Evangelizers can take heart from the experience of Saint Paul engaged in dialogue with the philosophical, cultural and religious values of his listeners." See Post-Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA), no. 20. He encourages narrative method and relational, historical and cosmic perspectives, which are akin to peoples' cultural forms in order to present Christ (no. 20).
- [104] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) no. 63; EA, no. 20g.
- [105] The process of genuine inculcation calls for *an attitude of openness, a cultural metanoia and creativity*. See Manjaly, "Gospel-Culture Interface," 71-73
- [106] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) no. 53. T. Menampampil, "Becoming All Things to Men," *Word & Worship* 36/2 (2003) 93.
- [107] D. Fleming, "Contextualizing the Gospel at Athens: Paul's Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication," *Missionology* XXX/2 (2002) 207; T. Menampampil, "Know the People you serve," in P. Haokip, T. Manjaly & K. Poovathumkudy (eds.) *Know Your People. Cultural Sensitivity in Formation* (Shillong: Orients Publications, 2005) 37-51.

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## **From Fragmentation to Communion: impact of Pauline Perception and Praxis on Ministries**

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*Abstract:* In this article from subaltern perspective, the author studies the impact of Pauline perception and praxis on ministries. He asserts that the conflicts and opportunities presently encountered by the people, especially of the subaltern sectors in our country, are multifaceted. The diagnostic framework for grappling with these complex issues could be evolved through the following three snapshots: (1) Universalist Outlook Vs. Particularist Outlook (2) Institutional Authority Vs. Charismatic Authority (3) Accumulation of Power Vs Democratisation of Power.

The people of God, as the very living extension of the murdered but Risen body of the Eucharistic Lord with the self-emptying spirit unto death, are none but the community-building community thrown amidst conflict-ridden situations with historical uncertainties. Their role is to function as the members of the enlivening God of history in bringing out the fullness of life as envisaged by the same very Lord of history. Whatever be one's identity, status, birth or opportunity, each of the members of the battered and fragmented body of Christ has to be incorporated as the harmoniously integrated body of Christ as a unified and living cosmotheandric organism of Christ. This leads from Fragmentation to genuine Communion.

*Keywords:* Universalist Outlook, Particularist Outlook, Institutional Authority, Charismatic Authority, Accumulation of Power, Democratisation of Power, Fragmentation, Communion, subalterns.

## **1.0 Conflict Situations**

The conflicts and opportunities presently encountered by the people, especially of the subaltern sectors in our country, are multifaceted. The diagnostic framework for grappling with these complex issues could be evolved through the following three brief snapshots:[1]

- (1) Universalist Outlook Vs. Particularist Outlook
- (2) Institutional Authority Vs. Charismatic Authority
- (3) Accumulation of Power Vs Democratisation of Power

### **1.1 Universalism Vs. Particularism**

The regional (particularism) voices of dissent[2] against the federal nature of Indian Nation (universalism) have indeed occupied the centre stage. Sidelining such regional voices will endanger even the survival of the Union Government of India today. The century old debate on pro-Reservation (particularism) and anti-Reservation (universalism) does not manifest any sign of receding back. Rather its emotional flames are fanned with fresh vigour when subaltern assertion and elite affront confront each other on the same issue.

The so-called Uniform Civil Code sought to be promulgated by those seeking to promote Cultural Nationalism acclaim the virtues of universalism. But those trying to uphold Secularism in the Indian context insist on the guarantee by the Constitution of India to affirm and protect the minorities and the pluralistic demography ((linguistic, religious, or ethnic). They underscore the merits of particularism. In the traditional age-old caste-ridden jurisprudence[3] the punishment gets more rigorous when meted out to the people of lower status than to those of higher status for the same crime (particularism). The jurisprudence of the Indian Penal Code governed by the Constitution of India articulates that every one is equal before law (universalism). But those who have the capacity to influence others at various levels through money and muscle power do escape the legal dragnets. Assertive cultural expressions of subaltern people against the imposed globalised cultural tenets are the impressive instances of constant dialogical space between the universalistic outlook and particularistic mindset.

All the above phenomena bear witness to the fact that, whenever convenient, universalism or particularism is deployed by the privileged as a weapon of oppression against others deemed to be inimical. In turn, the subalterns too deploy the same universalism or particularism as their weapon of assertion against the oppression they encounter.

## 1.2 Institutional Authority Vs. Charismatic Authority

Institutions could have a wide spectrum of impact upon people whom they seek or claim to serve. The wide range of the impacts could be short-listed as follows: (1) Killer Institutions, (2) Ambiguous Institutions, (3) Enlivening Institutions. For instance, different people may name the following list of the institutions in accordance with their ideological positions: Indo-US Nuclear Agreement, various Human Rights Organisations and NGOs with intervention on behalf of the deprived, the institution of marriage both for enlivening and dowry-sucking, the Naxalite networks both for serving the poor and killing spree, or the Union Carbide (Bhopal). The crux of the issue behind such labelling is whether an institution is perceived to have served or betrayed the people.

Similarly Charisms could have a wide spectrum of impact upon people whom they seek or claim to serve. The wide range of such impacts could be short-listed as follows: (1) Killer Charism, (2) Ambiguous Charism, (3) Enlivening Charism. Among the illustrious personalities with popular appeal like Aiswarya Rai, Amitabh Bachchan, Rajnikanth, Rajkumar both entertaining and amassing wealth, Adolf Hitler, Bal Thackaray, Narendra Modi, L.K. Advani, Mother Tresa, Ambedkar, Nelson Mandela could be labelled according to how they have served or betrayed the people.

No charism can function effectively to reach out to people at large without the help of institutional elements. And similarly no institution can humanly be utilized for people without the help of the charismatic elements. But the crux of the question is what type of creative combine of 'Charismatic Institution' or 'Institutional Charism' is to be ingenuously worked out in a given moment of history for adequately addressing the complex problems encountered especially by the subaltern people.

### **1.3 Accumulation of Power Vs. Democratisation of Power**

“[A]ggresive assertion of ethnic claims and identities worldwide often make the world community drift into a ‘Clash of Civilizations’.”[4] In this context, regarding the question of leadership, we find “old paradigms and presuppositions inadequate to engage with the phenomenal and unpredicted changes happening at this juncture of human history. New paradigms are not yet crystallized.”[5] One wonders who exactly operates as the epicentre of people’s power: George Bush, Osama-bin-Laden, Manmohan Singh, Prakash Karat, Narendra Modi, Persecuted Minorities, Karunanidhi, Jeyalalitha, Bal Thakaray, Amithab Bachchan, Mayavathi, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Mamta Banerjee, Ratan Tata or Naxalite Comrades? Ironically every one from all cues claim authority wielding some form of power, legitimate or illegitimate, in the name of serving people.

“‘Empowerment’, especially when divorced from a consideration of what constitutes ‘power’, seems to be a sanitized buzz-word of the mid-1990s, yet as Wright (1994: 163) has noted , the word itself has been part of the discourse of debureaucratisation for some two or more decades.”[6] Terms like ‘power/ authority’ are deployed by the power centres with dominant ideologies to indulge in anti-people excesses in the name of constitutional legitimacy.[7] The same terms are deployed by multiple spaces of civil society with ideologies of healthy secularism attuned to the Indic cultural sensibilities to promote human rights irrespective of the victims’ identities of caste, class, or creed.

### **2.0 India of 21st Century and Paul of 1st Century**

Even amidst the divergent contexts between the India of 21<sup>st</sup> century in the South Asia and Paul of 1<sup>st</sup> century of the Graeco-Roman World, the convergent dialogical space is the ethical need for journeying from the prevailing culture of fragmentation towards the ushering-in of the culture of communion. It is here that we seek to set the stage for a constructive, critical, and creative dialogue between Paul and India in view of establishing community-building communities. Though we cannot exhaustively treat all the aspects of both the Indian and the Pauline world, our point of departure in

this brief paper is the perception and praxis of MINISTRIES as transpired mainly through Pauline Epistles in the Second Testament. This could be done by raising the following three questions in the light of the conflict situations delineated in sections above (1.1-1.3):

- \* How to critically resolve conflicts created both by Universalism and Particularism?
- \* What could be the creative paradigms of encountering the dictatorship of both Charismatic Authority and Institutional Authority?
- \* How could we construct the mindset of democratic distribution of power against the ever-growing obsession with accumulating power both at the personal and collective levels?

### **3.0 Ministries for Community-Building**

The three sections below (2.1-2.3) attempt at identifying the constructive paradigms from the Pauline world by way of grappling with the questions raised above (section 2.0).

#### **3.1 Dialogue between Universal and Particular**

##### **3.1.1 Both Are Needed**

We come across the following four types of Jewish / Gentile Christianity in the Second Testament settings:[8] (1) Gentiles who became Jews, (2) Gentiles living in Israel, (3) Gentiles not under the Law, (4) Jesus has replaced Judaism. In the light of Rom 9:4-5; 10:1-42; 11:17-24; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 2:4,9,11-14; 3:10-13; 5:3; Phil 3:2-21, scholars have placed Paul in all the above four realms while attempting to construct the nature of his Jewish identity vis-à-vis his ministry to the Gentiles.

Paul was blameless in observing the Law even to the extent of persecuting the followers of Jesus. (Phil 3:6, 10). Though the Law is good in itself, it is exploited by the gripping reality of Sin (Rom 7:7-25). Zeal for the Law led him to believe in the Crucified Christ, the very root of righteousness for the accursed humanity (Gal 3:13-14). Sin and Death came to dominate humanity even before the Law came into existence. Giving of the Law did not erase Sin and Death (Rom

5: 5-21). The ‘in-Christ’ experience of conversion is the complete subversion of what he valued in the past (Phil 3: 8). Paul could not have freed himself from the clutches of the Law but for the divine intervention through Christ (Rom 8:1-3; Phil 3:9-14). The Gentiles need not feel superior to unbelieving Israel. It is the divine strategy to instil faith into the Gentiles through the disobedient Israel (Rom 11:13-32). It is the faith of Abraham (though with the signature of circumcision in his own body), which has made him the father of both the circumcised and uncircumcised believers (Rom 4:11-12). But the Judaizers of Jerusalem belong to the slave descendants of Abraham (Gal 4:21-31). “Paul is no less committed to the view that salvation comes to both Jew and Gentile through faith, but he leaves the story of Israel’s salvation open to further saving acts of God.”[9]

### **3.1.2 No Question of Domination by Both**

In the dialogue between the universalism and particularism, we come across in Paul’s perception at least the three expressions of the Gospel.[10]

- \* This *gospel* for the Gentiles “for the uncircumcision” (Gal 2:7) to bring liberty from the curse of law and from subjection to the law as a means of righteousness (2:16-5:12).
- \* This *gospel* for the Jews ‘for the circumcision’ represented by the Jerusalem-centred ‘pillar’ headed by none other than Peter. It was somewhat tolerant towards the legitimate space of the non-necessity of the circumcision to the Gentiles. Paul seems to be a bit perturbed that this expression of the Gospel, though might be appropriate for the intra-Jewish world, might lead to the greater degree of hair-splitting subjection to legalism(Gal 2: 2:4-10).
- \* This *gospel* as propagated by the proponents of the Palestine-based legalistic right wing was committedly against any possibility of the law-free Gentile mission. Whether Peter conceded to this *gospel* or not (Gal 1:7), Paul has vehemently condemned this as the perversion of the Gospel of Christ (Gal 1:8; 2:4-5; 5:12).

### **3.1.3 Creative Dialogue**

In the light of the discussions above we come across the following trends of Pauline insights leading him to identify what is absolute/ relative or universal/ particular, or non-negotiable/ negotiable in the cross-cultural contexts of the complex Graeco-Roman world of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century:

- \* The gratuitous gift of God's initiative through the murder and the resurrection of Jesus Christ to embrace all peoples across the globe irrespective of their ethnic, geographic or linguistic origin is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- \* For the Jews, the same Gospel of universal embrace came to be expressed through their long traditions in historic continuity with the Abrahamic covenantal discourses and Mosaic cultural discourses evoking the memory of the Exodus-event.
- \* But the universal embrace of the Gospel of Christ can in no way be imprisoned within the religio- cultural confines of the Jerusalem/ Palestine-based Jews.
- \* The criterion for assessing the validity of the Gospel of Christ is God's embrace of humanity through Jesus-event, but never the self-laudatory Jewish religio-cultural superiority or the impressive eloquence or brilliant organizational powers of individual proclaimers of the Gospel.
- \* Anyone or any thing falling short of recognizing the centrality of the Jesus-event in the salvific intervention of God (justification, reconciliation, or redemption) represents 'false apostles', servants of Satan', different gospel', or perversion of the Gospel' (cf. 2 Cor 10:13; Gal 1:6-9).
- \* In the light of the Gospel of the divine embrace through Jesus Christ, neither the Jewish superiority/ inferiority nor the Gentile superiority/ inferiority is the bone of the contention. But the uniqueness of Gentile history/ traditions or of the Jewish history/ traditions has their due space in the whole economy of salvation. "Never become a slave; Never enslave others" seems to be the universal appeal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **3.2 Discernment of Authority (Charismatic Vs. Institutional)**

#### **3.2.1 Paul's Introspection**

Paul's call as an Apostle is portrayed as an aggressive intervention enacted by God's sovereignty after the models of the call narratives with the commission from God in the First Testament. It seemed to have transformed this committed Jewish fundamentalist into a decisive witness to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all nations. By no means, his Apostleship was inferior to that of the Twelve constituted as Apostles before him by earthly Jesus (1Cor 9:1; 15: 5-8).[11] In Pauline understanding, the Apostle, as the unique witness of the risen Christ, becomes the foundation of the Church (1 Cor 3:11).[12]

Paul's leadership went ahead in full steam in establishing the community-building communities. His energies were perennially fuelled by the grip of his ineffable 'in-Christ' rootedness. His ability to set the stage for creative dialogue between the Gospel from the Palestinian cradle with the grand mix-up of peoples across the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman colonies with Hellenistic cultural sensibilities is quite amazing. This could not have been possible but for the creatively spontaneous process of cross-fertilization of the multiple cultures, with their respective spiritual energies, linguistic variations, and semantic nuances operative in the very fabric of his dynamic personality.[13]

#### **3.2.2 Pluralistic Blend of Charism & Institution**

While browsing through 1 Cor (12-14 especially), 2 Cor, and Rom, one might get the first impression that these communities were depending solely on charismatic leadership.[14] But in the light of some of the exhortations (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Cor 16:15, 18) we do come across the necessity of recognizing the authority of the appointed leaders devotedly taking care of the churches. And further the addressees are "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Phillipi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil 1:1). One has to perceive whether 'the bishops (overseers) and deacons (overseers and helpers)' are

deployed here to connote their respective functions or respective titles. Apparently the installing authority is not mentioned here. We come across the serving leaders[15] (ministry-'the leader' in NRSV is rendered as 'if you are put in charge' in NJB) is supposed to possess the special gift of the Spirit along with other multiple varieties of the charismatic gifts received by prophets, teachers, exhorters, or charity offerers. (Rom 12:7-8). "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues." (1Cor 12:28)[16]

### **3.2.3 No Antinomy between Charism & Institution**

In the light of the above ministerial trajectories as early as 52-63 ACE in Pauline communities, we come across the nebulous continuity and discontinuity between the Charismatic authority (ordained by the Divine) and Institutional authority (appointed by humans).[17] It is emphatically concluded by James D.GDunn as follows:[18]

At no time did Paul conceive of two kinds of Christians- those who have the Spirit and those who do not, those who minister to others and those who are ministered to, those who manifest charismata and those who do not. To be a Christian in Paul's view was to be charismatic. One cannot be a member of the body without being the vehicle of the Spirit's ministry to the body.

What exactly is the criterion for the validity of any authority-Charismatic or Institutional? The only overriding criterion for evaluating the outcome of the exercise of the multiple forms of charismatic gifts is the loving compassion (1 Cor 13). *Agap½* is not merely charitable acts or compassionate attitude or empathetic relationship. "Love is, perhaps, more of radiation, a wave phenomenon, rather than matter".[19]

### **3.3 Democratisation of Power**

#### **3.3.1 Leadership as Network**

The in-depth Pauline realization that the local community as a well-integrated as the charismatic community gets eloquently expressed through the powerful metaphor of ‘the body of Christ’ in his letters. Especially in the early ones it is not the universal Church but the very local Church or Churches which are referred to (Rom 12; 16:16; 1 Cor 7:17; 12:27; 16:1, 19).[20] The communities founded, sustained and supported by Paul have been, by and large, functioning at the initial stage of charismatic outburst of energies from its members.[21] These spontaneous and enthusiastic offers of each one’s natural gifts, talents, and skills have to be effectively streamlined for the causes of the common good (1 Cor 12:7, 11).

We do come across the following three circles of co-workers mentioned by their respective personal names in Pauline ministerial endeavours:[22]

1. Inner Circle: Co-missionaries like Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy who accompanied Paul during his journeys.
2. Second Circle: Independent co-workers like Priscilla, Aquila, and Titus who executed the directions of Paul in their respective communities.
3. Third Circle: Representatives from the local Churches like Epaphroditus, Epaphras, Gaius and others commissioned by Paul to build their respective communities.

The range of roles and functions assigned to these multilayered responsibilities are as follows:[23] Co-missionaries with Paul for a long or short while (Gal 2:1; Phil 2:19; Col 4:6-8; 1 Thess 1:1; Acts 15:2, 19:2), Emissaries for collecting and distribution of donations for the famine-stricken Jerusalem community (2 Cor 8:19; Acts 20:4-6), Well-placed women and women for hosting the prayer sessions and bread-breaking gatherings (Rom 16:3-5). One cannot but commend his enabling leadership in terms of “recruitment of capable, flexible, and committed people. He was generous in rewarding their performance and developing their competencies.”[24]

### **3.3.2 Delegation of Authority**

Though no designation is attributed to Timothy and Titus, they seem to have been authorized as delegates of Paul, the Apostle (1 Tim 1:3; Tit 1:5). Timothy is expected to function in place of Paul in counteracting heretical teachings (1 Tim 3:11), ordering the public worship (1 Tim 2:1-15), appointing bishops and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13), regulating the enlistment of the widows for monetary help (1 Tim 5:9-16), and ordaining, with due discernment, credible elders with appropriate remuneration (1 Tim 5:17-22). Titus was instructed to appoint elders who could preach sound doctrine while refuting heretical teaching (Tit 1:5-9). He was assigned to accomplish the same task (Tit 1:10-2:2). His duty was to ensure the credible Christian way of life expressed through edifying deeds and the avoidance of unproductive dissensions (Tit 2:3-3:11). The delegate of the Apostle is not merely the preacher through his words but through his deeds as a credible leader (Tit 2:7-8).

### **3.3.3 Roles of Elders, Bishops, and Apostles still Evolving**

The early Christian communities were in the making amidst conflicts. The story of the first Apostolic Council held in Jerusalem addresses the problematic of cultural diversity. It gets transpired through Acts in terms of agreement reached by the parties or representatives concerned (Acts 15:20) perhaps as the common minimum programme. The same event seems to be perceived through the eyes of Paul, not as a triumphalistic victory over the Jewish fundamentalists of Jerusalem or Judaisers. While stressing that a commandment of circumcision was not enforced (Gal 2:3), his “emphasis fell upon the demonstration of unity, symbolized by the collection for the Jerusalem church, a matter to which he often refers in his epistles (Rom 15:25; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8-9).”[25]

In the later days in Pastoral Epistles, we encounter the ‘offices’ or ‘quasi-offices’ like “elders” and “deacons” in the churches (1 Tim 3:8-13; 4:14; 5:17-19; Tit 1:5).[26]

Interestingly 1 Tim 3:11 perhaps refers to the wives of the deacons or deaconesses. But no role of women is referred to in the context of the function of the “bishop” in 1 Tim 3:1-7. The relation of the “bishop” (1 Tim 3:1-2; Tit 1:7- both times

in the singular) with the “elders” looks rather tenuous or unfixed. Perhaps, there are several elders from among whom they are appointed to rule (1 Tim 5:17) in contrast with some others who do not rule. One is not sure whether this possibility of fixing some elders to rule as ‘bishops’ was based upon those who have the organizing capacities, or hosting the prayer sessions or bread-breaking gatherings, or those having the credible qualities and virtues inspiring others.

Priestly ordination does not seem to have gained a great significance in the Pauline churches. For Paul the Spirit has surmounted the old Jewish distinction between priest and people and left it behind. All Christians have ministry and any member may be called upon to exercise any ministry. “Pauline church cannot be described as sacerdotal with only some having ministry and particular ministries confined to a few.”[27] However, the central role of “charisma” (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6) differs from what we hear of Jewish ordination supposed to be conferred on those who supposedly grow in wisdom with disciplined study under the rigorous formation of authorized Rabbis. The clear-cut divisions of job descriptions regarding the bishops, elders, or apostles assume complex legalistic turns and twists in the days to come when the Institutional Authority started manifesting its domination above the Charismatic Authority of the members of the churches.

#### **4.0 Ministerial Orientations for India Today**

Upon the foundations of the ‘in-Christ’ roots Paul builds up the role and function of the constructive power play in the ecclesial community to be rooted in Christ. And upon the ecclesial roots, he builds the personal and collective ethical behaviour in tune with organic rootedness in Christ whose organic link is the ecclesial community. Learning from the Lord Christ who voluntarily humbled himself to be ignominiously murdered as the criminal in public, the community members are supposed to “[D]o nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.” (Phil 2:3).[28] “It is a distinctive pattern of Christian life that no other New Testament writer has so forcefully proposed.”[29] With these creative Pauline leadership potentials of evoking faith response to the divine initiatives, one could visualize some of the paradigm shifts in the ministries undertaken in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian context.

#### **4.1 Constructive, Critical, and Creative Paradigm Shifts**

##### **Pauline World of 1<sup>st</sup> Century**

- Radical shift from legalistic Torah-centric ethnic obsession to freedom-centred all-embracing Divine embrace through the self-sacrificing murder of the Risen Jesus
- From the claim of the privileged status due to Jewish birth with its associate traditional cultural and practices to the Christian praxis of inclusive culture promoting egalitarian ethos (Gal 3:26-28)
- From the dictatorship of charismatic authority with its dramatic expression to bringing in the unintimidating virtue of the community-building *Agape* as a way of life (1 Cor 13).
- From the insistence on the accumulation of power by virtue of one's office or charisma to the prime agenda of distribution of power in tune

##### **Indian World of 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

- Need for moving from Christo-centrism through Theo-centrism leading to Life-centrism irrespective of one's caste, creed, colour, nation, gender
- From claim of attributed status by birth (caste and gender) to the attributed status of concretely achieving the victim-centred ethics of enlivening others
- From the dictatorship of tyranny of traditional, feudalistic, capitalistic, nationalistic, intimidatory, arms-twisting, institutional, legalistic leadership towards participatively collective leadership with consensus from the grass-roots of the last and the least.
- From the ever-growing ethos of accumulation of power to the distribution of responsibilities for the agenda of community-building founded on one's achieved ethical performances of other-

- with one's legitimate role and function primarily in the exercising of the community-building
- Claims of universal or particular are to be tempered with the divine heart-beat of promoting unity in diversity
- From holiness centred on circumcision to that on baptism into Christ
- Supremacy of the universal or particular has to be perennially explored with the discernment of the Spirit promising salvation to all through the differing divine strategies: one for the powers that be and other for the disempowered
- From holiness centred on ordination ritual to that on baptism to that on the very birth as human beings as co-born with mother Nature, co-worker with other humans, and creator with God.

## 4.2 Further Explorations

In the light of the above Paradigm shift that we identify Paul's perception and praxis of ministries in his 1<sup>st</sup> century Graeco-Roman world, let us spell out some of the broad orientations for our multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-caste, and multi-linguistic contexts of India today.

- \* Identification of conflicts operative in every sector of the people we are missioned to serve.
- \* Committed accompaniment with those who are on the losing ground, with a spontaneous sense of solidarity
- \* Contemplation of alternative visions through the eyes of the victims
- \* Encountering the oppressive mind-sets with prophetic credibility and courage
- \* Empowering the victims with prophetic compassion

- \* Evolution of new ways of democratization and distribution of power by critically deconstructing the patterns of accumulation of power in the existing hierarchical structures
- \* Identification of new methods of rereading the life-protecting oral and written resources operative in the reservoirs of the religio-cultural and intellectual traditions of people across the globe
- \* Strengthening the civil society from the underside of history for right intervention at the right moment against those forces causing conflicts engendering fragmentation of the people
- \* Enlightening that the divine embrace of universal salvation operates with differing strategies- one for the dominated and another for the dominant
- \* Being empowered only when enabling the victims to empower themselves with our role merely as hidden catalysts for such constructive societal transformation

The people of God, as the very living extension of the murdered but Risen body of the Eucharistic Lord with the self-emptying spirit unto death, are none but the community-building community thrown amidst conflict-ridden situations with historical uncertainties. Their role is to function as the members of the enlivening God of history in bringing out the fullness of life as envisaged by the same very Lord of history. Whatever be one's identity, status, birth or opportunity, each of the members of the battered and fragmented body of Christ has to be incorporated as the harmoniously integrated body of Christ as a unified and living cosmotheandric organism of Christ.[30]

### **Notes**

- [1] By doing so, we do not claim to have portrayed an all-comprehensive picture of the complex nature of the Indian situation in the current scenario.
- [2] Regional parties from various states cannot be bypassed by the so-called national parties in India today. Some of them cry hoarse even with militant war cry against the Centre from some states (Jammu & Kashmir) or the neighbouring states (Karnataka Vs. Tamil Nadu on Cauvery) or those migrant people from other states (Raj Thackery Vs. non- Maharashtrans in Maharashtra).
- [3] They are transpired through the texts of various *Dharma Shastras*. Of all of them *Manu Dharma* is vehemently under fire by the subaltern discourses even today.

- [4] Antony Kalliath, "Preface", in *Christian Leadership: The Shifting Focus in Theological Education*, Antony Kalliath (ed.), Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2001, p.7..
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] Angela Cheater, "Power in the Postmodern Era", in *An Anthropology of Power: Empowerment and Disempowerment in Changing Structures*, Angela Cheater (ed.), London: Routledge, 1999, p.1. also cf. S. Wright, *Anthropology of Organisation*, London: Routledge, 1994.
- [7] The anti-minority animosity with its outburst of violent campaign of hatred let loose by the Rightist fundamentalists in Orissa and Karnataka in the recent months is the typical example.
- [8] Cf. Raymond Brown & John P.Meier, *Antioch and Rome*, New York: Paulist Press, 1987, pp. 1-9.
- [9] Pheme Perkins, *New Testament Introduction*, Bombay: St.Paul's, 1992, p. 216.
- [10] Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, London: SCM Press, 1993- second edition- second printing, pp.23-24.
- [11] Neither the genuine epistles of Paul nor the Acts of Apostles spell out the formal authority of the originally chosen and sent out as Apostles. Cf. R.Eduard Schweizer, "Ministry in the Early Church", in David Noel Freedman & Others (eds.), *The AnchorBible Dictionary- Vol. IV*, New York: Double Day, 1992, p. 838.
- [12] This uniqueness of the witness proclaiming salvation to the listeners goes beyond the nature of eye witness of an event at a particular historical moment. It is clearly differentiated from other visions or auditions in his later days (2 Cor 11:16-17; 12:1-4).
- [13] Lucien Legrand, *The Bible on Culture: Belonging or Dissenting?* Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001, pp. 115-151, especially pp. 143-146.
- [14] There are proposals made even to the extent of suggesting that the institutional leadership was definitely a development in the post-Pauline Church. Cf. H. von Campehausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969.
- [15] Rom 12:7-*diakonian*- 'ministry' (NRSV)= 'gift of practical service, (NJB); Rom 12:8 - *proistamenos* - 'the leader' (NRSV) = 'put in charge' (NJB).
- [16] Though RSV personalizes all the impersonal form of charisms, NRSV restores the text, both with personal and impersonal categories, in tune with the original Greek text.

- [17] Cf. Cf. R.Eduard Schweizer, "Ministry in the Early Church", in *The AnchorBible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman & Others (eds.), Vol. IV, New York: Double Day, 1992, pp. 838-839.
- [18] James D. G Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, London: SCM Press, 1993 - second edition- second printing, p. 114.
- [19] For an effective articulation on "Love rather than Integrity" cf. Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979, pp. 52-68, especially p. 55.
- [20] Perhaps the same metaphor of the body of Christ might be extended to refer to the universal Church in the course of time in the post-Pauline era. Cf. Eph 4.
- [21] Cf. C.G.Kruse, "Ministry", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F.Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin & Daniel G. Reid (eds.), Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993, pp. 602-608.
- [22] Joseph Anikuzhikattil, "Paul the Missionary", *Ephrem's Theological Journal*, Vol. 12/ 1, March 2008, 15. Also cf. Rom 16:1-21; 1 Cor 3:9; 16:10, 15-18; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25; 4:2-3; Col 4:10-11;
- [23] Loyola, Michael John & Bhaskar Antony, *Thodarnthu Oruhiren* (in English- Let me Keep on Racing), Dindigul; Vaigarai, 2008, pp. 48-50.
- [24] Tresa Joseph, "Apostle Paul the Daring missionary", *Kristu Jyoti* 25/2 2008, p. 116.
- [25] Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979, p. 68.
- [26] "Strikingly different from Paul is the fact that here there is no place for female elders or bishops (1 Tim 2:11-15). However, the ministry of intercession by "enrolled" widows (1 Tim 5:5'9) is taken seriously." R.Eduard Schweizer, "Ministry in the Early Church", in David Noel Freedman & Others (eds.), *The AnchorBible Dictionary- Vol. IV* (New York: Double Day, 1992), 839.
- [27] James D. G Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, London: SCM Press, 1993- second edition- second printing, p. 114.
- [28] Also cf. Rom 12: 9-21. [29] Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle*, New York: Paulist Press, 1993, pp. 89-105 especially p. 105; Also cf. U.B. Müller, "Der Christus Hymnus Phil 2:6-11", ZNW 79 (1988), 17-44.
- [30] Cf. S. Soosaimanickam, *Narcheithiyin Thoothuvar* (In English- *The Apostle of the Gospel*), Dindigul: Vaigarai, 2008, pp. 138-173.

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## **Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** Paul is sometimes considered to be a misogynist who was responsible for the exclusion of women from leadership roles in the church. Paul seems to have sent mixed signals concerning the role of women in the church. In order to interpret the writings of Paul correctly, one should differentiate doctrinal statements from disciplinary norms and, moreover, keep in mind that both are conditioned by the culture of his time. On the one hand, Paul rejected all forms of inequality that existed between men and women and, on the other, he seems to have been instrumental in perpetuating some of the traditional practices which treat women as inferior to men. The best way to handle this complex issue is to begin with the evidence available in the letters concerning the actual role played by women in the Pauline churches. Both the Acts and the letters of Paul reveal that the apostle had many women colleagues, co-workers and collaborators. This Paper explores Paul's attitude towards women in the authentic letters of Paul, being sensitive to the socio-cultural and religious contexts of the Pauline churches.

The author concludes by asserting that the cumulative weight of the evidence found in the authentic letters suggests that (i) Paul was ahead of his time in promoting a dynamic and reciprocal partnership between women and men, and in appreciating and approving women's leadership roles in the church; (ii) Women did play important leadership roles in the life and mission of the churches founded by Paul.

**Keywords:** Women, women in the Church, status of women, New Community in Christ.

Saint Paul is not merely a prophetic leader of the past, but he also stands out as a dynamic guide for Christians today. The celebration of the jubilee year of Saint Paul furnishes us with a golden opportunity to re-read his writings and to recapture his prophetic message. Saint Paul was proud of introducing himself as a Pharisee (Phil 3:5) and was ‘extremely zealous’ for the traditions of his ancestors (Gal 1:14). As a Pharisee, Paul was trained to interpret the Torah and belonged to the group that was responsible for the ongoing interpretation of the Torah and its faithful transmission (1Cor 15:3).<sup>2</sup> This is what Paul was doing after the encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus – reinterpreting the Torah in the light of the Christ event (Gal 3; Rom 4) and reinterpreting the Christ event in the light of the Torah as well as the new pastoral concerns of the growing church, from the Jewish to the Gentile world (Gal 3; 1Cor 15; see also Acts 17). Paul was therefore a key figure in extending the membership of the church to non-Jews, in defining Christian identity through his law-free gospel and in developing an inculcated Christian theology.

The apostle is, however, sometimes considered to be a misogynist who was responsible for the exclusion of women from leadership roles in the church. Paul seems to have sent mixed signals concerning the role of women in the church. In order to interpret the writings of Paul correctly, one should differentiate doctrinal statements from disciplinary norms and, moreover, keep in mind that both (Paul’s doctrinal statements and disciplinary norms) are conditioned by the culture of his time. On the one hand, Paul rejected all forms of inequality that existed between men and women and, on the other, he seems to have been instrumental in perpetuating some of the traditional practices which treat women as inferior to men. The best way to handle this complex issue is to begin with the evidence available in the letters concerning the actual role played by women in the Pauline churches. Both the Acts and the letters of Paul reveal that the apostle had many women colleagues, coworkers and collaborators. This Paper explores Paul’s attitude towards women in the authentic letters of Paul, being sensitive to the socio-cultural and religious contexts of the Pauline churches.<sup>3</sup> However, it falls beyond the purview of this Paper to discuss all Pauline texts dealing with women’s issues.

I shall first undertake a short survey of the leadership roles played by women in the early Christian communities founded by Paul and then focus on Paul's egalitarian vision of the church articulated in Galatians 3:26-28. I shall then look at some of the misunderstood texts from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (7:1; 11:3-16; 14:34-35).<sup>4</sup> It is my contention that Paul championed a church of dynamic partnership between men and women, characterized by reciprocal and inclusive leadership.

## I. Women Colleagues of Paul

On many occasions both Acts and the Letters of Paul mention the active participation of women in the work of the gospel initiated by Paul. The author of Acts tells us that a certain business woman named Lydia was one of the first disciples of Paul: "A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Lydia and all her household believed in the gospel proclaimed by Paul and were baptized (Acts 16:15). It is noteworthy that Lydia not only received baptism, but also invited Paul and his companions to sojourn at her house, and that Paul accepted the hospitality of this Gentile woman. Lydia seems to have teamed up with Paul to further the work of evangelization in Thyatira.

Paul refers to some of the women disciples as deacon (*diakonos*, Phoebe, Rom 16:1), helper or benefactor (*prostatis*, Phoebe, Rom 16:2), coworker (*synergos*, Prisca, Rom 16:3), apostle (*apostolos*, Junia, Rom 16:7), prophet (*prophēteuousa*, 1Cor 11:5) and leader of the church ("Nympha and the church in her [*autēs*] house" Col 4:15).

Phoebe is described as a sister (*adelphē*), a deacon (*diakonos*)<sup>5</sup> of the church at Cenchreae and a benefactor (*prostatis*) of many including Paul (Rom 16:1-2). The designation 'sister', since it is traditionally used to refer to the female members of the church, does not need any explanation.<sup>6</sup> I shall explore what it means to be a minister of the church and a benefactor. Paul talks about himself as a deacon (*diakonos*) of the church and claims that he became a minister of the church by God's commission in order to make the word of God known (Col 1:24-25). By using the same expression

for Phoebe, Paul brings home the effectiveness of her ministry and the significant contribution made by her in the church at Cenchreae. This is further underlined by the fact that she has become also a benefactor (*prostatis*) of many people in the church. Some consider her ministry in the light of being a *prostatis* as that of hospitality to and sharing her resources with those who are needy and helpless.<sup>7</sup> Some others propose that "Phoebe's office as *prostatis* appears to imply authoritative responsibility similar to that of an elder."<sup>8</sup> In the Septuagint, *prostatis*, the masculine form of *prostatis*, is used as a designation for 'the captain of the temple' (2 Macc 3:4) and for 'the leader of the sanctuary and his people' (Sirach 45:24).<sup>9</sup> Hence it seems reasonable to conclude that Phoebe furnishes strong evidence for the presence of women leaders in the Pauline churches (see also 1 Tim 3:11).<sup>10</sup>

Prisca or Priscilla (as she is known in Acts) and her husband Aquila are addressed as Paul's coworkers in Jesus Christ. Paul recommends that all the churches of the Gentiles be grateful for the service rendered by them just as he himself is (Rom 16:3-4). The fact that Priscilla's name is always mentioned first before the name of her husband indicates her prominent role in the ministry of the gospel (see also Acts 18:18, 26; 2 Tim 4:19).<sup>11</sup> There is evidence in the letters of Paul that women were involved in the animation of house churches.<sup>12</sup> For example, references to the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila in Rome (Rom 16:4-5) and in Ephesus (1Cor 16:19), to the church in Chloe's house (1Cor 1:11) and in Nympha's house (Col 4:15)<sup>13</sup> bear this point out. If women were engaged in the management of house churches, then one can infer that they played some form of leadership role in the early Christian communities.

In Romans 16:7, both Andronicus and Junia are numbered among the prominent (*episēmoi*) apostles, a designation that Paul gives only to the Twelve, Barnabas, Silvanus, Timothy and to himself.<sup>14</sup> One can glean from the text that they were either Paul's relatives or country people; they were Christians before his Damascus experience and therefore members of some early church; and they were imprisoned because of their activities with Paul. In sum, Paul includes women among the outstanding (*episēmoi*) apostles of the early churches.

This short survey shows the active participation of women in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

## **II. Paul's Vision of a New Community in Christ (Gal 3:26-28)**

The occasion of Paul's letter to the Galatians seems to have been that, after the evangelization work of Paul in the province of Galatia, some Jewish Christians preached a different gospel from that of Paul. These missionaries seem to have questioned the authority of Paul and the validity of Paul's law-free gospel and insisted on the necessity of the observance of the Mosaic Law for salvation. In his response, Paul developed some of the doctrines most central to his theology, viz., salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, freedom of Christians from the Law and equality of all human beings in Christ. I shall focus on Paul's new vision of society characterized by a radical equality which appreciates and celebrates diversity.

Paul reinterprets the Jewish Scripture and presents the Law as a guardian (3:23-25) using examples from the life-style of a Graeco-Roman family (4:1-3) to drive home his general principle that Christians inherit eternal life through their faith in Christ and that their new life in Christ transforms social divisions (3:26-28).<sup>15</sup> In v. 26 Paul argues that Christ Jesus through his death has won the legal status for all Christians to become heirs to eternal life. All have the same legal status as *an eldest son* before God to inherit the eternal life. This is so because in the culture in which Paul wrote, the eldest son was the legal owner of the property of the family. In v. 27 Paul points out that it is baptism, not circumcision, that marks the beginning of this new life in Christ. As an initiation ritual, baptism symbolized the participation of Christians in the death and resurrection of Christ ('into Christ' *eis Christon*) and signalled the new life in Christ ('put on Christ' *Christon enedysasthe*).

The implications of the new life in Christ Jesus are articulated in verse 28. The transformed life in Christ is intimately connected with the abolition of discrimination on the basis of racial, social and gender differences: a) there is neither Jew nor (*oude*) Greek; b) there is neither slave nor (*oude*) free; c) there is no longer male and (*kai*) female. The first two pairs are straightforward and need no further

explanation. But the third pair ‘male and (*kai*) female’ calls attention to itself by breaking the formal pattern of the first two pairs: neither Jew nor (*oude*) Greek; neither slave nor (*oude*) free. The third pair echoes the language of the creation account in Genesis: ‘male and female God created them’ (1:27). Paul seems to signal the inauguration of the new creation where racial, social and gender discrimination does not exist. According to Paul’s vision, this does not mean that those who are in the new creation cease to be Jew or Greek, slave or free, and men or women, it means that these discriminatory distinctions have lost their power to be the ground for honour and privileges. These distinctions are no longer in force so that one group does not dominate over the other. Betz comments that “there can be no doubt that Paul’s statements have social and political implications of even a revolutionary dimension.”<sup>16</sup> In sum, Paul’s vision of a new life in Christ marks the end of discrimination of every kind and particularly that of gender, and establishes full equality among the members of the church. This new community characterized by equality, justice and peace becomes God’s new Israel or chosen people and makes God’s kingdom visible here on earth.

### III. Misunderstood Pauline Texts

It is against this general principle of equality of women and men in Christ Jesus and the presence of women leaders in the actual life experiences of Paul that we should look at some of the so-called ‘offensive’ Pauline texts on women in his first letter to the Corinthians (7:1; 11:2-6; 14:34-35). One also needs to be sensitive to the Greek rhetoric used by Paul and the socio-cultural background of the Corinthian church.

From Paul’s letter, one can gather the pastoral context of the Corinthian church. Some looked for eloquent speeches and were carried away by brilliant rhetoric (cf. 1Cor 1:17). Some were too ascetic (“it is proper (*kalos*) for a man not to touch a woman” 1Cor 7:1), and others were too liberal and understood Paul’s law-free gospel as lawlessness (“I am free to do anything” (1Cor 6:12; 10:23). Some were advocating idol worship (cf. 1Cor 8:1-13), and others were known for their immoral behaviour (1Cor 5:1-13; 6:12-20). Some were involved in corruption and exploitation (1Cor 6:1-11).

Some of them pretended to be spiritual people and claimed to have spiritual superiority (cf. 1Cor 1:5-7; 2:6; 3:1; 14:20). Some were prejudiced against women (1Cor 14:34-35) and yet others gave equal freedom to women to prophecy and participate in the ministry of the word (1Cor 11:2-16). In his response, Paul had to uphold the unity of the community. Paul appreciates both their zeal for higher wisdom and passion for spiritual gifts, but censures both licentiousness and showy asceticism. Paul gives equal opportunities to both women and men to animate communities and lead liturgical assemblies, but he wants all things to be done decently and in order.

### **1) Not to Touch a Woman (1Cor 7:1-7)**

In 1Cor 5:1 – 11:1, Paul deals with the uniqueness of the Christian way of life; we have a set of criticisms as well as guidelines about what it means to be a Christian community in the world. In chapter 7, Paul deals with the questions raised by the community concerning the relationships in married life (1Cor 7:1a). Modern readers often take it for granted that 1Cor 7:1b (“It is proper (*kalos*) for a man not to touch a woman”) is the view of Paul and it expresses Paul’s primary concern. Then follows the inference: Paul makes an exception to this rule that, because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his wife and each woman should have her husband (1Cor 7:2). When this phrase (“It is proper (*kalos*) for a man not to touch a woman”) is lifted out of its context, it presents Paul as a misogynist having some pathological attitude towards body and sex. However, understanding of Paul’s use of diatribe helps the reader better to understand his argument. Diatribe is a style of argumentation common among the Hellenes of Paul’s time, which consists in creating a conversation by quoting one’s opponent’s view which will then be refuted by the speaker. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul often quotes the slogans of the Corinthians and then corrects their views by presenting his own views on the matter under discussion. For example,

#### **1Cor 6:12**

Corinthians: “All things are lawful for me”

Paul: “But not all things are beneficial”

Corinthians: "All things are lawful for me"

Paul: "But I will not be dominated by anything"

### **1Cor 6:13-15<sup>17</sup>**

Corinthians: "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, but God will destroy both one and the other"

Paul: "The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!"

### **1Cor 7:1-2**

Corinthians: "It is proper (*kalos*) for a man not to touch a woman."

Paul: "But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."

### **1Cor 8:1-2**

Corinthians: "We know that 'all of us possess knowledge'."

Paul: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."

### **1Cor 14:34-40<sup>18</sup>**

Corinthians: "Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."

Paul: "What is this? Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached? Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order."

If this is true, then 1Cor 7:1b expresses the opinion of the Corinthians – "it is proper (*kalos*) for a man not to touch a woman."<sup>19</sup> This view goes well with early Gnosticism which regarded the physical body as inferior to the spiritual soul. Paul is trying to

counteract their radical asceticism that forbids sexual union within the existing marriages. As is noted by Pauline scholars, the emphasis here is on *mutual submission and reciprocity*:<sup>20</sup> “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1Cor 7:3-4). This aspect of mutuality and reciprocity is central to Paul’s understanding of human persons.

## 2) Women Should Wear a Veil (1Cor 11:2-16)

Paul deals with matters related to worship and spiritual gifts in chapters 11–14. Although Paul authorizes women to pray and prophesy in the liturgical assemblies, he also seems to have insisted that women should cover their heads while praying and prophesying (11:2-16). One should not forget that we are reading only one side of a conversational exchange. Paul is responding to some of the Corinthians’ concerns. Wayne A. Meeks, in his book entitled *The First Urban Christians*, reconstructed the social world of Corinth in general and the status of women in particular. There were women who participated in leadership roles such as leading the prayer of the community and prophesying in the assemblies (1Cor 11:2-16). This created tension and women’s active participation in the roles normally assigned to men became a subject of lively debate and controversy.<sup>21</sup> Paul’s compromises and directives in 1Cor 11 need to be understood against the background of this controversy and division in the community as well as his appeal for the unity of the community at Corinth that we find from the very beginning of the Letter (1Cor 1:10).

Now reading the text carefully, one realizes that Paul’s arguments in 1Cor 11:2-16 bring together many traditions and worldviews. Paul alludes to some specific practice within the Corinthian Church; he refers to the second creation narrative in Genesis and incorporates arguments from biological facts. One should glean from the text these various facets in Paul’s response: *Captatio benevolentiae*, the view of the Corinthians and Paul’s response.

In verse 2, as has been his wont, Paul introduces a new topic on the dress code for women and men at worship by appreciating the Corinthians. These words of appreciation, known as *captatio benevolentiae*, are meant to create good will among his readers so that his advice will be well received by them. Paul is praising the Corinthians for remembering him and maintaining (*katechō*) the traditions (*paradosis*) that he has transmitted to them. In the words of Ray Collins: "These words serve as an acknowledgement that the difficult situation Paul hopes to clarify arose from the Corinthians' naïve adherence to Paul's teachings and the traditions he had shared with them."<sup>22</sup> After encouraging them for their exemplary life, Paul takes up the issue under discussion and clarifies the misunderstanding.

In verses 3-10, Paul is paraphrasing the views of the Corinthians with his own corrective additions. The view of at least one of the groups in Corinth seems to be the following: the head of a woman is man (v. 3b)<sup>23</sup>; women should cover their head during public worship (vv 5-6); woman is the glory of man and man is the image and glory of God (v. 7). But by the use of the emphatic (*de*) at the beginning of verse 3 signals the beginning of Paul's corrective response. Paul brings their attention to the fact that "Christ is the head of every man" (v. 3a) and "God is the head of Christ" (v. 3c). Some Christians at Corinth seem to have legitimized the subordination of women to man by recourse to the second creation narrative in Genesis 2. They quoted: "For man is not from woman; rather woman is from man" (v. 8, Gen 2:21-23); "For man was not created for the sake of woman; rather woman was created for the sake of man" (v. 9, Gen 2:18). While Paul agrees with them with regard to what the Scripture says, he also reinterprets the same scripture for them in the light of the new life in Christ.

Paul develops further his arguments in vv. 11-16. The emphatic use of (*plēn*, but or on the other hand or nevertheless) in verse 11 indicates the continuation of Paul's corrective response. In verse 11-12, Paul gives his reinterpretation of the Scripture in the light of the Christ-Event. Paul first presents his theological thesis: "In the Lord (*en kyriō*) woman is not independent of (*chōris* 'without') man or man independent of (*chōris*) woman" (v. 11). The expression, 'in

the Lord' (*en kyriō*) at the beginning of Paul's response signals the Christian interpretation of the creation story. Paul then brings up an empirical argument: "For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman" (v. 12a). As a Pharisee who is responsible for the ongoing interpretation of the Law, Paul reinterprets Genesis 2:21-23 in the light of the biological fact that each human being (both man and woman) is born of a woman. He then concludes his argument with yet another theological claim: "All things (*panta*) are from God (*ek tou theou*)" (v. 12b).

Although Paul agrees with the Corinthians that it is good for women to cover their heads, he disagrees with the reasons given by them. He drives home the message that women and men are interdependent by nature and they are equal in front of God: "In the Lord neither is woman independent of man nor man independent of woman" (v. 11). Paul accepts the view of Genesis 2 that woman came from man, but he also remains open to the ongoing revelation of God in and through the experiences of our day-to-day life that man is born of a woman (v. 12a). Paul underlines the fact that there is a radical equality between men and women in the Lord as God is the origin of everything.

After having made his point clear, Paul uses a rhetorical question to further persuade his listeners to decide for themselves: "Judge for yourselves." What is the most fitting thing to do? It is fitting for women to cover their heads? What is natural? It is natural for women to cover their heads (vv. 14-15). Paul's final word on the issue is an appeal from his own example and that of the churches of God not to be divisive or contentious (*philoneikos*) (v. 16). Paul urges the Corinthians to keep away from quarrels over the dress code at worship.

The concern of Paul in 1Cor 11: 2-16 can therefore be easily understood against the prevailing prejudices against the participation of women in public gatherings. As expressed elsewhere, maintaining good order and the common good were of primary importance for Paul while making decisions on practices and customs (e.g., 1Cor 8 and 12). While discussing the issue whether one can eat the food offered to idols (1Cor 8:1-13), Paul would agree with the Corinthians that one can eat the food offered to idols because idols have no

existence. However, Paul does not eat such food if it scandalizes one of the members of the community. He prefers to sacrifice his own freedom out of love for the weaker members of the community. Similarly, Paul expects women to prophesy and participate actively in the public life of the church, but they should promote common good and maintain the unity of the community.

### 3) Women Should Be Silent (1Cor 14:26-40)

On the basis of 1Cor 14:34-35, Paul was often accused of being against women's initiatives and participation in the community worship. As we have already seen, Paul approves of the participation of women in leadership roles in the assemblies by praying and prophesying (1Cor 11:2-16). So we need to keep in mind the directives given by Paul to the women who are prophesying in assemblies. Now the question is how we are to understand the silencing of women in 1Cor 14:34-35, as it stands in contradiction to the directive given by Paul in 1Cor 11: 2-16 and to Paul's vision of an egalitarian society in Gal 3:26-28. Moreover, the text conflicts with the actual experiences of women in Pauline communities.

The text lends itself to various interpretations. At least six explanations have been given by scholars. (1) The text prohibits only disruptive speeches during the worship, it does not prohibit women to pray and prophesy; (2) Paul forbids only married women; so unmarried women can speak in public; (3) Women should keep silent in the larger assemblies, but they are allowed to speak when the church meets in their homes; (4) Paul prohibits women prophets to speak in public at Corinth; (5) Verses 34-35 are a later interpolation and thus they are non-Pauline; (6) The text represents the opinion of the Corinthian church which Paul in fact corrects in his letter.<sup>24</sup>

Scholars differ in their assessment of verses 34-35: whether they are Pauline or non-Pauline. As of now, no one can deny the fact that there is no manuscript evidence for a text without these verses. But we do have some manuscripts which placed verses 34-35 in a different place, i.e., after verse 40 (D F G 88\* it <sup>ar. b. d. f. g</sup> vg<sup>ms</sup> Ambrosiaster Sedulius-Scotus). One can therefore infer that at least some ancient copyists sensed that these verses interrupt the flow of the discussions of prophecy and speaking in tongues. These verses were placed in

the margin (as found in the sixth-century Codex Fuldensis) to highlight the foreign or the non-Pauline nature of the verses.<sup>25</sup> The attempt by copyists to place these verses in different places can also be explained by their lack of harmony with the Pauline attitude towards women. Moreover, as noted earlier, the view expressed in these verses contradicts Paul's views elsewhere (e.g., 1Cor 11 and Gal 3:28). It also belittles the positive role attributed to single women in 1Cor 7.

As we have seen earlier, verses 34-35 can be understood as the opinion of the Corinthians.<sup>26</sup> Some object to this view on grammatical terms, namely the particle (*ē*) cannot be understood as refuting the claim made in verses 34-35. For example, D. A. Carson claims that "*in every instance in the New Testament where the disjunctive particle in question [ē] is used in a construction analogous to the passage at hand, its effect is to reinforce the truth of the clause or verse that precedes it* [italics his]."<sup>27</sup> But this observation is not always true. For example, by using the particle (*ē*) in 1Cor 11:22, Paul is actually challenging the practice described in the preceding verses 20-21, and not reinforcing it.

1 Corinthians 11:20 When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. 22 What is this! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

In addition, the literary context and the overall theological concern of Paul in Corinthians support the theory that in verses 34-35 Paul is quoting the opinion of the Corinthians. As we have noted earlier, it seems thus convincing, if not conclusive, that verses 34-35 express the voice of the Corinthian church. If this is true, then the Corinthian view is refuted by Paul in verse 36 "What is this? Did the word of God originate with you [Corinthian men]? Or are you [men] the only ones it has reached?" Paul seems to be challenging the Corinthians in general and Corinthian men in particular, and asserting that they do not have a monopoly on the word of God. In verses 37-40, Paul is refuting the Corinthian church's

claim to suppress women and is reinforcing the mandate given in 1Cor 11 that women can speak provided they maintain unity and order in the community. In fact, verses 39-40 encourage prophesying and underline the directives given by Paul in 11:2-16:

Be eager to prophesy (*zēlōute to prophēteuein*).

Do not forbid (*mēkōlyete*) speaking in tongues

But “all things (*panta*) should be done decently and in order.”

The final exhortation in verses 39-40 highlights again the primacy of prophecy among spiritual gifts. In this exhortation women *also* are allowed to prophesy and speak in tongues. The mandate not to prohibit speaking in tongues is subject to the conditions that all things are to take place properly and in good order. The cumulative weight of the evidence suggests that Paul expects women to participate in the discussions and prayer meetings of the Pauline communities. All things considered, the Corinthians’ view theory seems to be the one most consistent with the vision of Paul and the actual role played by women in ministry and worship in the Pauline churches.

## Conclusion

Although the letters of Paul *seem to have presented* differing views of Paul on the role of women in the church, no one can deny Paul’s vision of a new community characterized by reciprocal partnership between men and women in the church. There are passages that impose some restrictions on the participation of women in the life of the church (e.g., 1Cor 11). As we have seen, these texts need to be understood as pastoral directives aimed at specific situations and concrete problems for the building up of the church. One needs to be careful in distinguishing the voice of the apostle from the concerns of the early churches (e.g., 1Cor 7 and 14). There are other passages which underscore the oneness and mutuality of women and men in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-28). Moreover, on various occasions, Paul acknowledged the roles actually played by women colleagues and apostles and the significant contributions made by them in the church (Rom 16). Therefore, one needs to make a distinction between the general principles of Paul (doctrinal

statements) and their pastoral applications in response to the specific concerns of different communities (disciplinary norms).

As Paul expected the imminence of the Parousia, it is understandable that, in his missionary work, Paul did not focus on the transformation of society in general (e.g., Phlm 16-18; see also the references to the institution of slavery within the church in 1Cor 7:20-24) and the establishment of gender equality in particular. However, Paul's colleagues and coworkers like Lydia, Phoebe, Prisca, and Junia are testimonies of women's active participation in the ministry of the gospel in the early Christian communities. It is therefore difficult to deny Paul's vision of a new society brought into being by the power of God's grace which transforms the old inequalities and discriminations (1Cor 1:18-31; Gal 3:26-28). It seems that it is the deutero-Pauline letters (e.g., 1 Tim 5:3-16; Eph 5:22; Col 3:18) and the writings of the apostolic fathers (e.g., 1 Clem. 1.3; 1 Clem. 21.6-7) which forced women out of leadership roles and compelled them to be submissive in conformity with their position in the patriarchal household systems.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately it is this tradition that was handed down by the church for centuries until the reawakening of women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Now the time has come to recapture the vision of the apostle Paul and reclaim the rightful place of women in the church and in society.

In sum, the cumulative weight of the evidence found in the authentic letters suggests that (i) Paul was ahead of his time in promoting a dynamic and reciprocal partnership between women and men, and in appreciating and approving women's leadership roles in the church; (ii) Women did play important leadership roles in the life and mission of the churches founded by Paul. These women apostles indeed reveal the universality of God's blessings. The new life in Christ for Paul was an ongoing process of experiencing the power of God's transforming love and grace in his day-to-day life (Phil 3:12-14). Paul admits that he has not reached the goal, the fullness of the new life in Christ, but he presses on toward the goal.

*Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting*

*what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:12-14).*

Paul leaves behind the past and always looks forward, striving after the expected perfection. Similarly, the Church in India has a long way to go to actualize the vision of Paul and to become a community where gender justice prevails. The new life in Christ implies an ongoing renewal, and new and ever creative responses from believers. Therefore, the actualization of Paul's vision of a new society characterized by gender equality and dynamic partnership between women and men still remains a task of the church in the unfolding history of salvation.

## Notes

1. This Paper is a revised and enlarged version of my article appeared last month in the Book titled, *Learning from St. Paul: Reflections for the Pauline Year* (S. J. Puykunnel and J. Varickasseril (eds.); Shillong: Vendrame Institute & DBCIC Publications, 2008).
2. Pharisees are members of a Jewish religious sect who are involved in the interpretations of the Law; see Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1994) 77-84.
3. The authentic letters are Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon. This does not mean that the deuteron-Pauline letters are less important for us nor do I belittle their canonical value. I am only limiting the scope of this Paper to the seven authentic letters of Paul.
4. One can also explore the feminine imageries used by Paul which reveal his respect for women and appreciation for feminine qualities; but it seems beyond the scope of this Paper to do so.
5. The masculine form of the noun used here reflects the patriarchal bias of the first century church; see E. S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983) 170. G. Stählin points out that the feminine form of the noun (deaconess) is used for the first time in canon 19 of the council of Nicaea in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (chēra TDNT 9 [1974] 464 fn. 231). See also M. Hauke, "Deaconesses in the Ancient Church: A Historical Sketch," pages 126-7 in *The Church and Women: A Compendium* (ed., H. Mšll; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).
6. Paul talks about the sister, Apphia, in Philemon 1-2.

7. J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word, 1988) 2:887.
8. R. C. Kroeger & C. C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 91; cited by Andrew Perriman, *Speaking of Women: Interpreting Paul* (Leicester, Apollos, 1998) 67, fn. 17.
9. See also 1 Ch 27:31; 29:6; 2 Ch 8:10; 24:11; 1 Es 2:12.
10. After a lengthy discussion, J. H. Stiefel arrives at the conclusion that "the evidence in 1 Timothy 3.11 for a diaconal ministry of women is strong, although not completely conclusive"; see his article, "Women Deacons in 1 Timothy: A Linguistic and Literary Look at 'Women Likewise . . .' (1 Tim 3.11)," *New Testament Studies* 41.3 (1995): 442-57, the quotation is from page 456.
11. Perriman, *Speaking of Women*, 62.
12. For a detailed discussion on the organization of the house churches in the New Testament period, see B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 104-11.
13. Whether Nymphan is the accusative form of the feminine name nymph-a or the masculine name Numphas is a disputed issue. However, the reference to the church in her (*autēs*) house in some manuscripts supports the feminine name.
14. For a discussion on the name whether the text refers to a woman (Junia) or a man (Junias), see J. Thorley, "Junia, a Woman Apostle," *Novum Testamentum* 38.1 (1996): 18-29. On linguistic grounds, Thorley argues for Junia, the feminine form of the name. See also Perriman, *Speaking of Women*, pp. 68-70.
15. See also Richard B. Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians" in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 271-73; Carolyn Osiek, "Galatians," in *Feminism and Theology* edited by Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 190-91.
16. H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 190.
17. Verse 13b expresses the view of the Corinthians who believed in a spiritual salvation that ignores the significance of the human body. For a similar view, see also Paul's discussion on the resurrection of human bodies in 1Cor 15, esp. 1Cor 15:44. For a detailed discussion on verse 13, see also Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 253-57.

18. Scholars share different opinions on these verses; for those who take it as the view of the Corinthians, see M. J. Evans, *Women in the Bible* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1983) 99. For those against this understanding, see D. A. Carson, "'silence in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1Corinthians 14:33b-36," pages 140-53 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (eds. J. Piper and W. Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), p. 151.
19. See also Richard B. Hays, "Paul on the Relation between Men and Women," in *A Feminist Companion to Paul*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine (London and New York: T & T Clark international, 2004), pp. 137-43.
20. Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Virgins, Widows, and Wives: The Women of 1Corinthians 7" in *A Feminist Companion to Paul*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine (London and New York: T & T Clark international, 2004), p. 140.
21. See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 70-71.
22. Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina 7; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 395.
23. The view of the Corinthians reflects the hierarchical structure of a first-century Greco-Roman family: husband, wife, children and slaves.
24. For a detailed discussion on various explanations, see Perriman, *Speaking of Women*, 103-35. See also Richard B. Hays, "Paul on the Relation between Men and Women," pp. 143-47.
25. Bruce M. Metzger comments: "Does the scribe, without actually deleting verses 34-35 from the text, intend the liturgist to omit them when reading the lesson?" (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], pp. 499-500).
26. For those who argue that verses 34-35 express the Corinthian view, see M. J. Evans, *Women in the Bible* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1983) 99; N. M. Flanagan & e. H. Snyder, "Did Paul Put Down Women in 1Cor 14:34-36?" *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 11.1 (1981) 10-11; D. W. Odell-Scott, "Let the Women Speak in Church: An Egalitarian Interpretation of 1Cor 14:33b-36." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13.3 (1983), pp. 90-93.
27. D. A. Carson "'Silence in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1Corinthians 14:33b-36," pages 140-53 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (eds. J. Piper and W. Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991) 151. See also Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolation in 1

- Corinthians," *CBQ* 48 (1986) 91-92; W. L. Liefeld, "Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Corinthians," in *Women, Authority and the Bible* (ed., A Mickelsen; Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986), p. 149.
28. See also Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Virgins, Widows, and Wives: The Women of 1 Corinthians 7," pp.148-68.

## **Politics of Body: Enabling and Ennobling Our Embodied Selves**

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*Abstract:* Thanks to critical scholars we have come to discover the cultural underpinnings of our bodies in our societies. Indeed many have shown how the representation of the body is a means of status and control of gender and ethnicity and of nature and culture. Thus body politics is anchored in the most basic experiences of being in a body.

The present study will strive to understand and trace how body has been thought of down the ages. We shall mainly focus our reflection on the western tradition. Next, we shall attempt to propose a possible rehabilitation of our bodily life with a special attention to the somatic theology of St. Paul.

Our study reveals that our social conditionings determine our perception of our body. The privileging of the racist white body, the consumerist fit body, strong male body, sattvic bhramanical body, and the rational body or even the violent body of the terrorist is a social construction. We have come to a conclusion that we can tackle this disembodying of our body through the creation of the ‘counterpublics’ that will spring forth a sustained discourse that will dignify our biological dynamism. In this task the deep insights and values from our Christian tradition are indeed highly resourceful. We have attempted to present some of the teachings of St. Paul and to show how they can ennable our embodied life.

*Keywords:* Body, politics of body, embodied selves, disabling body, enabling body, ennobling body.

Body is being radically rethought in both science and philosophy. Body is not merely a natural object but is also an object of cultural representation. Some point out that body is a means of encoding society's values through its shape, size and ornamental attributes.

The way of bringing up our babies through rites of initiations into our communities and acceptance of their adolescence as well as their introduction into the circumstances of adult life has important bodily dimensions. The values embedded in our socialization strategies shape all our everyday experiences: sleep and waking, rest and physical activity, hygiene, eating and drinking, reproduction, consumption, entertainment and creativity. Traditionally many cultures have constructed body in demeaning terms and death is often celebrated as freedom from the bondage of body.

Thanks to critical scholars we have come to discover the cultural underpinnings of our bodies in our societies. Indeed many have shown how the representation of the body is a means of status and control of gender and ethnicity and of nature and culture. Thus body politics is anchored in the most basic experiences of being in a body.

We are confronted with all kinds of modified bodies in all kinds of contexts. Extensively tattooed and body-pierced individuals are visible on the streets. TV guides now routinely contain advertisement for clinics offering breast implants, liposuction and other forms of cosmetic adaptations. Many somatic boundaries are falling apart due to the present developments

Body is also materially restructured by science through practices such as genetic engineering and artificial insemination and cyborgization. Today various parts of our anatomy can be disassembled and rebuilt through scientific interventions like cosmetic surgery, genetic engineering, performance enhancing implants etc. Robotics threatens to replace our body with robots that can perform efficiently many of the tasks that are associated with our bodies. Science and technology through the industrial and postindustrial revolutions have successfully introduced into the social space replicas of human body in the form of more and more complex tools, such as electronic systems of information technology and communication which both complement and mirror human abilities.

The present study will strive to understand and trace how body has been thought of down the ages. We shall mainly focus our reflection on the western tradition. Next, we shall attempt to propose a possible rehabilitation of our bodily life with a special attention to the somatic theology of St. Paul.

## What is a Body?

Our culture teaches us to ignore our bodies. Many trace its roots to the Platonic degradation of our bodies in favour of our spiritual souls. We in India are also bound by the vision of *Moksha* as freedom from the bondage of the bodies. Bodies are real and have materiality but at the same time they are socially constructed. The understanding of bodies as social assists us to view power, knowledge and our relationships in a new light.

Body evokes a bewildering variety of meanings. Often it is equivocal, sometimes ambiguous, at times evasive and always contested by those who wish to understand its meaning more fully.[1] This seemingly simple question ‘WHAT IS A BODY?’ has not been sufficiently problematized and attentively studied. Bryan Turner [2] admits that at the end of his book, *The Body and Society*, he was even more amazed by the “‘crassly obvious’ question ‘what is the body?’” than when he began.

Elizabeth Grosz [3] who for a number of years has researched embodiment, claims:

By body I understand a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and organization only through their psychical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality ... The body becomes a human body, a body which coincides with the ‘shape’ and space of a psyche, a body whose epidermic surface bounds a psychical unity, a body which thereby defines the limits of experience and subjectivity, in psychoanalytic terms through the intervention of the (m)other, and ultimately, the Other or Symbolic order (language and rule-governed social order). [4]

There is a considerable academic disabling of the body due to the operation of the body-mind dualism in our society. The Cartesian dualism considers the body as other to the mind. It functions as a lesser category to the mind which is associated with public space, rationality and objectivity.[5] This dualism is not only conceptualized in the western knowledge system but is conceptually and historically sexualized. The mind has been seen as rational and masculine and

the body has been perceived as reason's underside. The body is thus othered, disembodied, sexualized and disciplined.

Of course both men and women have bodies. But men are thought to be able to transcend their bodies and speak a universal language unencumbered by the material body placed in the material context of everyday life while women are widely thought to be bound to the fleshy desires of their material bodies. This othering of the body could be also traced as underpinning the racist white bodies, the rational disembodied observer of modern science or the so called the sattvic constitution of the bhramanical bodies. This disembodying of the body sanctions and renders normal the racist as well as the casteist domination in the west and India respectively. In India we can even find the divine body broken to legitimize casteist oppression. Positivism and scientism also depend on the disembodied observer detached from the subject under study. Nothing that is tainted by the corporeality of the knower qualifies to be recognized as knowledge. Moreover, the body being the chief locus of violence, we might see how the dualistic disembodying of the bodily dimension can lead to unscrupulous brutalization of the bodies of the victims. The paradox is that this disembodying of the body is only a social construction as body is always present and functions as a backdrop to all these multiple practices of incorporation or de-recognition of the body.

Thanks to the developments in body studies, corporeality is steadily accepted as a vital dimension of human life. Although body still functions as the other of the mind in many ways, there are noticeable attempts to embody the social representation of our body. Some of these attempts to put back the bodily dimensions with all their pure intentions suffer a drawback as it attempts to put back only the able-bodied male, racist white bodies/ casteist sattvic bhramanical bodies or even consumerist bodies leading to the same slavery of masculinism. Hence, we need a deeper look at the politics of the body.

## **Politics of Body**

Although the body is material, it is politically and socially encoded. Hence, we attempt to draw our attention to the social

production of our bodies. We strive to examine the politics of omission of the body in our discursive and material practices. The omission of the body becomes an important requisite of the social disembodiment of our body. The absent presence of the bodily dimension foregrounds the rationalist, white, brhamanical, consumerist, male bias that operates as an unmarked norm from which everything else that deviates is seen as unbecoming. This racialization, sexualization, consumerization or brhamanization of the body is deeply embedded in the dynamics of our society. This dynamics runs on the wheels of the exclusion of the body. Body is looked upon as irrational, messy and passionate. But the white, the brhamanical, male, consumerist bodies somehow can disembody and relate to the ordered, stable, essential normal, natural and universal and at the same time derive the right to establish order, stability and normalcy everywhere. This might explain how humans have fallen prey to untold brutalization of socially constructed and inferiorized bodies.

The theorization of the politics of Body has an important political as well as ethical dimension. The politics of silence that forbids the discussion of the bodies has been broken by numerous theorists in the 1990s who were influenced by the postmodern thinkers such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983, 1986), and Michel Foucault (1979, 1980). Yet Scholars like Robyn Longhurst points out that these laudable attempts are still guilty of bracketing the materiality of the body. The body that breaks its boundaries- urinates, bleeds, vomits, farts, gets sick and diseased, becomes both subject and object of sexual desire, ejaculates and gives birth remains largely un-discussed. The messiness of bodies is often conceptualised and totalized as feminised, and as such is Othered. But the ignoring of the materiality of the body is not a harmless omission, rather, it contains a political imperative that helps to keep masculinism intact in our society. [6]

The material biological body is the site of potential disruption of the order of the 'same' and at best totalized as other that is inferior. The politics of exclusion of the body is only a social construction. This awareness is indeed important and it can allow us to understand how a flesh-less, incorporeal, rationalized body underpins and

produces our discursive and material practices. Therefore, this exclusion of the body cannot be trivialized and brushed aside for it has several costs. Otherwise the regimes of hegemony grounded in the body will remain invisible. Hence, our locatedness, situatedness or embodiedness becomes deeply significant.

## Disabling Bodies

Clothing and make-up modify our bodies temporally. Permanent modification arises from workouts in gymnasium, tattooing, and plastic surgery. Even, subtle modification takes place as a result of socialization. The social conditioning is significantly responsible in producing proper, clean, decent, law abiding bodies. Julia Kristeva teaches that our subjectivity is constituted through a process by which a person comes to see himself or herself as a separate being with his or her own borders between self and other. Kristeva holds that our first experience is a realm of plenitude, of oneness with the environment and of the semiotic *chora*. This means the infant comes into the world without any borders. It is psychoanalytic theory that illuminates us about the formation of the borders and the formation of 'I'. Jaques Lacan teaches that subjectivity arises when an infant at some point between six and eighteen months of age catches a glimpse of himself or herself in front of a mirror and takes the image to be himself. Kristeva admits that mirror stage can bring a sense of unity, but points out that an infant develops this sense much before it through the process she christens as abjection. 'Abject is what one spits out, rejects, almost violently excludes from the oneself: sour milk, excrement and even mother's embrace.' [7] What is abjected is radically excluded but never totally banished. It hovers at the edge of one's existence constantly challenging one's own tenuous boundaries. Indeed that which is abjected remains a constant threat to one's own clean and proper self. This means abjection remains a constant companion in our whole life.

The rituals that we can trace in all cultures are mechanisms that humans have developed to deal with abjection. Kristeva suggests that religions have also served such purposes by setting up ways to cleanse or purify our selves. Within this dynamism of abjection, we can understand the process that we have described as disembodying

our bodies. One can notice the expelling of that which is considered as not part of the clean and pure self. This expelling of the ‘impure’ is very much part and parcel of the process of exclusion of the dynamism of our body. It might be characterized as forgetting our biology or forgetting to live from an embodied place. We pay the cost of the clean and decent bodies through abjection which rejects the frailty, passion, irrationality, messiness and sets the boundary of the self as rational, orderly, clean and pure. Those people whose bodies are understood to be messy and/or out of control - the disabled, pregnant, lactating, dirty, queer, fat, elderly, poor - are often marginalised as illegitimate, abnormal even inhuman. This othering of the so-called tainted bodies grounds the white, male, consumerist and brhamanical body and justifies the exploitation, oppression of the marginalized person

Therefore, the attention to the materiality of our socio-biological self is important as it can dismantle the raceological, casteiest, purely otherworldly worldviews generating oppression and exploitation. This recognition is important as we can understand the social production of the disembodying of our bodies and initiate a process that will attempt to restore the dignity of our body. The social production of the exclusion of the body becomes powerfully exposed through the work of Michael Foucault. Foucault illuminates the discursive production of ‘the individual’. In his essay ‘the Subject and Power’ (1982), he specially addresses this question. He holds that subject is an effect of power-knowledge configurations. Subject, thus, is not the source of meaning, power or action but is discursively produced. That is, power does not act over and against an already free subject, but rather it produces it. Moreover, power operates through the body; its productive effects are bodily.

Foucault in his essay ‘Why Study Power: The Question of Subject’, says that his work has dealt with the modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects, ‘dividing practices’ or the disciplinary powers and techniques of normalization by which subjects are divided internally and from others and the techniques of self, the way a human being turns himself/herself into a subject. All these modes coexist in a complex interconnection. [8]

The modes of objectification are seen as the practices of power-knowledge. The disciplinary power works by means of surveillance,

'the eye power' 'the eyes that must see without being seen.' [9] These powers are exercised through the body of the individual: certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individual; individuals are not points of application of power, but vehicles of power. [10] Thus, we can see panopticism has been interiorized and the individual sees himself or herself as an object of gaze, exercising surveillance over self.

Foucault points out that the 'dividing practices' discursively produce difference (otherness) in relation to the sameness. His analyses of the differentiation between the sane and the mad, the healthy and the sick, the good and the criminal, the sexually normal and the sexually deviant, reveal that it is discursive practices of normalization that function through the opposition between normal and abnormal (that are to be understood in the context of the critical questioning of this opposition of western knowledge between Same and Other) are the sites where the subjects are divided internally and from others. [11]

Foucault presents 'the government of individualization.' [12] He speaks of struggles against the form of power in everyday life, a form of power which makes individuals subjects. The term subject is used by him in a double sense: subject to someone else and tied to self, to identity or self-knowledge. [13] He holds that they assert the right to be different. They attack that which separates the individual, forces him/her back on himself/herself tying him/her to an identity. In the quest for self-sameness the subjects struggle with otherness. Thus, Foucault points out that to be a subject means to be objectified which also includes the subject taking self as an object. That is why he asserts that the 'the target now-a-days is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are' [14] which could be reformulated as 'what we are made'.

This means that the discursive practices also produce our material practices (behaviour). We can see how our discursive practices produce our subjectivity which in its turn will influence and produce our material practices. It is by redefining our discursive practices that we can influence our material practices. Hence, within this discursive formation we can trace the power to arrest and transform the social construction of the disembodying of our bodies.

## **Enabling our Bodies**

The disembodying of our bodies has its roots both in our biology and sociology. But we can overcome it by dismantling the social determinants that generate our discursive practices. Christian tradition with its focus on the incarnation and resurrection of the body can provide a potential stimulus to bring about an inversion in our discursive practices and assist in bringing about a change in our material practices that will dignify our embodied life. The theology of the body taught by Pope John Paul II of blessed memory is indeed an important step in this direction. George Weigel in his biography of John Paul II has already greeted it as a theological time-bomb.

In the context of the present study, we wish to draw our attention to the rich resources that we can draw from the writings of St. Paul that has the power to bring about a sea change in the understanding of our bodied experience of life. Christianity is deeply influenced by Jewish tradition and the Jews had a holistic notion of self. It is taught that the word *Nefesh* often translated as soul also meant body. Scholars like Vito Evola point out that the semantic shift that seem to exclude the bodily dimension occurred due to the St. Paul (<http://209.85.175.104/search?q=cache>) Others accuse him that he has inherited the Greek body-soul dualism. The ancient Greeks had two words that spoke of the body: *sarx* and *soma*. They were roughly translated as flesh and body respectively. *Sarx* got polysemically nuanced and as time passed the connotation shifted to a more negative side. Paul also capitalizes on this semantic shift and uses it to denote the rebel human nature that is not wanting to accept Christ. He further uses the term *soma* 91 times generally to speak about the body of Christ. The analogy of the body is beautifully used to describe the communion of the church and our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul forcefully uses this image of the body of Christ as a communion of faithful with special charisms and talents which build up the church.

Paul addressed many problems in the early Christian community like divisions in the community, abuse of the body, the position of the weak and strong, disorder in the worshiping assembly with his teachings on the Eucharist. Thus we notice that Paul teaches that the Corinthians profane and devalue the Lord's Supper because of

their unbecoming behaviour (1Cor 11). The saving death and resurrection of Jesus is presented as a definitive event that transforms the baptized into a new creation and are invited to live out the future life as an eschatological community by the power of the Holy Spirit in the present age until its final consummation at second coming of our Lord.

In his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II wove Paul's teaching throughout his meditation on the Eucharist:

The words of the Apostle Paul bring us back to the dramatic setting in which the Eucharist was born...The Apostle Paul, for his part, says that it is 'unworthy' of a Christian community to partake of the Lord's Supper amid division and indifference to the poor (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-22, 27-34). Proclaiming the death of the Lord 'until he comes' (1 Cor 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely 'Eucharistic.' [20]

## **Ennobling our Bodies**

We can use the creative hermeneutics of St. Paul to understand the politics of disembodying of our bodies. Just as St. Paul made use of the Greek Sarx to portray the attitude of rejection of Christ, we can find in Paul the same resources to invert the exclusion of our biology. We have already seen that the disembodying of our body is a social construction and hence a sustained campaign to generate a positive acceptance of our true biological self can truly set us free from a slavery to the white racist, healthy, fit, consumerist, sattvic bhraminical, orderly rational male bodies. Paul's theology of the salvific death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the theology of baptism, the theology of the Eucharist and the theology of the church provide great resources that we can explore to find means and ways to dignify the body. This exercise is needed as the violence to our body is growing with terrorism and technology like genetic engineering and NIBIC convergence. The Christian understanding of the effects of baptism is also a powerful resource as it has deep biological bearings and ennobles us holistically.

The holistic anthropology evolving from Christian tradition can be an antidote to the question of the body that we have discussed. It

is up us to bring this influence into the social process that would dismantle the hegemony of the white, consumerist, bhramanical and rational body. One might suggest that a sustained effort to introduce the biological dynamism in a positive light in our public sphere might contract and shrink the public space already occupied by the hegemons who actively promote the disembodying of our body.

The development of the theory of 'the public sphere' that has its roots in the Frankfurt School of social research might be of some help in achieving our goal of affirming our biological self. Jürgen Habermas is responsible for developing the contours of the theory of 'public sphere'. According to him: "By the "public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which the private individuals assemble to form a public body....with the guarantee of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions." [15] Many scholars improved on Habermasian views. Thus for instance, Nancy Frazer adds that the oppressed need a place from where the oppressed "invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." [16] Thus we can see how the creation of these 'counterpublics' can become a powerful tool to respond to the rhetoric and the ideologies of the main-stream that is hell bent on the exclusion of our biological dynamism. Such 'counterpublics' can become new sites from where we can creatively deconstruct the social construction of our bodies and reconceptualize the marginalized biological dynamism, and thus influence our discursive and material practices.

## Conclusion

Our study reveals that our social conditionings determine our perception of our body. The privileging of the racist white body, the consumerist fit body, strong male body, sattvic bhramanical body, and the rational body or even the violent body of the terrorist is a social construction. We have come to a conclusion that we can tackle this disembodying of our body through the creation of the 'counterpublics' that will spring forth a sustained discourse that will dignify our biological dynamism. In this task the deep insights and

values from our Christian tradition are indeed highly resourceful. We have attempted to present some of the teachings of St. Paul and to show how they can ennable our embodied life.

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## **The Dynamics of Evil as the Disproportionate Desire to Deny Death and to be Divine: Phenomenological Insights of Paul Ricoeur and Ernest Becker**

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**Abstract:** Without attempting to give a philosophical analysis of the origin of evil, the author presents some of the dynamics at work in the emergence of evil, based mostly on Paul Ricoeur and Ernest Becker. Ricoeur points out that the disproportion that characterizes human beings makes evil possible, though not necessary. The progress from *bios* to *logos* has enabled us greatly and also made evil possible. As a continuation of the philosophical analysis, Becker showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt at eliminating it. Both the thinkers trace the existence of evil (and also goodness and freedom) to the disproportion or in-betweenness in the human condition. So this article is a phenomenological description of the emergence and progress of moral evil in individual human beings and human society.

**Keywords:** Ernest Becker, denial of death, disproportion, evil, fallibility, human condition, immortality project, Paul Ricoeur, shadow, symbol

### **1. Introduction**

“The essence of man is discontent divine discontent; a sort of love without a beloved, the ache we feel in a member we no longer have” (Ortega y Gasset 1940) “Divine discontent” and “denial of death” are characteristics of contemporary humans. And they are

also intimately connected to the emergence and existence of evil. In this essay an attempt is first made to relate evil, at least moral evil, to the basic human condition of disproportionality. For this we draw insights from two prominent thinkers of the last century: philosopher Paul Ricoeur and psychologist Ernest Becker.

Our aim in this article is not to give any ontological basis for evil, but to understand phenomenologically, some dynamics underlying the prevalence and progress of evil. We shall see that evil perpetuates itself in the very process of fighting it.

After first analysing the fallibility in human nature, we try to explore the symbolism of evil, and then in the final section, see the dynamics of evil perpetuating itself in the very struggle against death, and consequently evil itself.

## 2. The Fallible Human

Paul Ricouer has been one of the most outstanding philosophers of the last century. In Ricoeur's first major work, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950), one finds an expression of a perennial theme central to his anthropology, namely the two-dimensional character of all constituent features of human existence. Contrary to Sartre's claim that there is radical difference between consciousness or the for-itself and materiality or the in-itself, a difference that pits the for-itself's (*pour-soi*) freedom against the in-itself's (*en-soi*) sheer facticity, Ricoeur holds that the voluntary and involuntary dimensions of human existence are complementary. There is, to be sure, no seamless harmony between these two dimensions. Each person has to struggle with the conflict between them. But this conflict is what ultimately makes one's freedom and fallibility genuinely mine, what gives me my distinctive identity, and what enables evil in oneself and in society (Stanford 2008).

Ricoeur extends his account of fallibility in *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*, both published in 1960. In these works he addresses the question of how it is possible for us to go wrong, to have a bad will. In *Fallible Man* he argues that there is a basic disproportion between the finite and the infinite dimensions of a human being. This disproportion is epitomized by the gap between

*bios*, or one's spatiotemporally located life, and *logos*, or one's reason that can grasp universals. This disproportion shows up in every aspect of human existence. It is manifest in perception, in thought and speech, in evaluation, and in action. By reason of this disproportion, we are never wholly at home with ourselves and hence we can go wrong. Hence, we are fallible.

This disproportion does not, in spite of Sartre, render our existence absurd, according to Ricoeur. Rather, the very disproportion that makes us fallible and makes human evil possible is also what makes goodness, knowledge, and achievement possible. It is that which both distinguishes us from one another and at the same time makes it possible for us to communicate with each other, through *logos* (Stanford 2008).

## **2. 1 Description of Human Fallibility**

The fact that humans can be observed from various different perspectives, all of which may be justified but not always compatible with each other, indicates a crisis in the self-understanding of the subject. The analysis of the fundamental possibility of human will in *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* has shown that there is a break, a wound, a non-agreement within humans. This non-agreement makes it impossible for them to see themselves transparently. Ricoeur is not satisfied just with this analysis. The fundamental structure of the Will, which he has traced out, is only a preliminary result in view of the fact of human failures and fallibility. Since it is an absurd fallibility, it cannot be captured though the description of its own nature. Furthermore it presents an alien object which can be philosophically approached only through concrete experiences.

Thus, for Ricoeur, fallibility provides an understanding of the possibility of evil and human freedom without implying their necessity. As such, fallibility is a concept open to elaboration from a purely reflective basis. Fallibility as the possibility for evil is taken as a primary characteristic of human existence. With this concept of fallibility human existence is the place or possibility for the manifestation of evil (FC, 14 and Ihde 1971: 113.).

In two different ways Ricœur tries to capture and describe this *fallibility*. The transition from innocence to guilt can be understood only in concrete expressions of human experiences, that is, through the act of confession, or avowal (*Bekenntnis*), which later leads one to take responsibility for one's actions. In *La symbolique du mal*, he examines therefore the symbolic language of the experiences of guilt. But before that he studies the breaking point of evil. Thus he continues his description of the fundamental human possibilities which he had begun and executed in a preliminary and abstract form in *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* by interpreting the structures of the Will as fallible. Because of the opaque and absurd characteristic of guilt, its description (which emerges mainly out of a convergence of concrete signs) could only be an "empirie" and not an "eidetic", a description of it. Fallibility describes a weakness which makes evil possible. It lies in the "structure of mediation between the poles of the finite and the infinite nature of man" (FM 9).

## 2.2 Interpretation of Fallibility

Ricœur has sought to show the situation of the human condition as being in between the finite and the infinite, as having a certain *in-betweenness* or *disproportion*, all of which is constitutive of fallibility or the possibility of the Rupture. Thus in relation to knowledge there is a disproportion of *finite perspective* and *infinite word*; in relation to willing there is a disproportion between finite *character* and infinite *well-being*; and in relation to feeling there is a disproportion between *pleasure* and *happiness*. This could be illustrated as follows (Thorer 1984: 36-37):

### DISPROPORTIONALITY IN HUMANS

	Infinite Orientation	Finite Fulfilment	Mediation
Knowing	Infinite Word (Verb)	Finite Perspective	Pure Imagination
Willing	Well-being	Character	Respect
Feeling	Happiness	Pleasure	Mind
	Original Affirmation	Existential Difference	Human Mediation

The human as fallible means that the propensity to and possibility of moral evil is present in its constitution. Fallibility results out of the tension-relationship between the finite and the infinite. Analogously to Kant's categories of qualities (Reality-Negation-Limitation), Ricœur also differentiates three categories in the human constitution, which are characterised through tension: *the original affirmation, the existential difference and human mediation*. The moment of the infinite, which we have seen in three levels, (namely the Verb, the idea of Blissfulness and the Mind seeking happiness) are the very moments through which the original affirmation is enriched, perfected and spiritualised. The original affirmation may be trampled upon by the existential negation, which presents to the man as a perspective, as character and as life feeling. "Human being is the joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite" (FM 140). This means "that man is capable of joy, joy through fear, and in overcoming the fear, that is the basic reason for all disproportion in the affective region and the source of affective vulnerability" (FM 140).

Fallibility is exposed through evil. Otherwise we can say that fallibility is the condition or the potential for evil. Thus fallibility has a double sense. It is the breaking point of evil, so to say, the weak point in the chain. In this sense fallibility is the original situation, from which evil emerges. The evil in fact points to an original situation of innocence. The *depravity* of human beings lies in a longing for a non-guaranteed perfection. The original situation of innocence is nowhere present. It can be imagined through the existing situation determined by evil and set apart from it. So one can imagine this original situation of innocence, as we normally find in myths. Thus the myths of the fall are always connected with the myths of creation and those of innocence.

Over and above these, fallibility means not just the breaking point of evil, but also the capability to sin and to commit evil. It requires only one step to move from the vulnerability to the *actuality* of evil. "To say that man is fallible is to affirm at once that the limitation of one being, that does not fall with itself, is the original weakness out of which evil emerges. Further, evil can emerge out of this weakness only because it dares" (FM 189; Thorer 37).

### 2.3 Fallibility as a Symbol

Ricœur's examination of the voluntary and the involuntary has made us aware that in man there is a break, a wound, a disproportion, an *in-betweenness*, a non-agreement within himself. In the fallibility of humans, Ricœur seeks to grasp precisely this world and to characterise it. The tensional relationship between the infinite orientation in humans and the finite fulfilment turns out to be the reason and location for fallibility. The mediation which succeeds in the object of knowledge and in the works of practice, remains in the affective region as constant conflict and tension. Pleasure is more than a sign, it is a promise and a guarantee of happiness. This happiness would be sought after through *avoir*, *pouvoir* and *valoir*. For wo/man in every finite fulfilment there exists the danger of shutting off the affective dimension and of regarding the finite fulfilment as the whole. Fulfilment, which could serve as a symbol of the desired blissfulness tends to deviate itself to an idol. The symbolised structure, through which Ricœur sees certain linguistic signs as characterised, corresponds to the human Will. It is the same for the location and for vulnerability. Humans can go against their own nature by forgetting the symbolic structure of the finite fulfilments, crossing over from symbols to idols.

The fallibility of man describes and characterises more precisely than the preceding *Eidetic of the Will* the location in which symbolic speech is proper and significant. At the same time it shows that fallibility is a situation which we can consider for its own sake and which lets itself be accessible to us through actual concrete acts of the evil (sin). Thus our reflection points to the transition from the mere possibility to the concrete actuality of evil and further to an expression of the actual evil in confession, which means, in the realm of symbols. Thus the symbol serves humans in their self-expression.

### 3 The Symbolism of Evil

Fallibility as a symbol leads us to appreciate the symbolics and to trace how evil reveals itself in terms of the primary symbols of stain, guilt and sin, as indicated by Ricoeur.

#### 3.1 The Symbol as the Starting Point for Thinking

The examination of human fallibility has shown, where and how the evil in man can originate. The transition from innocence to guilt is not to be understood otherwise than as an execution of the confession by which man accepts his responsibility for his actions in symbolic language. In *La symbolique du mal*, Ricoeur is engaged with the concrete expressions of the human experience of evil in symbols (which we also meet in myths and in primary confessions).

Before he actually proceeds with his task of studying the symbolism of evil through its concrete expressions, Ricoeur gives an account of his procedure. "How do we move from the possibility of human evil to its actuality, from fallibility to its act?" (SB 9; Thorer, 39). This is the initial question for him. He wants to capture the transition from fallibility to its actualization by concentrating on the symbolism of evil from concrete human experiences. What he intends to do is a phenomenology of guilt, which repeats itself on its way to the imagination and to the projection of the confession of guilt. The phenomenology screens and orders the materials which would be the object of human thought. Thus there is an intimate connection between philosophical speculation and the pre-reflective expression (of guilt for example) in symbols. When one reflects on the philosophical expressions of evil, one is led back to the original expressions of it in the myths. Then there is the move from the myths to its building blocks – the symbols. The symbols characterise evil as blindness, as ambiguity, as anger. They refer to an oppressive experience and man in turn tries to grasp this experience with the help of language. The experience of evil forces itself to be expressed, so that all the speaking - including the philosophical reflection - about it refers back to its original experience.

The area of investigation in *La symbolique du mal* is limited, as Ricoeur points out. It refers to a particularly important area: how evil touches on a central and crucial relationship between man and the

sacred, to which the myth gives witness. So it is to be expected that an examination in this area will give us a deeper understanding of the myths and symbols. In this crisis, the whole vulnerability of reality is evident: "Because evil is in a special way the critical experience of the sacred, the threatening rupture of this relationship of man with the sacred may be urgently felt, and [also] how man is dependent on the power of this sacred" (SB 12; Thorer 1984: 39).

### 3.2 The Symbols of Evil: Stain, Sin, Guilt

Ricœur elaborates his understanding of evil in terms of the primary symbols of stain, sin and guilt. In *La symbolique du mal*, the imagination goes back to the farthest region where crime and misfortune are not to be differentiated. The Stain, which is associated with definite actions, is something analogous to a material thing. Evil action brings with it punishment. Evil action effects suffering. So the symbolism of *Stain* is the first explanation and rationalisation of suffering. The imagination of a stain points to a judging and avenging instance, which though remaining anonymous, concretises itself in the laws and rules of society. When the guilty is accused of a crime, there is also a simultaneous expectation of responsibility, of proper punishment and with it a hope that the fear and consequences of this crime would thus disappear (Bradley 2005: 444f).

A new step in the development of evil is the building up of *sin consciousness*. This consciousness presupposes a personal relationship to the God who invites us. Sin shows that aspect of guilt felt in the presence of God. Biblically speaking, sin is the breaking of the covenant.

The next stage of internalisation is reached with the formation of *guilt consciousness*. Guilt shows the subjective moment of the crime (to be differentiated from sin, the objective, ontological moment). Guilt consciousness consists of the fact that one is intensively aware of one's responsibility and of his ownership. In this sense, it is anticipated and internalised, leading to pricks of conscience.

The *imagination* of evil develops from a material understanding (Stain) of evil to a deeper internalisation (Guilt). In this process the symbols of the earlier stages of development are not just denied or negated, but are carried over to the later stages of development. Thus there exists a connection between all these symbols. "So there is a circular

movement taking place between all the symbols: the last symbol relives the sense of the preceding symbol, but the first gives the last the full symbolic power" (SB, 176. Cf. Thorer, 41). If one wants to name the concept towards which the development of the original symbols of evil leads, then one is confronted here with the paradox of the "Non-free Will". This concept – which is not identical with that of fallibility, but which is to be understood only in connection with the symbolism of evil, and which in turn gives it its significance – is characterised by Ricoeur as having three moments (Thorer 1984: 42):

- a. *Positivity*: Evil is a power
- b. *Expressivity*: Evil presupposes the free decision of man and comes as a temptation
- c. *Infection*: If humans give in to evil, first it is an outward act and then it spreads. It becomes contagious. At the same time, turning itself over, it tends to make the agent of the action to be innerly a slave.

So far we have analysed the philosophical contribution of Paul Ricoeur on evil, which could be enhanced by the insights of social psychologist Ernest Becker, as we proceed to the next section.

#### **4. Evil as Denial of Evil (Mortality)**

Another prominent and insightful thinker of the last century who dwelt elaborately on evil is Ernest Becker in his two classics (Becker 1973 & 75). Like Ricoeur, he too felt that evil finds its driving force in the human's paradoxical nature: "in the flesh and doomed with it, out of the flesh and in the world of symbols and trying to continue on heavenly flight" (Becker 96). Becker humbly reminds humanity that we are still animals, with all of the instincts and seemingly irrational chaotic impulses befitting all animals. Yet, paradoxically, humanity is fitted with a sense of reason that wishes to attain a "destiny impossible for an animal" (Becker 1975: 96). What we perceive as evil, in every form, is essential to any temporal creature. It is a part of the very properties of humanity that we exhibit qualities of moral evil, according to Becker.

Ernest Becker provides part of the answer to the problem of evil; that is, the paradoxical nature of the human, just as Ricoeur does.

Humanity is both animal and rational, and there lies the source of evil. A human being is a finite, limited and fallible being that is controlled mostly by animal urges based mostly around survival, while at the same time possessing a reasonable mind capable of transcending these things and reaching out to the Divine. Humans are capable of creating evil as part of their nature, choosing evil in the very search for the good. Our desire to eliminate evil may itself be our undoing (Hoffman 2002).

#### **4.1 Participating in the Immortality Project**

Why is it that of all the creatures on the earth human beings are the only ones to wage war, commit genocide, and build weapons of mass destruction? Social psychologist Ernest Becker raised this question and then proposed an insightful answer in his book, *Escape from Evil* (Becker 1975), going one step further than Ricoeur.

Becker's answer begins by recognizing that of all creatures, human beings alone seem to be the ones who are conscious of their own mortality. This awareness gives rise to an anxiety that most people would rather not feel. So people cope with this situation by essentially choosing sides. They choose to align themselves with the side of life rather than of death, or identifying themselves with "immortality projects" (Hoffman 2002). People align themselves with the side of life by seeking anything that promises to sustain and promote their own lives, such as power or money. Alignment with power can have two faces: malignant power over others, as the power created by autocrats, or benevolent power, as in the power vested in the skills of a physician. Likewise, alignment with money can result in exploitation or philanthropy.

It may be noted that people also seek to align themselves with the side of life by seeking alignment with things that endure beyond a single individual's lifetime. These can include making a "lasting" contribution to a field of art, literature, scientific inventions or knowledge. These can also include involvement with religious movements or specific cultures. These larger than life phenomena in some way assure the perpetuation of the significance of the people associated with them, a kind of immortality (Hoffman 2002).

From this point of view, a threat to a person's culture, religion, or "lasting contributions" is viewed as a threat to that person's *own* immortality project. The immortality project must be defended at all costs. This is the reason why some conflicts in the world can become so intractable. It's not just my country or tribe that is being threatened, but the very significance of my own life. Becker says, "This is what makes war irrational: each person has the same hidden problem, and as antagonists obsessively work their cross purposes, the result is truly demonic" (Becker 1975: 109).

People also try to align themselves with the side of life by aligning themselves with what is "good." This is because life is associated with "good" as opposed to death, which is "bad." Becker argues that this alignment with good may also be a major cause of evil. To follow his reasoning it is necessary to make a little digression to understand the psychological concepts of shadow and projection (Becker 1973).

#### **4. 2 Projecting the Shadow of the Shadow**

The psychological shadow is the dark complement of the consciously expressed personality. It represents those personal qualities and characteristics that are unacceptable to the conscious ego. To borrow a fitting image from the poet Robert Bly, the shadow is like a sack that you drag behind you everywhere you go and into which you toss all the aspects of yourself that you are ashamed of and don't want to look at (Bly 1998). The psychological shadow is much like the normal human shadow: everybody has one; when you face toward the light you can't see your own shadow; and sometimes everybody else but you can see it.

Oftentimes these disowned contents of the psychological shadow are "projected" onto someone else. Then we see "out there" what is really "in here". Typically the person we choose to project onto is not entirely innocent. He or she has some "hooks" on which we can hang our projections. If we're ashamed of our own anger, we find a slightly irritated person and view her as totally enraged. That's how projection of the shadow works.

People with inflated self esteem find it easy to see themselves as being almost always on the side of the “good.” Becker’s argument is that in the process of taking the side of life and of the good, we project our shadow onto an enemy. Then we try to kill it, and in this process perpetrate evil, without our willing it.

Psychologist Roy F Baumeister also reaches a similar conclusion. He holds that a major cause of evil in the world is the idealistic attempt to do good. Some examples include the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Thirty Years’ War in Europe, in which Catholic and Protestant troops devastated much of Germany in attempting to wipe out the “evil” version of the Christian faith represented by the other side, murders committed to prevent the “evil” of abortion, and the Stalinist and Maoist purges in Russia and China. He points out that “studies of repressive governments repeatedly find that they perceive themselves as virtuous, idealistic, well-meaning groups who are driven to desperately violent measures to defend themselves against the overwhelmingly dangerous forces of evil” (Baumeister 1997).

For instance, in many ways the Nazis were idealists. The Nazi SS was composed of the elite, the noblest of the population; yet they willingly committed the most horrible deeds. The Nazis wanted to transform their society into a perfect one. They wanted to root out the elements that they considered “evil”. Yet they almost never considered their own actions as evil, but perhaps at worst an unfortunate necessity in carrying out a noble enterprise (Baumeister 1997: 34, 38). The Nazis projected filth and evil on to the Jewish people and then tried to establish a “pure” state by eliminating the Jews. One of the professed motivations of racist lynchings in Western society was to maintain the “purity” of the white race. Many animal species, including coyotes, wolves, and prairie dogs have been irrationally persecuted by humans in the name of eliminating “varmints” and “filth” and “disease-carriers.” Enemies are “dirty.”

Historically, nations have been aroused to war by the depiction of the enemy as pure evil. In cases of reciprocal violence, such as war, each side tends to see itself as the innocent victim and the other as the evil attacker. If we, as a nation, do not do our own

"shadow" work, we will simply respond to violence with more of the same and in this process we ourselves will perpetuate evil.

Once a person has decided that some other is evil (or devil), the decision helps justify behaviours that tend to belittle or punish the other. Such behaviours .. . . . . help justify the behaviours that justify the other person in seeing the first person as evil. This reciprocal projection and dehumanization usually leads to a downward spiral. Patterns of violence often grow worse over time. The typical pattern for marital violence and violence among strangers is for minor insults and slights to escalate more or less slowly to physical attacks and violent aggression (Baumeister 1997: 283).

As Baumeister points out, one of the reasons why violence tends to spiral downward is that there is typically a huge discrepancy between the importance of the act to the perpetrator and to the victim. Baumeister calls this the magnitude gap (1997: 18). For example, rape is a life-changing event for a woman, while it may be only a few moments of excitement and limited satisfaction to the rapist. Whether an SS officer murdered 25 or 30 Jews in a given day was a matter of additional work for the SS officer, but a matter of life and death for the 5 additional Jews.

Hoffman notes that the magnitude gap functions in a way that makes evil worsen over time. In a pattern of revenge, as occurs in terrorism and occupation, the roles of victim and perpetrator are constantly being reversed. The perpetrator (A) may think he has harmed the victim (B) only at a level of, say, one damage point. The victim (B) however feels harmed at a level of ten points. To exact tit-for-tat revenge, B perpetrates harm on A at a level of ten, which from B's point of view may seem only fair, but from A's point of view may feel like harm at a level of 100. This of course seems totally out of proportion and requires further revenge as A and B switch roles again (Hoffman 2002).

Becker's analysis offers a way understanding the instances of genocide and mass murder in human history. He suggests, chillingly, that one way to gain the illusion of psychological power over death is to exert physical control over life and death. He points out that the killings in the Nazi concentration camps increased dramatically toward the end of the war, when the Nazis began to have a sense

that they might actually lose. Mass slaughter gave the illusion of heroic triumph over death/evil.

In Becker's terms, people who maximize their own take are maximizing the "side of life" narrowly understood as their own welfare. They act to eliminate the "evil" of their own impoverishment. They ignore the fundamental fact of our human interrelatedness, a fact attested to by spiritual traditions throughout history (Hoffman 2002) and in this process aggravate the evil they wish to alleviate.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article we had the modest aim of indicating some of the dynamics in the working out of evil. Ricoeur's understanding of the disproportion that characterizes human beings was, he came to conclude, insufficient to account for occurrences of actual will. No direct, unmediated inspection of the cogito, as Descartes and Husserl had proposed, could show why these evils, contingent as each of them is, in fact came to be. Recognizing the opacity of the cogito in this respect confirmed his suspicion that all self-understanding comes about only through "signs deposited in memory and imagination by the great literary traditions." The progress from *bios* to *logos* has enabled us greatly and also made evil possible. Thus we have arrived at an antinomy and this is where philosophy has to stop.

By refusing to accept mortality as part of their very nature, humans deny their animality and attempt to be divine. In this very process of denial of death and anxiety, the humans join the "immortality projects" and disrespects the disproportion that is intrinsic to the human condition, enabling evil to emerge.

As a continuation of the philosophical analysis, Becker showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt at eliminating it. Though both the thinkers trace the existence of evil to the disproportion or in-betweenness in the human condition, it has not been our aim to give any account of the origin of evil.

So Tao Te Ching's insight, formulated 2500 years ago, is valid even today.

There is no greater misfortune  
than to underestimate your enemy.  
Underestimating your enemy  
means thinking that he is evil.  
Thus you destroy your three treasures  
and become an enemy yourself (Lao-Tzu 1995).

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## Book Reviews

Frans Wijsen, *Seeds of Conflict in a Haven of Peace: From Religious Studies to Interreligious Studies in Africa (Studies in World Christianity and Interreligious Relations, no. 44)*, Amsterdam & New York (NY): Rodopi, 2007, pp. 282

This book is the fruit of over three years of research, concluding with three months of fieldwork in Nairobi in 2004. The awareness of the connection of religious terrorist groups with Africa, prompted many Africans to be engaged in interreligious dialogue. "Theoretical reflection on the practice of interreligious dialogue, however, has yet to come."(p. 10) Other scholars, who have written on dialogue, have ignored the African perspective, and those that do speak about Africa, do so only in a descriptive manner.

"This book is an attempt at making good this deficiency. It is written by a European, but a European who has been working and travelling in Africa for 25 years."(p. 11) Wijsen tries to answer the following questions: "Why are African scholars of religion and theologians so remarkably silent about interreligious relations? Is there an African model for interreligious relations?.. How should the subject of interreligious relations be taught in departments of religious studies and schools of theology?.. Have African scholars of religion and theologians anything to contribute to the (international) debate on this subject?"(p. 12) In trying to answer these questions, Wijsen brings together theoretical reflections and insights from the field. He hopes that his study "will lead to new and better ways of teaching interreligious relations in departments of religious studies and faculties of theology."(p. 27)

Wijsen begins by explaining his multi-perspective and polymethodical approach. He examines the religious scenario in Africa today, and the impact of secularism. This is followed by a discussion of the currents trends in the academic study of religions there. Wijsen then presents the result of his fieldwork on education in interreligious relations at faculties of theology and departments of religious studies in East Africa. He then examines "some key issues in the study of religion in Africa: religion and conflict, human rights and reconciliation, as well as dual allegiance and syncretism, secularism and extremism, mission and dialogue."(p. 29) Added to this is a theological reflection on mission and on ecclesiology. Wijsen suggests that seeing the Church as a community of co-pilgrims in search of God is more helpful in promoting interreligious dialogue than the image of the Church as the family of God. He also underlines the importance of women theologians.

Religion in Africa is 'an ambiguous reality' (p. 75), and it is not easily understood by scholars. This ambiguity is further intensified by the fact that "religion, society and culture are not perceived as separate domains."(p. 100) Hence "in the process of reconciliation religion can play a purifying role, but scholars of religion should be aware that religion is also part of the problem."(p. 141) The awareness of the need for interreligious dialogue is a recent development in Africa, the result of globalisation and pluralisation. Wijsen believes that for interreligious dialogue to be possible we need to insist on the role of the Spirit in other religions, because "the Spirit blows where it wills."(Jn 3.8, p. 178)

This awareness will lead to 'a spirituality of the road', based on the African tradition of accompanying "a departing guest a little way on his or her road as a gesture of respect."(p. 210) This is also in harmony with other traditions that see religion as a way: *tao* (Chinese), *shinto*

(Japanese), *marga* (Hindu), *halacha* (Jewish) and *mazhab* (Islamic). These traditions are based on the fundamental awareness that we are all strangers% to one another and to the Other. Mission, then, will be less the crossing of geographical boundaries, and more the crossing of religious and cultural frontiers. This "does not imply wishy-washiness about one's own faith. It means willingness to learn from the other and letting go of the need to have all the answers."(p. 218).

Wijsen's study can help those who are engaged in interreligious studies and dialogue. Religions as social phenomena with ancient roots are very complex, and hence we need to be careful and avoid generalisations and naive comparisons. We need to walk with peoples of other faiths, and find our way by walking. Interreligious dialogue also calls for the commitment to inculturation and liberation: allowing ourselves to be enriched by local traditions and committing ourselves to build up the local communities that are rooted in justice and love.

Subhash Anand

**George Nedungatt, *Quest for the Historical Thomas: Apostle of India. A Re-Reading of the Evidence*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2008, xxiv-428.**

The last time the Indian Christians were challenged in their age-old tradition about St. Thomas, Apostle of Jesus Christ, being the founder of the Christian Church in India was in 2006 when Pope Benedict XVI stated that the Apostle Thomas preached the Gospel in north-western India from where Christianity reached south India, which would imply that he did not take the Gospel to south India. It was so vehemently denounced by the Christians of south India that the Vatican had to issue a corrective and asserted that the Apostle himself

had proceeded to preach the Gospel in south India. It is doubtful that the Pope had reevaluated the material to make such a dramatic turnaround within two months. It would make after all no difference to him and for that matter to most European historians whether Thomas preached in India or elsewhere. Nor has the incident in any way added anything to the centuries-long polarization of opinion about St. Thomas and India that exists between Western and Indian historians. But George Nedungatt's book has definitely added some clarity to the debate. It is a re-reading of the evidence as well as a presentation of new evidence and, as someone has rightly commented, it is a book for which many were waiting for long, students, teachers, ecclesiastical historians and any one interested in the culture and history of India. George Nedungatt, who is a canon lawyer by profession but has spent a lifetime researching for this important book which is a significant contribution to the history of Christianity, deserves sincere appreciation and gratitude for this gigantic undertaking. It is often said that what cannot be cured has to be endured. The incurable Eurocentrism of Western Church historians who have pronounced the last words on Christian origins elsewhere therefore will have to be endured. But for those who look at history as a never-ending search, whether European or non-European, Nedungatt offers a serious challenge to look afresh at their sources, hypotheses and conclusions.

The book has an introduction, five main parts and a general conclusion. The introduction presents the real problem confronting the research on Thomas and India: the sharply divided opinion about Thomas and India. While most of the non-Indian authors tend to be skeptical (ranging from unprovable, unhistorical, legendary, non-proven but possible, not likely, probable or very probable), some non-Indian and almost all Indian authors consider it historical and certain. It is difficult to believe that there is any chance for the two groups to meet but at the end of the book many of the skeptics would, had they been alive, make a serious reconsideration of their views. Part I offers the survey of recent literature in English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Polish, Hungarian, Malayalam, and Tamil,

Part II is a critique of the method of those who are skeptical about the historical Thomas in India, namely, historicism which he blames for the uncompromising attitude of Western historians and pleads for the historical method which uses both written documents and unwritten traditions.

Part III offers the nine theories put forward by those who deny the Indian apostolate of Thomas: (1) India is confused with other countries like Ethiopia; (2) The Acts of Thomas is no historical source; (3) Apostolic foundation in India is an Edessian invention; (4) No Christianity in India in the second century; (5) Parthia and India are alternatives; (6) Apostle Bartholomew is India's Apostle; (7) Not Apostle Thomas but Thomas of Cana (Kinai); (8) Christian origins in India is from Nestorian missions; and (9) the problem with Calamina, the place of death of the Apostle. These are the objections that are usually put

forward by those who deny the apostolate of Thomas in India. It is for the first time that we find all of them in one place with a detailed critique of each of them and offering rather convincing solutions.

Part IV is another important contribution, namely a detailed analysis of the Patristic evidence about the apostolate of Thomas in India. 31 persons are quoted, some of them anonymous authors, which once again is an important contribution. Many readers will be surprised that there are so many Patristic references to Thomas in the first place. I have not come across another book where all these sources are placed together. Many hitherto confusing expressions are clarified in this section, one important one among them being the confusion between Parthia and India, the clarification of the expression Greater India and the relationship between India and Edessa.

In Part V the Indian tradition is analyzed, starting with the northwest Indian tradition revolving around Gundaphar of Taxila, which is basically based on the Acts of Thomas. Many would be surprised to find that there are other living traditions connected with the northwest Indian tradition of the apostle Thomas, like the Gar-Thoma village close to Sirkap in the district of Islamabad, and Tatta in Sind. Besides the several places mentioned outside the Malabar tradition (p.278) the one most interesting would be the central Indian tradition, namely, the Udayapur inscription in Madhya Pradesh. Unknown to many yet, this could turn out to be a significant archeological source about the Apostle Thomas in India but needs further study, and as the author admits, correct translation and interpretation. Then the author turns to the south Indian tradition, the most known in India and abroad, the Tomb of Thomas, the place, year and circumstances of his death, the traditions on the Malabar Coast, like the seven churches, the tradition about the Palayur Church, other ancient churches, the ballad, like the Veeradian song, Margam Kali, Pattu, Rambanpattu etc. In the process he has dealt a blow to some Thomas Christian leaders of today who have prided in the designation nasrani which according to him is a late Muslim imported name for the Christians. Nor does the designation Thomas Christians is of any historical value. Certain things which are considered to be non-negotiable by many Indian Church historians are pure non-starters according to Nedungatt: The Thomas Christian Priesthood, the Law of Thomas, the Thomas Cross, Brahmin social customs among the Thomas Christians, Christian influence on early Indian religion, etc.

The general conclusion offers a summary of the entire discussion, a bit repetitive perhaps, but finally sees the convergence of so many traditions as a sure proof of the historical mission of St. Thomas the Apostle of Jesus in India. The title given to the book is fully justified. It is a rereading of the evidence with a number of additional pieces of evidence brought under a single volume. The dialogical style of engaging the opponent is praiseworthy but at times the forthright conclusions seem to be dismissive of the other's position. The style is rather pedantic. Canon Law and historical narrative have little in common

and the author cannot be faulted for that. The unfortunate list of errata could have been avoided in this age of computers. But this is an invaluable book for all students and teachers of Indian history, culture and history of Christianity in India. As a single volume work on the vexed problem of the foundation of Christianity in India, it would be difficult to supersede this book for some time to come.

Isaac Padinjarekuttu

**Pandikattu, Kuruvilla (ed).** *Dancing to Diversity: Science-Religion Dialogue in India*. Serials Publications. New Delhi, 2008, ISBN 978-81-8387-194-5, pp. 246+xvi. Rs. 750.

The editor and authors of this book try to understand the phenomenon of diversity, and to respond to it creatively? What are contemporary scientific and religious responses to diversity and pluralism? Given the postmodern ambience, how do we enrich ourselves through the plurality of scientific theories, religious experiences and cultural preferences? These are some of the questions posed to some research scholars in the fields of science, religion and culture. The articles in this volume attempt to answer these questions at least partially.

The context of these articles is science and religion dialogue in India. India is considered to be not merely a "melting pot of civilization," that transcends the "clash of civilizations," but a creative and amicable source of "unity in diversity." Such a variety and diversity is easily noticed by a student of Indian culture. It is noted that the contemporary India is not merely a conglomeration of paradoxes, but a place where diversity is cherished, affirmed and even celebrated.

Within this context religious pluralism and cultural diversity that Indian Institute of Science and Religion, Pune, has organized twelve week seminar, spread over three years, on "science, values and visions." The seminar provided about thirty young scholars a chance to think deeply on issues of science, values, vision and religion and to interact innovatively so that they can contribute significantly in this field. These articles in this volume are by scholars who have worked intensely, reflected deeply and shared creatively to relate critical science with creative religions. The young scholars hailed from different parts of India, spoke different languages and possessed different faith and scientific traditions. These articles reflect some of their insights, many of them seminal, towards ushering a society where differences are cherished and creativity fostered.

The articles fall under four categories. The first two introductory articles speak of the need and social status of science-religion dialogue, since it has become a fast developing field particularly in the Indian scene. The next section carries four articles that deal with nature and reality with its unity dimension. Two articles are on Bohm's interpretation of reality, while another philosophical article deals with the nature of nature in itself. The last article in this section

draws parallels between the book of nature understood by Kepler and the Indian tribal traditions. This section has scientific basis and metaphysical implications. The third section focuses on diversity, relating health, beauty and wonder to it. Two articles in this section deal with the tragic Tsunami and the need to preserve the rich biodiversity in India. The last section is application of science-religion dialogue in the Indian context. A statistician survey on the relationship between health and spirituality is included. Since the contemporary Indian situation is driven by bio- and information technologies, two articles focus on stem cell research which has significant influence in India and one deals with the possibilities opened up by artificial intelligence.

The aim of these articles is to give young and aspiring scholars a chance to relate science and religion constructively. So these articles are primarily meant for educated staff and students in the universities. The articles are characterized by religious rootedness and scientific openness. They reflect the emerging India which is young, dynamic, ambitious and at the same time socially conscious. Another companion volume which will take up more focused issues will come out shortly.

The editor and the authors have succeeded, I believe, in deepening the ambience of religious, scientific and cultural dialogue within the larger Indian psyche. It can be recommended to all libraries and research departments.

S V George

**Zacharias Mattam, *Not I, But Christ Lives in Me*. Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore, 2007. pages 406. Price Rs. 300.00**

The work of Fr. Mattam S.D.B. originated as a doctoral dissertation from the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome, under the direction of Prof. Giorgio Zevini, S.D.B. Surveying the books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, the author attempts to trace the various stages of God's mystical union with human persons in Christ. The salvation history is presented here as a process, a progressive self-gift of God to humans.

The author identifies six stages of this process: i) "Walking with God" is the first stage. This is the time of man's first acquaintance and friendship with God as it is portrayed in the OT stories of the Patriarchs. Walking with the forefathers of Israel God transforms them and makes them instruments of blessing and salvation for the world. ii) The God who introduced the people of Israel to the world and walked with them 'falls in love with them'; he liberates them from the slavery in Egypt and owns them up as his chosen possession with the covenant at Sinai. During this stage, qualified as the time of *betrothal*, God dwells with his people and enables them to stand in his presence. iii) In the third stage of the process, depicted as the *wedding feast*, God sends his beloved Son as the bridegroom to establish the new covenant. Israel hears the voice of the bridegroom in the public life of Jesus and rejoices in his presence with

them. iv) The one who heeds the call of the bridegroom partakes of the nuptial union with him in the Church, his bride. This is the fourth stage and it is continued through the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. v) By participating in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments and through ecclesial communion a believer is being transformed into Christ; in this fifth stage the believer realizes that it is no longer he but Christ who lives in him (Gal 2,20). vi) The final stage is described as the participation in the *wedding feast of the Lamb*, the ultimate goal the Church is eagerly looking forward to.

These six stages have been discussed in this work in three parts (six chapters) in addition to a general introduction and a conclusion; one finds the heart of the thesis in the fourth chapter where a detailed analysis of Galatians 2,15-21 is given. The content of the text is organized very well in short sections with proper titles and subtitles; the short résumés given at the beginning and end of each chapter help the reader to follow the flow of the argument.

As Prof. Wirth Morand in his appreciation of this work says, "a reading of these pages shows the experience of a man of faith and a minister of the Word". Even a cursory glance would reveal the richness of this work and its plentiful use of scripture. Fr. Mattom quotes liberally from the Bible for every affirmation he makes. One may also notice that in his interpretation of the Bible the author has opted for a traditional reading of the text, ignoring modern critical studies. The work, as a result, does not discuss in depth questions of historicity and diachronic formation of texts. Thus an impression is created that the work is more 'spiritual' than exegetical in nature. Readers cannot be blamed if they expect a more scientific analysis of the texts, applying both synchronic and diachronic approaches, from a scripture scholar.

This work in which various themes and imageries both from the OT and the NT are analyzed and explained is a rich resource for the study of biblical theology. It is indeed a gift to all who sincerely seek the meaning of their Christian identity and strive to live it. Henry Pattarumadathil S.J

**John Mialil SJ, *Wonders in Nature*, Media House, Delhi, 2008, pp 150, ISBN: 81-7495-329-9, Rs. 100.**

A knowledgeable and practical botanist, Fr. Mialil has attempted to present a scientific account of the functioning and progress of life in the plant kingdom and animal kingdom. He has elaborately explained the anatomic functioning of the human body and has colored his arguments with a theological understanding – that there exists the Supreme Intelligence of God in all things. All the seven chapters are presented systematically well in progression, to show that the hidden hand of an Intelligent Designer is at work in the universe and its organisms. The literary style and logic in the presentation of these arguments is commendable and it enhances better understanding of the themes.

Chapter 1 carefully discloses the amazing ability of plants to choose suitable natural techniques in multiplying themselves with extreme care and precision. Chapter 2 meticulously studies the living mechanism and reproductive systems in animals and establishes that though they are instinctual, an Intelligent Agent has set things in the way they are. From the following chapters it is quite interesting to learn how human body functions in tune with nature and preserves itself in varying conditions from birth to death. Through many instances from different levels of life the author tries to respond to the notions of some of the scientists and philosophers who try to rule out the presence of God in nature. According to the author, there are enough evidences to show that behind every natural activity there is a mysterious hand that operates and which is not completely comprehensible to human minds. Looking at nature we are moved with awe and wonder and are led to a deeper faith in God.

The book is set as a critical and relevant response to the postmodern tendency that rejects God completely from the universe. The author goes against the view that science can explain all processes in the universe without any intervention of God. Hence the whole book is an attempt to show that nature does speak of God and this is clear from the mysterious and miraculous way in which nature operates. The book mainly addresses only part of the debate in science and religion, namely the aspect of Intelligent Design.

Ramlat Thomas SJ

Isaac Padinjarekuttu, *Challenges to Religion, Church and Theology*, Mumbai: St. Paul's Publishers, 2008. pp. 213. Rs.90.ISBN: 978-81-7109-873-6.

The book is an attempt to highlight the significance of moral and social ethical values, religion and spirituality for ensuring an authentic human existence in the modern world. At present peoples and societies all over the world are facing uncertainties regarding the meaning and purpose of life. Human life is fast losing its direction and goal. Lacking a sense of proper values and purpose to guide, people are groping in darkness. Taking advantage of this situation, unscrupulous political and religious leaders seek to reduce the people into objects of manipulation. They become easy victims of the quick-fix solutions and superficial satisfactions their leaders offer.

The crises confronting the modern world are symptoms of a deeper malaise. They indicate the moral and spiritual vacuum experienced by our contemporaries. In this situation, it is incumbent upon religion, theology and the Church to creatively respond to the multifaceted challenges facing the people of the present world. A failure in this would amount to courting irrelevance and turning religion, theology and the church into inconsequence – a phenomenon that the people of today are increasingly experiencing.

At this juncture, a sense of history, more than anything else, may be the sure guide of action for religion, theology and the Church. The understanding of history is the understanding of human behavior both in the past as well as its inevitable fall-out in the present. The contemporary experience of moral vacuum and the accompanying sense of a lack of meaning and direction in human life emerge from the blunders that humans, on account of their frailty, have committed in the past. These blunders involve the spheres of politics, religion, church, and theology. A historical awareness will enable us to judge the appropriateness of a specific action or inaction resorted to at present in the light of its historical precedents. And this will forestall the repetition of the same blunders and help us determine the realistic response required by the present situation.

The book provides an analysis of the various dimensions of the challenges facing religion, theology and the church against the larger picture of the global situation, offers the historical background of the challenges and suggests the possible ways to respond to each of these challenges.

The book is a collection of twelve articles written in the past one decade and are arranged in three parts. Part I deals with the challenges to religion in general and identifies the failure in responding to the challenges as the root cause of the present crisis in religious belief. The five essays in Part I discusses the challenges from Modernity, Religious Violence, Religious Fundamentalism, Science and Pluralistic Culture.

Part II of the book focuses on Christian Theology and delineates the task of theology in a world assailed by various challenges. If the task of theology is to help people understand their faith in the contemporary world, then theology needs to re-conceive this task anew taking into account the various elements of the situation in which people live their faith. Thus, the four essays in Part II seek to provide a clear understanding of the secular context, the presence of other world religions, and the need to bring the sources of faith in dialogue with the context and to link the cultural situation with the sources of faith.

Part III concentrates on specifying the ways to make the church a credible institution in the contemporary world. The credibility of the church will be predicated upon the nature and the relevance of the services it provides to humanity as well as on its commitment to the values it professes. Once again, the service that the church is called upon to perform is in response to the crying needs of the world. Accordingly, the need to serve the cause of freedom, the need for the church to become a servant of the world, and the necessity of providing spiritual leadership are discussed in the three essays of Part III.

The twelve chapters in the book, written in clear, lucid and direct language, reflect the strong conviction of Fr. Padinjarekuttu and his commitment to making religion, spirituality, moral and social ethical values the foundation on which the modern world could re-found itself. It is from this perspective that he looks

at the function of theology and the role of the church in the world. As a historian, especially as a church historian, Fr. Padinjarekutty brings out from his storehouse of knowledge and information the historical trajectory of each of the challenges facing the people of today. The realistic solutions he proposes to these challenges in the light of his wide range of knowledge, his experiential understanding of the situation of the world as well as his clear vision for the future leave the readers with no other option but to share his convictions and to commit oneself to the task of reshaping society and world in such a way as to make an authentic human life possible in the present times.

Mathew Jayanth SJ

**Pandikattu, Kuruvilla (ed.) *Postmodernity: An Indian Appraisal*. Serials Publications, New Delhi, 2008. ISBN 978-81-8387-200-3, pp. 282+xvi Rs. 895.**

“Is India postmodern?” This is the question posed to the authors of the articles included in this book. They hold that India is at the same time traditional, modern and postmodern. All these elements are present in different sections of the kaleidoscope that India is. Also these elements are present in each individual. In many areas in our own lives, we are still at the traditional world-view. The modern world-view has taken deep root in the Indian psyche, though not completely. Today, India is also opening itself to the postmodern world-view. So this book attempts to address this peculiar situation in India. Responding to the postmodern challenge, this book wants to focus on India and offer some creative Introduction proposals within the Indian ethos.

This book is also primarily addressed to the Christian audience. So some of the themes dealt with in this book are predominantly Christian. Christianity has been purged and purified by the enlightened and by the “crisis of modernism.” It has grown out of it and come out with more vitality and vigour. And similarly the authors of the articles in this volume believe that Christian tradition is strong enough to brave the challenges and opportunities offered by postmodernity. As Christians we need to face the world and the world-views squarely. Without being gobbledd up by these views, the living Christian traditions can respond positively and creatively to the phenomenon of postmodernity.

So the articles in this volume attempt to respond to the postmodern challenges and prospects. Some of the articles in this volume are introductory, introducing the postmodern life style to the audience. Some are rather critical of postmodernity, while others are appreciative of it. A few of the articles are creative applications made in the light of the postmodern challenge and critique: notion of God, renewed vision of reality (metaphysics) and Jesus (Christology).

The first section introduces the vague and fashionable notions related to postmodernity. It is both general and introductory in nature. It focuses on the historical origin, the salient features and the innovative challenges offered by postmodernity.

George Rajmohan, a young phenomenologist, traces the main ideas of postmodernism and some of its prominent exponents including Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault. The author hopes that postmodernism will constructively create new paradigms of life which the world badly needs today.

The next article by Kuruvilla Pandikattu traces the scientific domains (like quantum mechanics and chaos theory) that have given birth to elements of postmodern thinking. Then he applies some of the key notions of postmodernity to the religious and social life of the contemporary world. He concludes the article by tracing the elements of postmodernity in various levels of contemporary human life like economics, informatics and social life. The questions he finally asks is: Will postmodernism play also a constructive and prophetic voice that ushers in more human and humane values?

The article of the budding scholar, Augustine Pamplany, first analyses the epistemic, anthropological and metaphysics assumptions of modernity and points the way to going beyond them, leading in the process to postmodernity. He concludes hopefully: A well authenticated praxis of postmodernity evident in a penetrating reassessment of the perennial foundations of our social, religious and political life may reinforce our optimism about the future of postmodernism

After the introductory section, the second section invites the readers to engage themselves in some concrete applications to India from postmodern perspectives. This section tries to engage some of the insights with the complex Indian phenomena like the caste system, domination, exclusivity and folk religiosity. Hence it provides us with concrete applications of some of the postmodern insights and offers new paradigms for the Indian Church.

The young scholar of science and religion, Victor Ferrao, argues that Ambedkar exhibited postmodern tendencies in his war against the casteist metanarrative in India. He understood the caste system as the power game of oppressing the weak. He hopes that Ambedkarism can go a long way in our fight against our highly stratified society arranged in an ascending order of reverence and descending order of contempt.

The anthropologist, Joe Arun, carries on this conversation with caste system and studies this phenomenon from the perspectives of domination and exclusivity – from that of Brahminism and British colonialism. Drawing inspiration from postmodernity, he pleads for a “celebration of the dignity of difference.” He urges us to appreciate the dignity of difference in the ways in which people are and live in their own situations. And this is why it is hard to find any precision in the arguments of postmodernism and it refuses to settle down to one single meaning by which one could characterise postmodernism.

James Ponnaiah, a budding scholar in folk religiosity, applies the insights of postmodernity to the role and significance of rituals practised by the Indian folk. He sees rituals as both the locale and the instrument of “the techniques,

technologies or strategies of power.” Thus rituals have a type of efficacy or special power, not only to shape social organisation and thereby the dispositions of individuals, but also in the articulation, redefinition, and legitimisation of socio-economic and cultural realities of India.

A young German theologian, Christian Bauer, tries to carry on this conversation by bringing in the Church and the poor. Facing politics and mysticism of the Sacred today, the Church will have to reformulate the famous ‘option for the poor.’ Following the maxims of two great martyr-bishops, it has to be radicalised towards an existential option of the entire people of God for *Homo sacer*, the extreme paradigm of ‘the poor’ in and beyond modernity: Oscar A. Romero interpreted the often-quoted statement, “Gloria dei vivens homo” of Irenaeus of Lyons in the light of his Latin-American context as “Gloria dei vivens pauper”. Maybe theology today will have to extend these sentences into their very extreme of that double frontier, which excludes *Homo sacer* from the ‘modern’ world of God and Man – and thus open up a wide field of transgression beyond both. That extension might be without any frontier, but it is never without the horizon: ‘Gloria dei vivens homo sacer’.

This vision for a religious community is complemented by Hector Andrade, who brings in the metaphor of “migration.” He hopes that the Church will be ready to accept a wide spectrum of forms of understanding and expressions of religious experiences, Scripture and Tradition. Religion must become pluriform if it has to reach out to all the people among whom it has spread and grown. From a postmodern perspective, the author holds, that this reaching out is beneficial to the religious communities and does not smack of ‘fragmentation.’ Such religions may appear to the western mind as ‘fragments’ of a true religion torn apart, but to the South Asian mind it will appear rather as ‘parts’, portions of a whole whose cohesion and unity lies elsewhere, beyond any institution.

Nishant, another young scholar of philosophy and postmodernity attempts at a Deridian deconstructing of Husserl and Levinas and shows how responsibility and responding to the phenomenon of life can help us to live our suffering meaningfully. This moral philosopher attempts to respond to the radical questions: Is ethics viable in a postmodern age? After attempting to respond to some of the challenges posed by postmodernity, the author concludes: Postmodernism as a genuine partner in dialogue with the little narratives in the field of morals becomes both relevant and appealing in the contemporary world.

The third section attempts at responding creatively to wider issues of significance based to some extent on the Indian realities and postmodern challenges..

The first article by LeRon Shults, a prolific American theological writer, is a theological response to postmodernity. This article attempts to explore a new opportunity that arises at the contemporary postmodern intersection: the opportunity to articulate theological concepts in a way that links them to the modern fascination

with human desire. The author hopes that by responding reconstructively to late modern concerns in this way, the author hopes that academic theology may contribute to the ongoing mission of the body of Church in the world.

Then the crucial question is raised: Is Natural Law Morality Defensible in a Postmodern World? Taking up the ethical domain, Craig A. Boyd, an American ethicist, tries to go beyond moral relativism and asks the questions: Is Natural Law Morality Defensible in a Postmodern World? His answer is inspiring: Natural law morality can plausibly be reconstructed in spite of the postmodern criticisms. Accordingly, he maintains that natural law morality depends upon a viable realist epistemology that explicitly denies the skeptical assumptions of postmodernism.

The next article by Augustine Perumalil, a young systematic philosopher, deals with the "dawn of postmodernism and the decline of metaphysics." It may seem that "postmodernism replaces Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God with an announcement of the end of philosophy". In this context Perumalil brings out valid insights from Marion's postmodern natural theology, which is primarily a commitment to Catholic orthodoxy without its unwanted metaphysical baggage.

In the same vein, another promising systematic philosopher, George Karuvelil, uses postmodernity as a ladder to offer a critique of John Caputo. The author shows that Caputo's espousal of radical undecidability, a postmodern feature, is the result of being a prisoner of a pre-hermeneutic mind-set, of the old objectivist picture. He indicates how we can go beyond such limitations imposed by postmodernity.

In the concluding reflections, some authors attempt to sum up, our responses to postmodernity. An acclaimed systematic theologian, Jacob Parappally, indicates the relevance of Christ in the larger background of postmodernity. The author contends that postmodernism's insight into the significance of language can positively contribute to the understanding of the implications of various Christologies and enable us to judge whether they are liberative or oppressive. However, the tendency of certain postmodernists to explain everything by appealing to the inevitability of death and by enclosing everything within the framework of bounded time go against the fundamental human experience of transcendence and the Christian experience of Jesus Christ. Finally, Cyril Desbruslais offers a constructive criticism of postmodernity based on Juergen Habermas and Ken Wilber.

The good is a good asset to libraries and houses of higher learning. The editor and the authors have succeeded, I believe, in introducing and applying postmodernity to the complex Indian scenario.

S. V. George

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