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Aspects of Priesthood



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Jnanadeepa Journal details	2
Editorial.....	3
A Public Property Called Priest <i>Joseph Lobo, S.J...</i>	6
Prophetic Priesthood Today <i>Raj Irudaya, S.J.....</i>	36
Priests amidst Conflicts <i>A. Maria Arul Raja, S.J.....</i>	50
Hindu Catalyst for Catholic Priesthood <i>Thomas Chillikulam, S.J.....</i>	76
Samadhi in Yoga: An Experience of Encounter with Deathlessness <i>Stephen Chundamthadam, S.J.....</i>	99
The Priest and Politics: A Critical Examination of Some Common Assumptions <i>P.T.Mathew, S.J.....</i>	123
Priesthood and Professionalism: The Need to Support the Process of Professional Development in the Church <i>Paul Fernandes, S.J.....</i>	143
The Eucharist and Community Building in 1 Corinthians 11: An Indian Perspective <i>George Kudilil.....</i>	170

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Editorial

The year for priests, from June 2009 to June 2010, has engendered much material on the priesthood, priestly ministry, the vocation and life of priests. There was apprehension in some quarters that this was to stress once again the division in the Church between clergy and laity, or to emphasize the authority of the clergy over the laity. This definitely was not the purpose of this year. Pope Benedict XVI, in the very opening paragraph of his letter announcing the year, stated his purpose: "This Year, meant to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a more forceful and incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world"... Let us hope that something of this purpose has been served. Further, in the same letter, while praising the wonderful examples of exemplary priests, Pope Benedict also candidly admitted the scandal and harm caused by priests who did not live up to their priestly vocation. An honest appraisal is essential for any improvement.

The year provided an excellent occasion for priests for renewal. However, it was not meant exclusively for them. It offered a chance to all to reflect upon ministry, leadership in the Church, and the services that different members can render within the Church. The articles in the previous issue, and the present one of *Jnanadeepa Journal* highlight several aspects and dimensions of priesthood in the Church. It is very refreshing to see that being in India, where one is constantly in touch with people of other faiths, our faith is nourished by dialogue with those of different faiths. Our understanding, even of Christian priesthood, is enriched by our openness to the

understanding of priesthood in other religions.

Priestly formation in India requires a close, detailed and honest look. Evaluation and survey reports do not paint a rosy picture of priestly formation in India. There are many who feel that the end product does not measure up to expectations. The time, effort and money put into the training of priests does not seem to yield results as expected. One needs to ask hard questions like: Is the formation program truly geared for the contemporary Indian context? Are the formators not up to the mark, or are they failing in their mission? Are the formees deficient? Do they have the motivation, the ability and the determination to truly form themselves as the present day requires? Is consumerism, corruption and the ways of the 'world' affecting formees and formators? These questions require well researched and thoroughly studied answers. Not only is thorough research required, but also the wisdom to interpret the findings correctly, and the courage and creativity to follow-up the findings. Research is required because mere opinions or conjectures will not be helpful, and in fact may do harm. Also, different people will have different opinions in this matter, and only a detailed study will convince those who need to be convinced, and more importantly, will provide the way forward.

The history of the Church shows how priesthood has evolved over the centuries. Changes have come in due to many reasons. Historical circumstances are among these reasons. We need to see what changes we need to bring in, in our contemporary world. For this, collective discernment is very necessary. Openness to the Holy Spirit is of utmost importance here. There is urgency to respond to the many challenges before us. Loss of credibility of

priests, priesthood itself being questioned, the lack of vocations to the priesthood, are all challenges that need to be responded to. We have to be open to God, to one another and to discern the signs of the times in order to be relevant to the world of today, and truly responsive to the challenges before us.

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Editor.

A Public Property Called Priest

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Abstract: The focus is on ministerial priesthood. It is difficult to combine institutional priesthood and the prophetic function. These roles can be combined in the living out of the Eucharist, which is more than a cultic celebration of the Mass. Sharing in the priesthood of Christ is through sharing in His self-sacrificing mission. Being one with Christ makes the priest one with people. A priest is a public person, with priesthood claiming the totality of his human person. The power and authority that a priest has comes from his self-emptying like Christ. Important characteristics of priestly service in the Indian context are spelt out.

Keywords: Priest, priesthood, prophet, public, celibacy, priestly function, Indian context.

How to 'tame' a prophet?

Ordain him a priest!

A priest celebrating the golden jubilee of his priesthood is a contradiction in terms.

He should not have survived to see that day.

He should have been 'spent' and 'worn out' long ago!

A loaf of bread is not to be kept in the showcase...so is a priest.

If it is kept, it only gathers fungus.

A loaf of bread is to be broken and consumed...

So that it can enliven the hungry!

"The greatest suffering of the Church is the sin of its priests."¹

"Priests are celibates, not old bachelors."²

“Scandals that arise when priests fail to live celibacy are not just about priestly discipline, but rather about a failed understanding of human love.”³

“Eternal paradox of the priest: He bears within him those who are contrary. He reconciles, at the price of his life, fidelity to God with fidelity to man. He seems poor and feeble.... He has neither political power nor financial means, nor the force of arms that others use to conquer the earth. His strength lies in being unarmed and being able to do all things in the One who gives him strength.”⁴

“Intrinsically linked to the sacramental nature of ecclesial ministry is its character as service. Entirely dependent on Christ who gives mission and authority. ministers are truly ‘slaves of Christ’ for us. Because the word and grace of which they are ministers are not their own, but are given to them by Christ for the sake of others, they must freely become the slaves of all.”⁵

The year for the priests has seen an enormous amount of literature being produced all over the world about “priest” and “priesthood”. In most of the literature it is customary to begin with the OT and NT understanding of priesthood; trace its development in the history of the Church; distinguish between the ‘common priesthood’ of all baptised Christians and the ‘ministerial priesthood’ of the ordained priests; and finally offer a few reflections on its current role and relevance. While such attempts are very valuable, I do not intend to offer such a systematic reflection here. I would rather allow the above citations shape and direct my train of thoughts. Further, my focus in this article will be on ministerial priesthood and not common priesthood.

1. The drama of priests and prophets

In the history and pre-history of religion, it seems difficult to find a religious tradition that did not have its own priests and prophets. It is generally accepted that priesthood evolves from a simple to a more complex form in the history of a given religious tradition. Most of the time, “priest” and “prophet” remain as distinct and at times even mutually conflicting roles. Perhaps as a rare phenomenon Christian theology combines them into the single person of the priest. Such an attempt though looks theologically idyllic, nevertheless has its own problematic consequences if it is subjected to an honest and rigorous sociological and hermeneutical critique. This is for the simple reason that while the priest in and through his concrete actions (be it strictly religious, political, cultural etc.) tries to maintain the status quo⁶, the prophet, in being faithful to his/her vocation, deconstructs it⁷; thereby laying the foundation for a reconstruction.⁸ The implied tensions between prophets and priests in texts such as Am 5:21; Jer 7:21; Hos 6:6; Is 1:11 should be understood from this perspective. In a similar vein, R. Brown’s distinction between the “missionary apostleship” (which is more the function of an itinerant preacher and prophet like St. Paul, who is constantly on the move and keeps contact with the community established by him or by another through occasional visits and letters) and a “residential episcopate” (who takes care of an already founded community by residing with it) in the early church brings out the difference between their respective “character traits” and “mental outlook” required to play their respective roles. Brown considers them as different from and “sometimes opposed” to each other.⁹ From a sociological point of view Max Weber is emphatic in saying: “The [priest] lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition,

while the prophet's claim is based on personal revelation and charisma. It is no accident that almost no prophets have emerged from the priestly class."¹⁰ In the Biblical traditions, certainly, these two roles do not try to liquidate each other; but in a dialectic tension contribute to the continuity, progress and purification of societies.¹¹ Hence it is important to understand the significance of implanting such roles in the single person of a priest in the Christian tradition.

On the part of a priest there may be many ways of fulfilling these roles. But here I choose to explicate one important way within the Christian tradition. I choose to call it the "way of the Eucharist". The lived out Eucharistic reality can combine priesthood and prophethood into a single person and/or a single community in a very unique and effective way.

2. The Eucharist integrates...

Sociologically, the Christian Eucharistic celebration can be dealt with under the rubric of cult and/or ritual. In this sense the priest has a very important role in it. However, from the point of view of a truly liberative and responsible theology, the Eucharist transcends a mere cultic and/or ritual context and presents itself as the warp and woof of Christian life. It is here that the priest and the prophet can merge into a single person or a single community in the context of his/its Eucharistic life.

For this to happen, the Eucharist needs to be seen as a reality wider than what we call Mass, which in turn is a cultic-celebrative and sacramental dimension of the Eucharist. We take the cue from the life of Jesus himself. The whole life of Jesus is a single Eucharist. The Last

Supper, where he shared the bread and cup can be seen as sacramental representation of what he already did during his ministry (a real breaking of himself in selfless love and service) and what he did on the cross – a real giving of himself in obedience to the Father. This totality constitutes the first Eucharist. The Eucharist is the kenosis of God; God emptying Godself out of infinite love in order to be one with us, to save us. Its memory should not only be ‘recalled’ and celebrated at the Mass but more importantly be lived at every moment of the life of a priest and a Christian community. It is in this sense that the participation in the “Eucharistic toil” (the prophetic, healing and teaching praxis of Jesus) becomes the necessary and inseparable dimension of the “Eucharistic meal” (the Mass). It is only in the living out of both these dimensions of the Eucharistic reality (“toil” and “meal”) that the priest and the Eucharistic community can be priest and prophet simultaneously. Eucharist in this sense plays an integrating role in the life of a Christian community.¹²

Eucharist understood in the above sense guards against any ‘taming’ of a prophet by means of priestly ordination. That is because living out of the Eucharistic reality necessitates that a priest be first and foremost a prophet. Eucharist leads the prophet in his or her prophetic praxis to offer a sacrifice of the self by means of participating in the self-sacrificing Eucharist of Jesus. Rightly then the archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn affirms “the priesthood is more than a job; it is a special call to holiness through sacrificial love and service to others.” Emphasizing this dimension of priesthood, he says, “if the priesthood is not an experience of self-sacrificing love, then inevitably it will become a kind of loveless clericalism, more concerned with power and prestige than

with the priesthood of the crucified Lord.”¹³ *Pastores dabo vobis* rightly integrates the spiritual life of priests with their service (No.21): “The spiritual life of the ministers of the New Testament should therefore be marked by this fundamental attitude of service to the people of God.” This emphasis on sacrificial and loving service prevents priestly ordination being looked upon as claiming any privilege, position, precedence or power.

The leadership, the cultic and the prophetic roles of a priest thus have meaning and significance only within the framework of the total Eucharistic reality.

Linking priesthood to the Eucharist in a narrow cultic sense was of Scholastic origin and got a further impetus in the manual theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such an emphasis, in fact was reinforced by the Council of Trent, which itself was more a reaction to the troubling questions raised by the “Reformers” than a positive enrichment of the doctrine of the Eucharist and the Priesthood.. Vatican II attempted to modify this understanding.¹⁴ Basing its own teaching on the ministry of Jesus, the Council interrelates three important offices of Jesus the priest in defining priesthood in the church; namely, like Jesus, an ordained minister is a teacher, sanctifier and leader in the Church. Priests are called to exercise these offices in communion with the bishop (LG 21). “Bishops, in a resplendent and visible manner, take the place of Christ himself, teacher, shepherd, and priest, and act as his representatives” (LG 21; cf. PO 12, LG 6). “Priests represent Christ and are the collaborators of the order of bishops in that threefold sacred duty which, of its nature, pertains to the mission of the Church” (AG 39; cf. PO 1; LG 28).

It is true that the scholastic link between priesthood and the Eucharist depicted a narrow perspective in understanding the Christian priesthood and that the teaching of Vatican II has broadened and deepened it. However, one must pay attention to the fact that given a more comprehensive understanding of the Eucharistic reality itself, Vatican II's broadened understanding of the priesthood can be meaningfully situated within it. The recent teaching of the FABC is particularly helpful in this regard.¹⁵ The document interprets every part of the Eucharistic celebration in the context of the Asian realities and attempts to integrate a Christian response within the Eucharistic reality. Living the Eucharistic reality in this sense certainly goes beyond celebrating Mass; and by the same token the role of a priest extends beyond presiding at the celebration of the Mass and finds its fulfilment in facilitating a dynamic by which Eucharistic reality becomes the warp and woof of the totality of Christian life. And such a priestly ministry cannot but be prophetic. That is why the Nicaraguan revolutionary priest Miguel D'escoto, during the peak of the Nicaraguan revolution said: "I looked on all of life as a preparation for the next Mass, and the fulfilment of the commitment made in the last Mass".¹⁶

3. Freedom of a priest – a freedom to be...

The priesthood of Jesus in the letter to the Hebrews is compared to that of Melchisadek. The point of comparison is that it is not a traditional priesthood, nor is it one that is hereditarily transmitted. That is why Melchizedek's genealogy is not referred to. The name Melchizedek in Hebrew simply means king (*mēlek*) of righteousness (*ṣəḏāqāh*). These considerations shed significant light on

the NT understanding of the priesthood of Jesus which is shared by every baptised Christian in general and a priest in particular.

Such a priesthood stands radically distinguished from the priesthood understood in the anthropological and sociological sense – something that is essentially connected to cultic practices. The essential dimension of Christian priesthood lies in the “cult” of self-sacrifice. Such a consideration brings to our awareness a whole lot of commonly forgotten dimensions of Christian priesthood.

A Jesus-like priest like the “Son of Man who has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58) is called to a life of freedom from all interior and exterior compulsions in order to be fully and totally available for the service of the Reign of God.

Sharing in the priesthood of Jesus should not be reduced to the words and actions related to the sacrament of ordination. Sharing in such a priesthood also is a process brought about by sharing in the self-sacrificing mission of Jesus. Therefore, one who is ordained a priest has to become more and more a priest in daily life after ordination, through kenotic love expressed in sacrificial service.

Jesus responded to his times by means of discerning the will of God in the signs of his times. The recently announced model for priests, St. John Vianney’s mission was fitting to his times (among other things, spending more than 18 hours a day in the confessional). A Jesus-like priest is essentially a person of discernment; one who longs to find the will of God in the signs of the times and finds the greatest fulfilment of life in doing it.

4. A dually relational existence: one with Christ, one with humans

“A priest is a slave of Christ, who himself became a slave when he took on human nature” (Benedict XVI)¹⁷.

Pastores dabo vobis (No. 12) speaking about the nature of ministerial priesthood says: “the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood cannot be defined except through [the] multiple and rich interconnection of relationships” [to God, to the church, to their superiors, to fellow priests, to the local community, and themselves].

The vocation to the priesthood is a call to relativize one’s own existence and thereby order it radically in terms of relationship with Christ on the one hand, and with the people of God on the other. It means that a priest, to be faithful to such a calling, cannot afford to exist for himself. Defining one’s existence in relation to Christ is vividly expressed in the words of St. Paul in Galatians 2:20 – “and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” That amounts to being a “slave of Christ” in the most radical sense; having no will of one’s own, but that of Christ. In fact such a relationship points towards a radical union.¹⁸ At the same time a priest, precisely because of this union with Christ, is called to find the concrete expression of it in terms of him being one with the people of God whom he serves; thereby making the kenosis of Christ in an unique sense his own. It is because of such a possibility that Fernando Cardenal was able to say: “any step taken against a commitment to the people would be against God’s will. It would be a sin.”¹⁹

Pope Benedict XVI has beautifully expressed this idea:

... authentic service to the Word requires from the priest that he strains toward a deep abnegation of himself, until being able to

say with the Apostle, 'It is not I who lives, but Christ who lives in me'...Now then, to be the 'voice' of the Word doesn't constitute for the priest a merely functional element,... On the contrary, it presupposes a substantial 'losing oneself' in Christ, participating in his mystery of death and resurrection with all of oneself: intelligence, liberty, will, and the offering of one's own body as a living sacrifice... profoundly united to the Word of the Father, who in incarnating himself, has taken the form of a slave, has made himself a slave. The priest is a slave of Christ in the sense that his existence, ontologically configured to Christ, takes on an essentially relational character: He is in Christ, through Christ, and with Christ at the service of man. Precisely because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people.²⁰

In sum a priest, to be true to his vocation needs to transcend his natural instinct for self-preservation, thereby radically relativizing his very existence in the service of God and His people. However, it would be naïve to think that this relativization, this being "ontologically configured to Christ" occurs magically and instantaneously at the moment of ordination. Rather, it has to be a prolonged process of painful purification and transformation, all through formation, leading up to ordination and continuing all through life after ordination.

5. Someone for all, at all times and yet "alone" at the end of the day

Parental support, friendships, spousal intimacy, etc., certainly play unique roles in making life not only bearable but also truly fruitful and meaningful. However, a Jesus-like priest, paradoxically, is called to experience a certain type of "aloneness" or solitude in the very mission of being available for service in an unconditional manner. It is this paradox that makes him someone very special. For instance, at the critical moments of life such as

initiation into the religious tradition (by means of baptism, confirmation), spiritual healing/renewal, wedding, sickness, death, etc., the accompanying by a priest stands a class apart from such acts on the part of anyone else. However, a Jesus-like priest is called to deprive himself of all the self-advantages that could come his way due to such ministries.

Emphasizing this aspect John Paul II writes in his Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2005:

Christ's self-giving, which has its origin in the Trinitarian life of the God who is Love, reaches its culmination in the sacrifice of the Cross, sacramentally anticipated in the Last Supper. It is impossible – for the priest – to repeat the words of consecration without feeling caught up in this spiritual movement [...] The priest must learn to apply these words also to himself, and to speak them with truth and generosity. If he is able to offer himself as a gift, placing himself at the disposal of the community and at the service of anyone in need, his life takes on its true meaning. This is exactly what Jesus expected of his apostles. [...] It is also what the people of God expect of a priest.²¹

A service of this type is both, a privilege and a responsibility. It is a privilege because, a priest has access to such forums where a penitent bares himself/herself so completely that no other forum can facilitate it. It is a 'privilege' because a priest can be instrumental in the hands of God to heal and build penitents, both as individuals and as a community at a very deep level. Benedict XVI has powerfully brought out this fact in one of his recent interactions with the parish priests in Rome.

And who knows the men of today better than the parish priest? ... to the pastor, men often come normally, without a mask, without other pretexts, but in situations of suffering, infirmity, death, family issues. They come to the confessional unmasked, with their own being. It seems to me that no other profession

gives this possibility of knowing man as he is in his humanity,
and not in the role he has in society.²²

It is precisely for this reason that this ‘privilege’ becomes at once a serious responsibility for a priest: to act not merely in the name of Christ but like Christ in bringing about healing and reconciliation in the life of the person before him.

Every human person, irrespective of his/her state of life, experiences at the depth of his/her heart a certain degree of aloneness. It is an existential aloneness. One can treat it as loneliness in the negative sense and react in such a way as to fill it with ‘things’ that really do not fill or take it as a ‘solitude’ – a space to encounter the Source of one’s being there at the depth of one’s heart. In this context a priest, once again has a special privilege of encountering the Creator right through the day in people and situations and then at the end of the day, as it were, in the solitude of his heart. Experience tells us how these two encounters can be mutually enriching.

The priestly solitude is directly linked to priestly celibacy. Though celibacy may not be the most important factor in being a priest,²³ yet integrating the demands of celibacy in a way that makes a priest ‘passionate’ about his mission, can make his life only richer.²⁴ In fact “fidelity to my people in their battle” says Fernando Cardenal, “has always been a powerful reason for being faithful to my vow of celibacy”.²⁵ To connect priestly celibacy to ministry is not bypass the other related issues such as physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and social dimensions of ‘priestly loneliness’. Addressing them adequately falls beyond the scope of this article. Here I would like restrict myself to saying that the

emotional void, pain and tensions that a priest experiences due to his celibacy as such need not be negative or self-destructive. Priestly ministry and spirituality do offer space and opportunities for a healthy integration of such factors into a self-sacrificing love.

Can a priest have a ‘private life’?²⁶

In common parlance the public personalities are those who are in some way accountable to the public. A priest in this sense is certainly a ‘public personality’. But we need to clarify the nature of the ‘public-ness’ of a priest. It seems to stand a class apart from any other type of ‘public-ness’. This is because, sociologically speaking, a priest plays the role of a ‘mediating functionary’ in a system called religion, which in turn is a ‘total system’; in the sense that it makes or mediates absolute claims on the totality of the human person. Seen from this perspective, to be a priest cannot be a part-time job. (Perhaps the traditional concept of indelibility of priestly character has to be understood also in this sense. Namely, indelibility is not only a temporally permanent phenomenon but more importantly an all-pervading character that affects the person of the priest in its totality.) Our interest here is to reflect on the consequences of such a fact.

A priest certainly has his ‘private life’ – he needs to eat, recreate, rest and so on. But to be true to his vocation, none of these things can be independent from or unrelated to his mission. They have to be undertaken to the extent and only to the extent they have a positive contribution to make to the priestly mission. A priest cannot claim some aspect of his life or time solely for himself, as unrelated to his priestly mission. In this sense a priest should lack a ‘private life’ for himself.

6. Credibility, power, authority, honour and relevance of a priest

I always have had an acute sense of uneasiness whenever I saw a priest being made much of for the sole reason that he was a priest. I feel very uncomfortable when priests assume for themselves some exalted roles such as 'ruler' (understood as a man having control over others), 'sacred person' (in the sense of being separated from and holier than others) etc., and try to justify it theologically. I blush with shame when I see a priest dominating people; shouting at people from the pulpit; trying to control people by inducing fear and guilt in them; and taking advantage of their goodwill for his own glorification and gratification. Such moments as these have always nagged me with questions regarding the identity of a priest.

In a certain chapel there is a painting of Jesus. In that picture Jesus is clad in Mass vestments. Looking at that painting, I have always wondered: "What a mischief! Instead of painting a priest clad in the torn and blood stained clothes of Jesus and thereby challenging all priests to live like him, the artist has clad Jesus in priestly (cultic) clothes; thereby domesticating him." The best way, they say, to contain a prophet is to ordain him a priest!

Looking at Jesus' life, death and resurrection, I think a priest first and foremost should stop making any claims of honour and advantage, either spiritual or material for himself. A priest essentially is a 'public property' existing only 'to be used' for the real good of the people.²⁷ It is he who should exist for people and not people for him. It is only through such a complete self-emptying that a very different type of 'power' and 'authority' begin to emerge

in the person of a priest. In fact the Greek word for ‘authority’ is *exousia* (ex + ousia = from one’s essence/ from what one actually is, and not from outside). The building up of a true “Kingdom community” is possible only through such authority, as Jesus himself has shown us.

It was while looking at the way Jesus helplessly suffered and died that the Roman Centurion in Mk 15:39 exclaims: ‘Truly this man was God’s Son’ – and not while seeing him performing powerful miracles. In a similar way, John the Baptist has his disclaimer in Jn 1:20-23 that he is not the Christ, neither the expected prophet nor Elijah but a voice crying out in the wilderness (unheeded by the ‘respectable people’). Indeed a *chapatti* is not to be kept in a showcase but to be torn into pieces and eaten; a broom is not placed on a lamp stand, but is used to sweep the floor and then thrown in the corner. It is some such imagery that makes us aware of what a priest should be in order to exercise the type of authority that is exercised by the Crucified and Risen One. In fact only such authority can touch and transform people and thereby become instrumental in the sprouting of the Reign of God in their hearts. Any other type of authority only subjugates and does not liberate. Rightly then Fernando Cardenal, right during his tenure as the member of the Sandinista Assembly and vice-coordinator of the National Executive Committee of the youth movement said: “I fear the risks of power. I strive to place everything I have in the service of the poor”.²⁸

Does this description put a one-sided and imbalanced emphasis on the identity of a priest? Maybe. But I am convinced that without it, the rest of the dimensions may not make one a priest after the image of Jesus the “High

Priest” who offered the sacrifice of his own life (Heb 9:26;10:12;13:11-13).

Will it be very impractical to be a priest of this sort? Can a priest survive like this? A companion of mine once exclaimed in a theology class: “All that was fine for Jesus to say and do what he said and did; after all he survived in his ministry only for three years according to the Gospel of John; and just for a year according to the synoptics!” The professor shot back: “If you want to live like Jesus, do not expect to last longer than that”! One wonders: Is the choice for a priest, then, between ‘living long’, ‘establishing much’, earning a big name (and if possible a big fortune) on the one hand, and living like Jesus on the other with all the hazards and painful consequences?

These considerations lead us to reflect on a difficult problem that many priests and religious face today. To begin with, we have an interesting passage from Paul: “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.” (1 Cor 7:32-33). Paul certainly is not speaking about priests or elders in the Corinthian community. In fact “priest”, “presbyteros” (elder) and “episkopos” (overseer or bishop) do not occur even once in the two letters to the Corinthians (among the Pauline non-pastoral epistles “priest” occurs only once: Rom 15:16). Their usage is almost exclusively restricted to the Pastorals. Hence in the passage cited above, Paul may be speaking about any of those Christians who by free choice dedicated themselves exclusively to the ‘service of the gospel’ (Rom 15:16). They could have been unmarried persons or those who had left their families for the sake of

the ministry.

The significant point is that Paul has recognized a situation of conflict between love and commitment to the Lord and to the 'affairs of the world' all of which need not to be evil in themselves; like for instance, as Paul enumerates, pleasing one's spouse and children. In fact married persons are called to live their marital commitment precisely by loving their spouses and children and thereby loving God. However the love of one's family in the case of a married person can come in the way of one's commitment to the Lord: married persons, for instance, to make their spouses and children happy may earn money through illegal and immoral means, etc.

A priest who runs an institution, for instance, may face a similar situation. His love for the institution and for the many who benefit by it may lead him to get involved in many types of corrupt, illegal and immoral practices – just to 'keep up a high standard in the institution' or 'to make the institution posh, famous and widely known' or 'in order to survive in the competition among similar institutions', or 'to maintain public relations' or 'to establish a social network', etc. Under such circumstances the priest in question faces the conflict between his faithfulness to the Lord and his commitment to his institution. At times in such cases the commitment to the institution and the commitment to one's own need-gratification can hardly be distinguished. Though there may not be easy solutions in such circumstances, one important question needs to be reflected upon: Is the institution and apostolate a means or an end? If the "service of the Gospel" is the end, then it cannot be achieved by such means which are through and through

anti-Gospel. This principle can be applied to any apostolate that a priest is involved in. The prophetic words of Mother Teresa become apt in this context: It is not important to be successful; it is important to be faithful. Credibility and relevance of a priest depend on his faithfulness to God and not on his success according to 'worldly' standards.

7. Knowing the world... interpreting the Word

A Jesus-like priest acquires a unique place and a role in a given context. Such a priest is fully and radically related to the world and the human persons, and encounters them at the deepest possible level. It is precisely due to such encounters that the priest is able to interpret the Word salvifically in the given situation. We have a very enlightening example in the OT: the debate between prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah (Jer 28:1-17). Jeremiah interprets the Word of the Lord and concludes that the people of Israel have to be in exile according to the will of God. Whereas Hananiah (essentially a court prophet) wanting to please the people and the palace speaks the words of comfort – that God will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. The debate ends with these terrifying words of Jeremiah: “Listen Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you made these people trust in a lie” (Jer 28:15). An earlier verse describes such false prophets – “See, therefore, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who steal my words from one another.” (Jer 23:30). Both Jeremiah and Hananiah were accepted prophets of their times; but the fundamental difference between them was, while Jeremiah interpreted the Word of God contextually (in the light of the signs of his times), Hananiah blindly and deafly “stuck to the tradition” and only stole the words

of prophet Isaiah uttered some 200 years before him in a very different context.

Jesus' own contextual reading of the scriptural texts made a clear and liberating distinction between what "was said to those of ancient times" and "but I say to you" (Mt 5:21f). Rightly then Benedict XVI says: "We cannot simply work with great formulas, [although] truths, without putting them in the context of today's world. Through study and what the masters of theology and our personal experience with God tell us, we must translate these great words, so that they enter into the proclamation of God to the man of today."²⁹

We do not need to emphasize further how a priest needs to hold history on the one hand, Bible on the other and both close to his heart.

History, culture and priest: a person for all seasons

E. Schillebeeckx's study³⁰ of the priestly ministry in the first and the second millennia of the Christian era shows the differential understanding of the roles of episkopos and presbyteros. For instance he notes, in the early church only the bishop, as the leader of the community in a collegial association with his presbyters presided over Eucharistic celebrations. But as the Christian communities spread and the bishop could not be present for every Eucharistic celebration, the presbyters began to preside over them, even though they were not consecrated for this role. They could do this by virtue of their actual leadership role in the community (also as delegates of the bishop and by the unanimous acclamation of the local church). Clement I opines that though it is normal for the episkopos to preside over, "other eminent members, with the approval of the whole church"³¹ can also play that role. Tertullian goes

one step further: “Where no college of ministers has been appointed, you, the laity, must celebrate the eucharist and baptize; in that case you are your own priests, for where two or three are gathered together, there is the Church.”³² It is in the second millennium, that we see the emergence of a predominantly juridical view of the priestly ministry “almost exclusively concentrated on the ministry and less concentrated on the church, in which ‘sacrament’ and ‘law’ are detached from each other.”³³

The understanding of the function and position of what we today call priest/ priesthood in Christianity has by no means been uniform from the time of Jesus up to now. Though the words *presbyteros* and *episkopos* of NT are today identified with ‘priest’ and ‘bishop’ respectively, in fact, their meaning and functions were not uniform during the apostolic age in various Christian communities. Certain uniformity in understanding of these roles seemed to have emerged from the mid-third century in the context of various pastoral needs.³⁴ It is significant to note that the Greek word *hiereus* or the Hebrew word *cohen* which can be correctly rendered into English as priest are not applied to those leaders of the early Christian communities who presided over the Eucharistic celebrations. Interestingly the letter to the Hebrews applies the title *hiereus* to Jesus and to all the baptised. But neither of these may have performed any cultic practices; except the ‘rite’ of sacrifice of their own lives, as the case may be. In this sense, for the early Christians there was only one *hiereus* or *cohen*, namely Jesus Christ. The whole Church and every baptised Christian shared the priesthood of Christ. Each Christian exercised this priesthood according to his/her position, role and office within the Christian community, according to its different needs at different

times and in different circumstances.

If this conclusion is acceptable then we have a set of very important implications for the understanding and functioning of Christian priesthood at all times.

As said earlier, a Jesus-like priest does not exist for himself; nor is his priesthood for his self-benefit. Pastoral needs of different times and places make various demands on priests. Within a general framework that characterises the priesthood of Jesus, a priest should be able to adapt himself according to such genuine pastoral needs. Pastoral needs are context bound; though, the existence of certain universal pastoral needs cannot be denied. Their specificity is shaped by the historicity of a community and its cultural milieu. These factors demand very specific contextual responses from a priest in the pastoral field. And under such circumstances the understanding of priesthood and its function need to be reinterpreted. Priesthood is for service of the people of God and not vice versa. It is this fact that makes a priest a person for all seasons.

A concrete corollary of this state of affairs is found in the necessity of a priest being “all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22). No wonder, then, that the cultic, leadership and prophetic roles of a Christian priest take multiple expressions in the NT: envoy, the representative of Christ and the Father, steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1); fellow-worker of God (1 Cor 3:9); Christ’s friend (Jn 15:15); witness of Christ (Act 1:8); the preacher of the Word of God (Rom 15:16); preacher of the good news by Christ’s mandate (Eph 3:8); dispenser of the sacraments (2 Cor 5:18); teacher of the nations, fisher of men (Mt 4:19)³⁵; and in and through these and similar functions he

is called to expound, proclaim, defend, and preach the Word.

8. Is there a unique specificity to Christian priesthood in India/Asia?

If ministry and priesthood in essence are for service, and in the history of the Church the understanding of these concepts has not been uniform, but changed according to the demands of various contexts³⁶, then we have a case for stipulating some unique specificities of these ‘institutions’ in the Indian/Asian context without however negating their universally defined and accepted common characteristics. This consideration gains significance also because of the fact that “ecclesiastical ministry means service to the world through an internal service to God’s people. The ecclesiastical ministry ... should provide the stimulus for Christian work in the world and for the world. It is internal ecclesiastical service to the outward-looking community of Christ.”³⁷

The outward-looking character of his community is defined by none other than Christ himself, when he commissioned his disciples to go to the whole world... (Mt 28,17f). It is this command that should also shape the concrete forms of the offices and ministries in the church, including that of priesthood. In other words, “the ministerial structure which best achieves what Christ really meant by the Church, is the right ministerial structure for Christ’s Church.”³⁸ From this background we can further specify some important characteristics of ministerial priesthood in the Indian context.

a. A priest who responds to the issue of alienation

George Soares-Prabhu has pointed out a three-fold

alienation of Christian theologians in India.³⁹ Namely, alienation from the Indian people, alienation from the Indian intellectual circles, and alienation from the Christian people. These types of alienation can also be held as true of priests in India in general. An effective leadership role cannot be performed unless and until this alienation is substantially gotten rid of. It is for this reason that today we need a priest who is thoroughly but critically rooted in the local contexts, having deep knowledge of the local cultures and diverse religious texts and traditions; thereby inserting himself into situations, as it were, that can effectively give rise to theologies and liturgies with “local flavours” with a capacity to respond to contextual issues. A priest of today needs to widen his horizons beyond the confines of the Christian community under his pastoral care.

b. A priest who communicates in intelligible and transforming language

In India, unlike in the first world, priests and such religious leaders still have a considerable credibility and therefore a significant role in touching the lives of the people at the most fundamental level. In this sense religious leaders can play a very important role in providing a fundamental interpretability to life in general and to individuals in particular. But this is possible only if the priest as a religious leader can present the basic message of his religion in terms that makes sense to the current generation thereby responding to the current issues liberatively. A mere repetition of religious statements that belong to alien times and cultures reifies the potentially transformative religious rituals, symbols, metaphors, myths and narratives in the current contexts.

It is not possible to speak about an interpretative process unless we refer to the total milieu in which interpretation is done. Such a milieu is made up of not only the language and content of interpretation but very importantly the interpreter himself/herself. In other words, words and witness cannot be separated from each other in the act of interpreting a religious text for a community. In this connection the Indian audience always has had difficulties with the Christian proclamation right from the colonial times. When Mahatma Gandhi said “today I rebel against orthodox Christianity as I am convinced that it has distorted the message of Jesus”⁴⁰, he was essentially referring to this problem.

A priest in India as the proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus whether to the Christian community or to the wider society or both, needs to address such critique, among other things, as a hermeneutical problem arising in the context of proclamation and learn to respond to it constructively. The language of witness apart (which is the most powerful language of all times), a priest in India today needs to learn to be truly an ‘Indian priest’, ‘incarnating’ himself into the ‘soil’ of his community. Only then his proclamation can be transformatively intelligible to our people.

Conclusion

I should like to conclude with the words of Benedict XVI: “What I have written in the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* is also true for priests: ‘Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction’”(No. 1).⁴¹ These words strike two harmonious chords simultaneously: being a Christian, and

by extension, being a priest, is the result of an encounter with an event and with a person. The person is Jesus Christ; and the event is the Christ Event. But what is central to the Christ Event is the incarnation, which is presupposed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. If so, encountering the event of the incarnate Word entails encountering the human and the cosmic realities along with the divine. Hence the new and relevant horizons that the Pope speaks about can be brought into the life of a priest only if he allows himself to be deeply encountered by these realities in his context. It is this encounter that results in creating ever relevant horizons of experience, understanding and praxis and reconciles all alienation, thereby shaping the Christian priesthood in the order of the priesthood of the incarnate Word, Jesus.

¹ Benedict XVI on inaugurating the year for priests, June 19, 2009 (Zenit.org).

² Andreas Tapken, "Seminarians Not Considered Endangered Species", January 9, 2009 (Zenit.org).

³ Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani, "Cardinal stands up for priestly celibacy", May 29, 2009 (Zenit.org).

⁴ Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard, *Ecclesia*, n. 141, 14 December 1960, p. 21. Cited in "Pope: Priestly Formation a 'Delicate Mission'", June 7, 2009 (Zenit.org).

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 876.

⁶ "The crucial feature of the priesthood" according to Max Weber is "the specialization of a particular group of persons in the continuous operation of a cultic enterprise, *permanently associated* with particular norms, places and times, and related to specific social groups". See his *The Sociology of Religion*, 4th revised version, Ephraim Fischhoff, Beacon Press, Boston, 1963, p.30. Emphasis is mine, to show that in playing a role as this, a priest is naturally prone

to maintain the status quo of a religious tradition and by extension, to whatever degree, the other related dimensions of life of a people. Rightly then J. Wach observes – “For the priesthood regular ritual observance and a fixed theology are essential” – “*Sociology of Religion*” in Gurvitch, George and Moore, Wilbert E. (eds), *Twentieth Century Sociology*, The Philosophical Library, New York, 1945, p. 365.

⁷ W. Brueggemann exemplifies it in the case of Moses: “The radical break of Moses and Israel from imperial reality is a two-dimensional break from both the religion of static triumphalism and the politics of oppression and exploitation. Moses dismantled the religion of static triumphalism by exposing the gods and showing that in fact they had no power and were not gods. Thus, the mythical legitimacy of Pharaoh’s social world is destroyed, for it is shown that such a regime appeals to sanctions that in fact do not exist.” Alternatively, “Moses discloses Yahweh the sovereign one who acts in His lordly freedom, is extrapolated from no social reality...but acts towards His own purposes”. See his *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia, 1981, p.16.

⁸ Prophet Jeremiah is called “to uproot and to knock down, to destroy and to overthrow, **to build and to plant.**” (Jer 1:10) We are familiar with such two-fold functions (deconstruction and reconstruction) being performed by great prophets of history such as Jesus, Buddha, Basava, Mohammad, Mahavira and others.

⁹ R. E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1970, pp. 21-40 and 63. However the NT is virtually silent about Paul’s presiding over any Eucharistic celebration and also about a presbyter-Bishop performing such a function. Ibid., p.63.

¹⁰ M. Weber, op.cit., pp.46-47.

¹¹ “Office [typical of priestly role] is connected with the Church as the Body of Christ, issuing from Christ the Head, whilst Charism [typical of prophetic role] is connected with the soul activity in the body issuing directly from the activity of the Spirit. The dialectical complementarity of soul and body constitutes and builds up ‘Man’”. – A. Brueggeman SJ, “Charism and Office: The Dialectic of Ministry”, in D.S. Amalorpavadass (ed), *Ministries in the Church in India*:

Research Seminar and Pastoral Consultation, CBCI Center, New Delhi, 1976, p.30.

¹² Pope Benedict XVI in his *Sacramentum Caritas* presents the “social implications of the Eucharistic mystery” and “sanctification of the world and the protection of creation” as the significant consequences of participating in the Eucharist. See nn. 89 and 92.

¹³ June 16, 2009 (Zenit.org)

¹⁴ K. B. Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church*, Paulist Press: New York, 1988. p. 315f.

¹⁵ FABC Papers, “Living the Eucharist in Asia” IX FABC Plenary Assembly, 10-16 August, 2009, No. 129.

¹⁶ Cited in T. Cabestrero, *Ministers of God, Ministers of the People: Testimonies of Faith from Nicaragua*, (transl. by Robert R. Barr), Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 1984 (first English translation 1983), p.121.

¹⁷ “Pope Notes His Goal for Year for Priests: Reflects on Priorities for Ministry”, June 24, 2009 (Zenit.org).

¹⁸ The existence of only one will in the Holy Trinity is traditionally described in terms of the *perichoretic* union of the Persons and vice versa.

¹⁹ Cited in T. Cabestrero, op.cit., p.69.

²⁰ “Pope Notes His Goal for Year for Priests: Reflects on Priorities for Ministry”, June 24, 2009 (Zenit.org).

²¹ Cited in “Our Priests, Our Heroes: Theologian Comments on Compilation of Vocation Stories”, - An interview with Christine Anne Mugridge, March 3, 2009 (Zenit.org).

²² “Q-and-A Session With Parish Priests (Part 1): Let Us Not Lose the Simplicity of the Truth”, March 3, 2009 (Zenit.org).

²³ K. Rahner, *The Priesthood*, transl. By E. Quinn, The Seabury Press, New York, p. 145.

²⁴ S. J. Rossetti, *The Joy of Priesthood*, ATC (reprint), Bangalore, 2009, (original publ. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, 2005), Chapter 6.

²⁵ Cited in T. Cabestrero, op.cit. p.81.

²⁶ The core insight of this section comes from, K. Rahner, op.cit., p.99f.

²⁷ “The office or ministry is a gift of God to the Church community, not primarily to the person of the minister as such”, says Gerwin van Leeuwen. “It is also certainly not a reward to persons who have served the Church well and it should never be seen as a profitable career.” – see his “Who is a Minister in Christ’s Church?”, in D. Amalorpavadass, op.cit., p.94.

²⁸ Cited in T. Cabestrero, op.cit., p. 71.

²⁹ “Pope Urges Pastors to Uphold Faith's Simplicity”, March 3, 2009 (Zenit.org).

³⁰ E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: A Case for Change*, SCM Press, London, 1984 (first published in 1981), especially the second chapter.

³¹ I Clement 44.4-6. See M. Jourgon, “Remarques, sur le vocabulaire sacerdotal de la Prima Clementis”, in *Epektasis* (In honour of Cardinal J. Daniélou), Paris 1972, 109 ; J. Blond, in *L’eucharistie des premiers chrétiens*, Paris 1948, 38f. cited in Schillebeeckx, Ibid, p. 51.

³² Tertullian, *De Exhort. Cast.* 7.3; cf. *De Praescriptione* 41, 5-8. G. Otrano, “*Nonne et laici sacerdotes sumus?*” (*Exhort. Cast.* 7.3), in *Vetera Christianorum* 8, 1971, 27-47. Cited in Schillebeeckx, ibid.

³³ Schillebeeckx, Ibid., p.52.

³⁴ Kenon B. Osborne, op.cit., presents a detailed study on this matter (especially chapters 2 and 3).

³⁵ Cited in K. Rahner, op.cit., pp 105-106.

³⁶ NT depicts a variety of ministries which certainly are not bound up with Apostleship: A ministry was entrusted to Archippus (Col 1:17), Timothy (2 Tim 4:5), Tychicus (Col 4:7; Eph 6:21) and Epaphras (Col 1:7). Serving at table is also considered as ministry (Acts 6:1; 4:3 cf. 10:40). A collection for the poor of Jerusalem is ministry (Acts 11:29; 12:25). Distribution of the financial aid among Christians in Jerusalem that Paul had collected in Macedonia and Achaia (Rom 15:25-26) is also called ministry (Rom 15:31). Helping the poor was at times

referred as “ministry of the saints” (1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1). That is because such help produced a grateful attitude to God in the beneficiaries (2 Cor 9:12). Cited in J Pathrapankal, “‘Ministry’ in St. Paul”, in D. S. Amalorpavadass (ed), op.cit., pp. 207-208.

Similarly, we can also see how some of the early ministries changed in Christian tradition according to the contextual needs: some among seven men (Acts 6: 1-6) who were set apart for ministry of charity later became evangelists. Also the *Chor-Episcopoi* in the 3rd century, who were actual bishop-delegates took up non-episcopal works in the later centuries. – see A. Thannikot, “Church History and Ecumenism”, in D. S. Amalorpavadass, op.cit. p. 472.

³⁷ R. J. Bunik, *Priests for Tomorrow*, Translated from the Dutch by Frances Wilms, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1969, p. 50. Cited in Gerwin van Leeuwen, op.cit, pp. 94-95.

³⁸ Gerwin van Leeuwen, *ibid.*, p.95.

³⁹ Cf. G. Soares-Prabhu, “From Alienation to Inculturation: Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today”, in *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today: Collected Writings of George. M. Soares-Prabhu SJ*, Vol.1., Edited by Isaac Padinjarekuttu, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, Pune and Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand 1999.

⁴⁰ M. K. Gandhi, “Harijan”, May 30, 1936.

We find many such passages in his writings. For instance: “It is my firm opinion” he wrote in ‘Young India’, “that Europe today represents not the Spirit of God or Christianity, but the Spirit of Satan... His (of Jesus Christ) so called followers measure their moral progress, by their material possessions”. See “The Message of Jesus Christ”, in ‘Young India’, September 8, 1920, p.30.

“If you go on serving people and ask them also to serve, they would understand. But you quote instead John 3:16 and ask them to believe it. That has no appeal to me, and I am sure people will not understand it. Where there has been acceptance of the Gospel through preaching, my complaint is that there has been some motive” – *Ibid.*, p.69.

Swami Vivekananda has similar words of advice to Christians: “Let me tell you, brethren, if you want to live....go back to Christ....Go

back to him who had nowhere to lay his head....Yours is a religion preached in the name of luxury. What an irony of fate!...you can't serve God and Mammon at the same time...Better be ready to live in rags with Christ than to live in palaces without him." - "To Americans in Detroit" February 21, 1894, in "The Complete Works", in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VIII, Swami Yogeshwarananda Advaita Ashrama, Himalayas, 1951., p.213.

⁴¹ Address of Benedict XVI during the general audience in St. Peter's Square, July 1, 2009 (Zenit.org).

Prophetic Priesthood Today

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Abstract: Prior to kings becoming rulers of Israel, the people there were a covenantal community. They were a Tribal confederation where there was equality, justice, sharing and love. After the rule of kings started, there arose an exploitative ruling class, and the participation of lay elders in officiating religious worship was replaced by a clericalized priesthood. Prophets had a pivotal role in rebuilding Israel's covenantal community. Prophetic priests are called to overcome divisive forces like casteism, to collaborate with people of other religions and ideologies, and to bring hope to the suffering and marginalized people.

Keywords: Prophetic priesthood, covenantal community, monarchy, tribal confederation, justice, counter-culture, hope.

Every disciple of Jesus is invited to promote the Reign of God. A priest as a radical disciple in particular, is expected to devote his heart, mind, soul, body and the whole being to the promotion of the Reign of God. Priesthood is basically a grace-filled call to the service of God and humanity in the footsteps of Jesus who came that all may have life and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10). Is priesthood today viewed more as a vocation or profession? Today there is a danger of priests becoming merely a professional like an educationist, an administrator, an organiser, a social worker, a project-manager, etc. A priest is not called to be merely a well-qualified professional but basically to be and to become a committed servant of Christ's mission.

Today's society is confronted by a gamut of problems

and dangers like aggressive violations of human rights, destructive effects of globalisation, marginalization of women, Dalits and Tribals, terrorism, casteism, consumerism, religious fundamentalism, dictatorial regimes, denial of pluralism, ecological exploitation, etc. These forces vie with one another virulently to divide and fragment humanity and to destroy the earth. The reign of God has suffered violence (Mt 11:12). In such a dehumanizing and life-destroying context of the twenty-first century, a priest is called upon to respond rightly and righteously in order to accelerate the growth of the reign of God. The need of the hour is to become a prophetic priest of God. Reigniting priesthood with the prophetic spirit will enable priests to respond appropriately and fruitfully to the challenges posed to the promotion of the reign of God in this 21st century.

Call to be a Covenantal Community

Biblical prophets in the history of Israel played a pivotal role in renewing and revitalizing the covenantal community in the ways of the Lord. Prophets emerged in Israel when monarchy was demanded and ushered in (1 Sam 8). With the entry of monarchy in Israelite society came in also all types of inequality, injustice, corruption, exploitation and marginalization of the people. Before monarchy entered into Israelite lives, the system of Tribal Confederation held them together as one faithful community of Yahweh. The covenantal community was born at Mount Sinai when the Lord declared to the people of Israel that He would be their God and they would be His people (Ex 19-20). The Israelites promised to obey and follow the ways, ordinances, commandments of the Lord which would build them into the covenantal

community.

Features of the Covenantal Community

The characteristic features of the covenantal community were well reflected in the tribal confederation life of Israel. Highlighting the socio-economic, religious and political dimensions of the tribal confederation community which was basically governed by equality, justice, fellowship, sharing and love, will help us to understand it as the covenantal community of the Lord.

The socio-economic scenario of the Israelites during the tribal confederation period was egalitarian as their basic needs were upheld. Each family had a piece of land to dwell and to cultivate. The book of Joshua in chapters 13-23 explains how the land of Canaan was distributed to all the twelve tribes of Israel. People had the facility of cultivating their own food and looking after their basic needs. In times of famine and drought the tribes whose lands had yielded plentifully, came forward to share with the famine-stricken people. There were in-built mechanisms that would take care of the poor, orphan, widows and foreigners (Lev 19:9). Accumulation of wealth, power and land in one person or group was prevented by the principles of the Jubilee Year which stipulated that mortgaged land, persons and properties had to be returned to the owners (Lev 25). Lending money to the poor without interest (Lev 25:35-38, Deut 24:10-18), doing business without exploitation and corruption were monitored (Deut 25:13-16) to prevent the gap between the rich and the poor. In the socio-economic realm the Israelites were almost a self-sufficient and self-dignified community

In the political arena, there was an equitable sharing of power among the tribes of Israel. Leadership was not centered on one man but the power to govern themselves at the family, clan and tribal levels was a shared one. It was a shared leadership and power which enabled them to discuss and solve the different problems they were confronted with. There was no centralised military system. But if a tribe was endangered by enemies, all the other tribes would go to protect them (Jud 6-8; 8:22-27; 9:1-6, 13-16). Politically the tribal confederation system guaranteed the safety, protection, sharing of power and leadership and participation of the Israelites.

Religio-culturally everyone was treated as a child of God. As there were no centralised Temple and clericalized priesthood in Jerusalem, worship was officiated in the midst of the people and in shrines by respectable and devout lay elders. The Ark of the Covenant which was a symbol of God's power and presence was carried to all the tribes to show that the Lord was a journeying God with all of them. Religiously the confederation system knit them together as one people of the covenant. In general the socio-economic, political, religio-cultural features of the tribal confederation community of Israel reveal that it was basically a just, equitable, fellowship-generating, sharing and loving covenantal community.

Rise of Monarchy and Emergence of Prophets

The rise of monarchy in Israel led to the degradation and fragmentation of the tribal confederation. In the face of the Philistine threat and invasion, the Israelites lost confidence in themselves and in Yahweh and demanded a King. They did not heed the warnings of Yahweh who apprised them of the evils, exploitation, corruption,

inequality and injustice the monarchy would impose (1 Sam 8:4-18). But the Israelites clamoured for monarchy that brought gradually ruin, degradation and destruction upon them.

The monarchical system ushered in an exploitative ruling class which appropriated the power, wealth, land and property of the people and heaped them on the king who became the supreme and all powerful ruler. The labour, produce and lands of the people were exploited for the luxurious and extravagant life style of the ruling class. The people who used to cultivate barley and wheat for their food were then forced to grow olive orchards and vineyards in order to provide wine and olive oil to the profligate ruling class. The people were pressurized to borrow and become bonded labourers when they were not able to pay back. People were uprooted from their villages to become forced labourers and mercenaries for building palatial royal houses and monuments for the ruling royal class. Agricultural economy was converted into business economy which was rampant with corruption and exploitation. The centralized Jerusalem Temple refused the Ark of the Covenant to travel from tribe to tribe and the lay elders' participation in officiating religious worship was replaced by a clericalized priesthood. In order to please their queens, princesses and concubines, the kings built temples for their gods and adulterated and relegated the worship of Yahweh. The covenantal principles and directives were routed and transgressed and the Israelite community became an anti-covenantal community in which prevailed injustice, inequality, corruption, exploitation, poverty and marginalization.

The prophets were sent into the unjust, unequal and exploitative Israelite community with the clarion call of

making them again the covenantal community of the Lord. They were the voices of the Lord to pluck up and to pull down what was unjust and unequal, to destroy and to overthrow what was exploitative and dehumanizing, to build and to plant once again the covenantal community of the Lord (Jer 1:10). They took the side of the poor who were oppressed and marginalized by the monarchical rule and condemned the evil and injustices. They announced that justice should roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Am 5:24). They demanded that all that had been appropriated from the people and accumulated on the ruling class and the rich should be equitably shared (Am 3:10; 5:7-15; 6:4-8; Mic 3:1-4). They denounced the pompous, vain and meaningless sacrifices and liturgical celebrations which were bereft of justice, equality and faithfulness and demanded a life based on justice, equality and fellowship (Isa 1:10-17; Jer 7:1-15; Am 5:21-24). They lit the light of hope and life in the lives of the people broken and marginalized by the unjust and atrocious monarchical rule (Isa 40:1-5; Jer 3:1-12; Hos 11:1-9; Am 9:11-15). The prophets' reverberating call invited the people again and again to come back to the covenantal community of the Lord. Thus the pivotal role of the prophets in Israelite history enabled the rebuilding of the covenantal community of the Lord.

Priesthood in the Prophetic Tradition

Reign-of-God Promoting Priesthood

Priesthood today lived in the prophetic spirit and tradition will make it meaningful and fruitful. The prophets were engaged in the mission of rebuilding the covenantal community of the Lord. The covenantal community in the First Testament and the Reign of God

announced in the Second Testament call for a community based on the common parenthood of God and the people as the children of God. Transcending race, caste, colour, creed, nationality, language we are called to be and to become a world community of the children of God living in equality, justice, fellowship and love.

The life and mission of a priest needs to be a telling witness of the Reign of God. By his vocation to be the servant of Christ's mission, a priest is called upon to promote reign-of-God communities in a world which is broken and fragmented by divisive forces like casteism in particular in India. It is not untrue to say that priests also become victims of casteism. To be a prophetic priest is first of all to rid oneself of all the casteistic tendencies, values and actions. Christian communities even in the twenty first century are not liberated entirely from the stifling grips of casteism. Caste practices and discriminatory customs are still upheld in certain churches. As pastors and animators of Christian communities, it is the bounden and prophetic duty of a priest to diagnose this destructive malaise of casteism and eradicate it in solidarity with the Christians who are inspired and guided by the spirit of the Reign of God. There is no place for casteistic division and discrimination in the community which partakes of one bread and one cup of Jesus. The prophetic call of priesthood is that a priest not only promotes but lives the very spirit of the reign of God in his life and mission.

Counter-Culture Producing Priesthood

To live radically and deeply the Paschal Mystery of the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus is the call of priesthood today. In a culture of selfishness and

dehumanization Jesus ushered in a counter culture of other-centeredness and dignified life for all. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). The very life and mission of Jesus not merely announced but actualized the other-centeredness and dignified life. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). Priests are invited to model their lives after the prophetic, counter-cultural life and mission of Jesus.

In today’s context of consumerism, selfishness, accumulation of wealth and comforts, proliferation of luxuries of globalization wherein only ‘I and mine’ and not ‘others’ matter, a priest is challenged to have an interior freedom for not merely falling a prey to these temptations but also to have the spirit of sharing all he is and he has for the sake of others’ dignified life and for the promotion of the Reign of God. To break and share himself like the Eucharistic Jesus is to be prophetic in a world of selfishness and filthy consumerism. All the energies, capacities, opportunities, talents, time and sources a priest has, need to be placed at the service of the people, especially of those marginalized and dehumanized. The vow of poverty embraced by a priest becomes meaningful only when he empties himself like Jesus (Phil 2:5-8) so that others become full with the dignified life of the children of God.

A priest’s celibacy enables him to broaden the horizon of his relationship from the limited circle of his own family and relatives to the wider family of God. Jeremiah’s celibacy came in the context of his mission of rebuilding the broken people into the covenantal family of God (Jer 16:1). Transcending their own families and close-knit bonds of relations, the prophets had the freedom

of moving out and giving themselves to others and God's mission. The prophetic discipleship enshrined in priesthood does not ask us to love only those who love us, to do good only to those who will do good to us, to give only to those from whom we will get in return (Lk 7:31-34); but it demands of us to love and give to those who are marginalized and deprived of dignified life. Complaints are not uncommon today against those priests who are unduly attached to their own families, relatives and friends and siphon off the common facilities, funds, opportunities, etc to their own. The prophetic dimension of celibacy should liberate us from our narrow and self-centred circles and lead us to the wider family of God.

The prophetic aspect of the vow of obedience is to free a priest from his own self-centred plans, welfare, needs and dreams so that the plan of God becomes the supreme criterion for his life and mission. To be a prophetic disciple of Jesus whose food was to do the will of the Father (Jn 4:34), unconditional obedience to God's plans becomes a witness. To discern God's will with all sincerity and to respond to it wholeheartedly will let God's dreams come true in a priest's life and mission. Being ready to be sent where his services are most needed is characteristic of a prophet's disposition. Refusing to be transferred from a well-settled work or lucrative and powerful position, being unwilling to move to the place or ministry where his services are most needed, willing to do only what one likes, go counter to being a prophetic disciple of Jesus. Therefore if the commitment to poverty, celibacy and obedience is practised in the prophetic way, priesthood will continue to usher in a counter-culture that will bear witness to the Kingdom values.

Solidarity-based Priesthood

The prophets in Israel were the voices and messengers of Yahweh who took the side of the poor and oppressed, listened to their agonies and came forward to liberate them. "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings and I have come to deliver them..." (Ex 3:7). When we browse through the pages of the Gospel, Jesus' solidarity with the poor, marginalized and dehumanized, stands out powerfully. In his first public manifesto of his mission (Lk 4:16-18), Jesus affirms that it is in and through his solidarity with the poor, he promotes the Reign of God. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Lk 6:20). Following the spirit of solidarity with the poor expressed in our God and through our Master and Leader Jesus, a priest today is called to preferentially opt for and to work in solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Whatever be the type of ministry a priest does, whether it is pastoral, educational, social, the concerns, issues, struggles and problems of the poor need to be the platform of his life and service. If this is not the attitude of priest, then he tends to derail from the prophetic and from even God's ways of working in solidarity with the poor. If all that priests have in the name of the poor, is not used for their welfare and dignified life, a priest turns out to be a betrayer of the poor.

Justice-oriented Priesthood

The God revealed in the prophetic traditions is predominantly the God of justice. The oracles, actions and lives of the prophets echo justice. It is through the proclamation of justice the prophets called for the

rebuilding of the broken and oppressed Israelite society. “Seek justice” (Isa 1:17), “Grant justice” (Isa 16:3), “Execute justice” (Jer 21:12), “Do Justice” Jer 22:15, Mic 6:8), “Establish justice” (Am 5:15), “Let justice roll down like waters...” (Am 5:24) were the clarion call of the prophets to rebuild the exploited, marginalized and wounded Israelite society into the covenantal community of Yahweh.

Socio-cultural analysis reveals that it is injustice at all levels of society, which is the root cause of today’s unequal and marginalized society. Therefore it is justice that can make today’s world just and equal for all. Love without justice cannot be love at all. A society without justice cannot be an egalitarian society. Justice is not merely one of the many values, but the overriding value of all values. It is in justice all other values like love, equality, fellowship, concern, compassion, sharing, peace, etc., find their meaning. If the life and mission of a priest in today’s context is to be meaningful and effective, justice-orientedness must permeate the priestly life and his ministries. Not merely charity-oriented and development-oriented approaches, but basically justice-centered approaches will bring about the transformation of society and make the reign of God more alive and active. A priestly ministry is geared towards promoting a just society where all, as children of God, live in dignity. When justice becomes a central focus of the life and mission of a priest, needless to say that he will be confronted with opposition, aggression, struggles and pains to be caused by unjust forces. Only a courageous priest with deep faith in the ultimate power of God will be able to withstand and journey with the Lord of history to bring about a transformed society of justice and equality.

A priest is not merely called to work for justice but to be justice itself in his life and mission and this is indeed a challenge to those who wish to become prophetic priests.

Pluralism-respecting Priesthood

In a world of net working, collaborating with the likeminded forces and people is a must for a priest today. Social transformation is not just the mission of one individual or one group but that of many persons and groups. It is not merely that we priests or religious or Christians alone who are on the journey of making this broken world a humanistic and egalitarian place for all. There are many persons in other religions, traditions, ideologies, races, nations, movements who are imbued with the spirit of making a better humanized world for all. Religions or ideologies are meant to unite and not to divide people.

In a world of politicized religions and communalized politics a priest has to be on the alert to recognise and counter the forces which promote uniformity negating plurality. He should be able to collaborate with the forces which respect and encourage unity that values pluralism. To acknowledge that God is acting and good is working in others requires openness and broadmindedness. Isaiah was open enough to recognize God acting in and through Cyrus, the Persian Emperor, a non Israelite and invited the Israelites in Babylonian exile to hope for their return to their own land (Isa 44:28; 45:1,13). Jesus recognised God acting in the faith of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28), the Centurion (Mt 8:5-13) and in the thanksgiving spirit of the Samaritan (Lk 17:15-19). Jesus worked for the reign of God in collaboration with both Israelites and non Israelites. A priest in the prophetic tradition and in the

spirit of Jesus needs to work in collaboration with other religions and ideologies, with other movements and organizations and thus can join the common endeavour of building a free, equal and just world for all.

Hope-generating Priesthood

The prophets not only denounced injustice and inequality but announced hope to the economically dispossessed, socially marginalized, politically victimized (Am 9:11-15; Jer 30:11-22) and religiously subjugated in Israel and to the languishing Israelite exiles in Babylon (Isa 40:1-5; 41:1-20; 43:1-5). They showed the compassionate and faithful face of God to the people of Israel assuring them that God would continue to care for them in spite of their repeated unfaithfulness and would restore to them their lost land and dignity. They kept on sowing the seeds of hope in people who were confronted with affliction, exile, sufferings, helplessness and marginalization. Even when the prophets were faced with opposition, rejection, humiliation, agonies and abandonment on account of their prophetic life and mission, they had the unflinching hope and trust in the Lord. They totally surrendered themselves to God's unfailing love and ever-abiding protection and believed strongly that God who started the good work in them would bring it to fruition.

For today's priests it is not easy to be prophetic in the context of evil forces, injustices, conflicts, contradictions, marginalization and all types of oppression. The present evil and unjust scenario is frightening and frustrating too. In such a world a priest is challenged to be a beacon of hope and optimism. He needs to believe strongly that it is not he alone, but he by the power of God and in

collaboration with likeminded forces would carry out his prophetic mission. He is called to instill and evoke hope in the lives of the suffering, the poor, the exploited and the marginalized, so that the journey of becoming the children of God with a dignified life moves on and ahead.

A Priest of the Twenty-First Century

It has been a modest attempt in this article to discover the different and meaningful ways of being the right and relevant priest in the context of today and in the light of prophetic tradition. The twenty-first century poses to priests a myriad of challenges and opportunities to make priesthood relevant, effective and fruitful. Reign-of-God promoting priesthood, counter culture producing priesthood, solidarity-based priesthood, justice-oriented priesthood, pluralism-respecting priesthood and hope-generating priesthood could make one a prophetic priest of the twenty-first century.

Priests amidst Conflicts

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Abstract: In our conflict-ridden world, priests are called upon to be servants of God and God's people. Those who have power and position have their own vision of society, of structures and their purposes. Those who are powerless have totally viewpoints on these matters. Priests have to be on the side of the weak and accompany them with empathy. Jesus provides the best example for this. Priests have to make the Eucharistic culture their own, to bring about that which Jesus intended. This will involve self-sacrifice, and bringing to the centre those who are in the periphery.

Keywords: Priest, conflicts, commitment, appropriate intervention, critique, alternative, Eucharist, humanization.

1.0 Wounded Context of Conflicts

Ours is the age of mindless prostration before powers and privileges. The covenantal bond between money and manipulation, prosperity and pomp, affluence and influence is loudly canonized in the corridors of power. The voice of the wretched is muffled, their rights transgressed and their lives sacrificed upon the altar of the wealthy for their luxurious pursuits. It is against this backdrop, we, the priests, are beckoned to reflect on our priestly commitment to our people in the wounded history in the background of the definitive and compassionate divine intervention through the Jesus-event in continuity with the Exodus-event. Such an exercise might inspire us, the priests, to reprioritize our values that are operative in our life and highlight our responsibility towards the powerless humans.

1.1 Divine Intervention

Could one imagine the fear of losing its life, throbbing in the heart of a baby deer surrounded by the pack of organized wolves hunting for their prey and making a dinner out of it? When such fears of hapless victims in any conflict situation is recognized with motherly care and fraternal concern for saving their life and dignity, then one could say that a humanizing intervention by the divine hand is taking place. It will further probe into the layers of the struggling consciousness of the deer with its right to live. At the same time, it will take courage to expose the killer designs of the organized violence of the blood-thirsty wolves. If the civil society is sustained by courage and confidence, it will proceed to intervene in emancipating the life of the deer unscathed and in penalizing the wolves in public space of the society. Healing the deer, it will seek to place it back in the company of the other deer in the fertile forest. Punishing the wolves, it will contemplate on driving them away into the barren wilderness. "The deer are condemned to become the daily bread of the wolves"- Such perceptions and positions deemed to be the normal jungle law, natural law, or even divine law are kept on subverted and deconstructed by civil society.

The servants supposedly representing the God of justice cannot afford, in the name of maintaining the middle path, to opt for callous indifference when encountering conflicts between the killer forces and life-seeking struggles. In such situations it seeks not only to fill the hungry with good things and exalt the lowly, but also takes courage to scatter away the proud-hearted and put down the mighty from the thrones.

1.2 Nuances of Conflicts

The priests as the servants of God and His people have to evolve sharp tools to comprehend both the articulate and inarticulate agenda of the disempowered. In this process, it could differentiate how the sturdy structures legitimizing the power-centres and weak energies empowering the vulnerable, function in opposite directions. They could be portrayed as follows:

Orientations Of the Structures of Power-centres	Orientations Of the Energies of the Vulnerable
I. Levels of Ideology/ Education (Brahmana)	
Social honour/ leadership based on one's origin or birth	Social honour/ leadership based on intensity of culture of caring/ sharing
Legitimization to perpetuate the domination of the powerful	Favouring the life struggles of the disempowered
Respect for traditions, documents of yester years	Discourses on the dreams and utopia emerging from present struggles
Upholding the ideology of exclusion by series of reasons	Projecting the ideology of inclusion by every effort
Masking the existing or creating new conflicts in favour of the ruling elite	Exposing the existing and creating new conflicts for the process of democratization
All (body, life, nature, or god) are good enough to be indulged in as commodities	Efforts of not hurting justice or not justifying injustice interpreted as the purity of God
Humans for the law	Law for the humans

Coercive claims of truth as falsehood and falsehood as truth	Intuitive realization of truth emerging from the sense of treating others as co-humans
Other worldly philosophical or theological discourses postponing solutions for the present problems	Urgency of seeking justice here and now on the historical plane
Spirituality shying away from the existing conflicts	Spiritual exploration into the existing conflicts
Normative ethics based on some package of traditions	Explorative ethics seeking new directions according to the needs of adequate response to existing conflicts
Teaching non-violence in public while hiding the truth beneath some reason or other	Raising the question openly on the ready-made teachings on non-violence and daring to explore new possibilities

II. Levels of Authority/ Governance/ Weapons **(Kshatriya)**

Accumulation of power	Democratization of power and collective responsibility
Weapons are in the hands of those authorized by the ruling elite	In the face of violence, it may not hesitate to advocate democratization of weapons
Intervention of the rulers is always right and that of the ruled amounts to treason	Intervention from within and outside is invited for upholding the legitimate rights and human dignity of the victims
Citizens are to be ever	Citizens are capable of

treated with vigilance and control	making decisions as their duty
Surreptitious imposition of the decisions from higher echelons of the ruling structure	Consensus evolved from the general public in the process of weighing the pros and cons in any decision
Fanning the emotions behind non-contradictory conflicts leading to bloodshed (SCs \leftrightarrow BCs)	Contradictory conflicts will be gradually identified and unveiled (Economic Globalisation \leftrightarrow Landless Labourers)
Active hierarchy through the undercurrents of monarchical / feudalistic practices even in the name of democracy	Opportunities are distributed to all according to the needs and efficiency both at the collective and individual levels
Public exhortation on the need of law and order with veiled threat and statistical data	Discourses on basic needs like drinking water, rise of the price of rice, unemployment, need for basic educational and health facilities
Emergency ordinances/ crisis management with armed forces	Dialogical style of gradually evolving working relationship even in the face of conflicts
Custodial deaths / encounter deaths	Creating disorder when possible / apparently peaceful with repression but no compromise with state terrorism
Easy and fast process of decision making due to the	Delayed and tough process of decision making due to

unilateral approach	multipolar dialogical approach
Conveniently justice will be delayed /denied	Restless and impatient till justice is rendered

III. Levels of Economic-Political Networking (Vaishya)

Higher the status→ Higher the Privileges→ Lower the Sanctions	Rewards and Punishments according to one's performance irrespective of one's status
Favouring the powerful with privileges in the name of equality, i.e., Meritocracy defying the Reservation Policy	Favouring the under- privileged in the name of discriminatory justice, i.e., Reservation for the SC/ ST/ BC/ MBC
Capable of producing fake historical data for the convenience of gaining more benefits	Consistent interpretation of the historical data in favour of the disempowered people
Others = Plunderers, Criminals, Deviants & Competitors	Others = Co-humans meant for mutual sharing
Prosperity of the nation is measured through the welfare of the Business Establishments / Stock Exchanges	Prosperity of the nation measured through avail- ability , basic needs, health care, educational facilities and employment oppor- tunity for all
Alliance of the local and international investors in the name of globalization of capital and market	Alliance of the local and international labour class people as the globalization of solidarity
Economy thriving on the basis of stock exchange, e-	Economy with the preference for the

commerce, foreign exchange, mega development projects	availability of potable water, food, guarantee for employment and personal security of each of the last and the least
Profit as the only criterion for development	Human solidarity as the yard stick for progress
Insensitivity towards one's neighbour - "Am I my brother's keeper?"	Sensitivity even to the anonymous corpse on the road with sense of belongingness

Amidst these conflicts between the minority of the ruling elite seeking to accumulate power for its own sake and the majority of the common folk looking for alternate ways of democratization of power, the ministries of the servants of God are evolved. When the heat of the conflicts becomes enhanced, then the creative expressions of their ministries become creatively multifaceted.

1.3 Need for Appropriate Intervention

When the structures of the democratic governance (Legislature, Judiciary, and Executive) fail in their duties of protecting the Human Rights through the democratization of power and actively protects the vested interests of the dominant but minority power elite, there rises a dynamic restlessness amidst the common folk. This dynamic restlessness from the grassroots is the spiritual foundation and the inspiring energy of the servants of God. The same very dynamic restlessness would express itself in terms of individual or collective interventions as the constructive measures against destructive forces actively operative across the society. The righteous anger actively inspiring the less powerful to undo the schemes of

the powerful elite blocking justice to be meted out to one and all cannot escape the attention of the priests as the servants of building the community of God's people.

2.0 Nation with Contradictions

As a great nation, we are heading on towards becoming the super power of the 21st century. India is a great developing country challenging the developed countries.

- We live in a nation where the price of rice of Rs. 40/- per kg in the open market and the dual or multiple SIM cards are free of charge.
- Pizza is door-delivered with lightning speed than the snail-pace arrival of the police and the ambulance service during the cry of emergency.
- Loans for buying cars are allotted immediately just with 5% interest whereas for educational purposes the loans are only available with 12.5% interest.
- Assembly Complex Building are getting ready within one year but even after ages the Public Transport bridges are being constructed endlessly with the ultimate purpose of being demolished again and again.
- We are an incredible nation, the great India, the supreme power of the 21st century.
- The violation of human rights is unprecedented in our age. Such violations are overtly and covertly performed by rulers who are supposed to protect the human rights of their own citizens.
- The aggression of armed forces in Kashmir, seven states like Manipur in the North East
- Cases of murders of 10000, tortures of 100000, and hundreds of thousands of missing – all people with flesh and blood

- The new face of fascism in Gujarat
- Orissa is marooned by the invasions of the MNCs/ TNCs besides the besiege of the religious fundamentalists
- Hundreds of the villages of Narmada Valley inundated by the mega project of the new dams
- Tribals are driven out from their native habitat of hectares of forests, denuded with bulldozers and earth removers, for the so-called development projects
- Virtual conditions of civil war in Jharkhand and Chattisgarh
- The suicide of thousands of farmers in the states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra
- Intercontinental Agni missiles are successfully launched, but the wretched are reduced to be rag-pickers on the city streets and the humans forced to become manual scavengers carrying the human excreta on their heads.

The dogma of the terrorism of so-called development seems to be proclaimed from the roof-tops as if it is the only way to humanize the world and the people. The market powers are networked and the people and their Governments are viewed only as market entities. The ultimate outcome is nothing short of bloodshed and civil war in almost 150 districts of our country.¹

3.0 Critique and Alternative

The situation of marginalisation rightly generates righteous anger in the minds and hearts of the subalterns. This anger is anchored upon the deprivation of life that they are subjected to. It seeks to replace the prevailing order bearing out the status quo of the rulers with an

entirely new one. The righteous wrath of the subalterns against dehumanization, even while functioning as the critique of the oppressive means and mechanisms, looks for possible alternatives implicitly or explicitly. For instance the following three subaltern socio-cultural locations have their respective aspects of the critique and alternative as indicated below:

Socio-cultural location	Critique	Alternative
Dalits	Permanent pollution/arbitrary segregation/ attributed status/ immutable social hierarchy imposed in the name of tradition/ gods/ order/ harmony	Annihilation of caste hierarchy/ discriminatory justice against discriminatory injustice/ universal egalitarianism irrespective of one's origin of birth/ radical relational anthropology
Adivasis and Tribals	Imposed alienation from the ethos of autonomous community uprooted from Mother Nature in the name of development for the society at large/ profit-oriented nature-destroying mechanistic world-view promoting	Autonomy of the culture of egalitarian communities with inclusive growth of all in harmony with the symphony of Mother Nature

	ruthless consumerism	
Women Constantly Haunted even with Productive Hard Labour	Sexist hierarchy based on irrational patriarchy, in collusion with caste hierarchy, relegating women with minimum rightful space in society	Participation as co- human-persons in deciding for sharing of power and resources, irrespective of one's gender identity

By and large, one could observe the in-built relationship between subaltern critique and subaltern alternative. The priests will be on the right track when they carefully identify the seismic movements beneath the critique as well as the alternative. If so, they become capable of effectively excavating even the latent or inarticulate subaltern agenda from the interior movements of the victims of history. The culture-specific and history-specific expressions of the subaltern critique and alternative have to be gradually evolved when dialogue takes place between the Subaltern People and the Priests. In this dialogical space both partners become learner-teacher with a sense of exploration with ongoing mutual understanding. Corrective measures will be addressed and undertaken by both partners (Subaltern People and the Priests). In this dialogical interaction the anti-subaltern forces could be identified both within and without through the dialogue of sharing the 'critique-and-alternative'.

3.1 Priest as Empathetic Accompanier

In the process of enabling the spontaneous release of the life-affirming energies from the flesh-and-blood

subaltern people, the priests have to simultaneously encounter the high-handedness of the powers that be and the dynamic restlessness of the battered subalterns. Thus by way of bringing about the transformation of 'the miseries of oppression into beatitudes of emancipation', the subalterns have to be activated to become the agents of transformation. The intervention of the priests has to enable them to be awakened to the destiny as designed by the Lord of History. The contributions of the priests, by way of systematic articulation of the subaltern agenda, are but the catalysts for the furtherance of people's on-going encounters with multiple conflicts. In this process of identification and articulation of the liberative potentials embedded in the very lives of the subalterns, the priests cannot afford to be the 'outsiders' to the subaltern socio-cultural and politico-economic world. It is only by genuine solidarity with repeated attempts at sharing the subaltern vulnerabilities and sensibilities, the priests could become the 'organic participants' in their joys and sufferings. This process could be further enriched in the following manner:

- The questions emerging from the life-experience of the silenced subalterns are analytically sharpened by the tools provided by the human sciences.
- These sharpened questions related to the situations of oppression are made into problems related to crucial and critical issues in the operative meaning systems, like 'to be human or not to be human?' or 'Is egalitarianism merely an idle talk?'
- These ultimate nature issues are made to dialogue with the life-affirming streams found in the religio-cultural world of other people's struggle for a new life elsewhere are brought as the dialogue-partners.

In this process, the priests, in spite of their privileged

training and expertise, should consciously choose to play the role of the mid-wife serving the subalterns. It is the people who give birth to their own emancipation. Its delivery can be smoothly conducted by the active solidarity of the organically functioning Civil Society.

4.0 Paradigms of Interventions from Jesus

The ideological edifices of the powers that be with the vast networks of communication facilities eloquently hijack the minds of the middle class consumers with communicational networks. But on the other hand the ideological expressions of the disempowered weaklings are voiced out as the forlorn cry in the wilderness. They could be differentiated as follows:

Ideological Orientations of the Powerful Elite Crying from the Himalayan Heights	Ideological Orientations of the Disempowered crying from the Abysmal Subterranean Depths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent & Attractive • Magnificent & Colourful • Eloquent & Eye-catching • Dramatic Grip & Liminal Thrill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent & Intermittent • Anonymous & Unpopular • Insignificant & Ignored • Down-to-earth & Dismissed as Ordinary

Could the vulnerable group of mice eat up the Himalayan rocks and roots? Yes, if the mice are united in biting with their infant teeth with determination. Even if it might take ages to achieve this Himalayan objective, it is worth undertaking such a challenging exercise. Amidst these challenges, the priests have to unveil the broad spectrum of the historical gifts bestowed upon and tasks demanded of the humans, both as individuals and as society, by the Eucharistic culture ushered in by Jesus Christ.

What are the vibrant demands of the Eucharist?

- In continuity with the historical impact of the Eucharistic outburst of divine energies, could we continue to protect and promote the lives of the common folk in and through our own bodies today?
- What are the reverberations in today's conflict-ridden situations when we remember the stories of the exodus and the Jesus-event?
- What could create a harmonious network of humans – cosmos - God?
- How could we, as individuals and society, spontaneously evolve the fine art of sowing our body and blood in the spirit of a motherly self-gift, without victimizing others?
- What are the enlivening features of the culture of caring with solidarity and sharing with harmony emerging from the spirituality of servanthood?

If the humans take courage to breathe in the Eucharistic culture, then they will be empowered to actively participate in the divine struggle of removing the sins of the world. In order to encounter the recurring currents of the sins of the world, we need to promote human rights, genuine solidarity, and egalitarian sharing with those vanquished in every conflict situation. By enabling the marginalized to realize their God-given human dignity as co-human with others on an equal footing, the oppressive humans too are helped to realize their God-given humanity damaged by their practices of dehumanizing the others. This is how authentic reconciliation between the marginalized and the oppressive humans will take place in human history. In this brief presentation we shall evoke the enlivening orientations of the Eucharistic culture

seeking to remove the sins of the world.

4.1 Tremors of Eucharistic Memory

The Eucharist cannot be just reduced to the act of ritually elevating the bread and the cup in the context of solemn community worship. The outburst of divine energies emerging from the violently crushed body of the Lamb of God is to be distributed to all creation. Each and every move of the Jesus-event, before and after his brutal murder, has been marked with being broken and distributed to all creation. This divine offer has to continue till the end of the world.

4.1.1 Who are the Closest of Our Kinsfolk?

In the time of Jesus, a minority but hegemonic elite excluded the vast majority of the voiceless people drenched in the sweat of their daily labour as polluted creatures. The common folk were gratuitously labelled as sinners by the 'pure' people who could never respect them as co-humans. But, the unconditional embrace of such people as equals is the hall mark of the Eucharistic culture.

This creation of an inclusive community does not rest with manifest verbal expressions of hospitality, warm welcoming gestures, or acts of feeding the hungry. One could be charitable with indifference, coldness and practicing untouchability. One could wash the feet of the inferior people with gloved hands and masked face. But the Eucharistic culture had the direct organic link with the following realities usually dismissed as dirty and polluted. Even before the body of Jesus, the Son of Man, was broken as the ransom for many, it had the direct contact with the saliva of the little children, the blood of the woman suffering from hemorrhages, the hair and the

perfumed oily hands of the woman counted as a prostitute, the stinking water, pus, or blood oozing out from the body of the diseased and dying socially or actually. The Eucharistic bond of union shatters the mind-set of 'pollution through touch' and ushers in the new one of 'sanctifying through the touch' and of 'getting sanctified through touch of the so-called untouchables'. This is not salvation 'through remote control' but through intimate oneness with the victims of history.

Perception through Eucharistic eyes takes pain to rightly identify the divine elements organically throbbing in the flesh and the blood of those reduced to untouchability, yet struggling to realize their God-given human dignity on a par with other humans. It further venerates the divine operative in the body and the spirit of the victims. The gratuitous labeling of the victims as 'ungrateful', 'good for nothing', 'illiterate', 'eternal drunkard', 'promiscuous', 'inhuman', or 'socially dead creatures' runs counter to the spirit of incarnational solidarity in which the Eucharistic Lord throws his lot with the victims.

4.1.2 The Sacred in the Periphery

The culture of gratefulness does not get imprisoned within the culture of pragmatic calculation of buying-selling. Rather the clutches of pragmatism gets broken in genuine gratitude. Acts of genuine reaching-out to the least and the last become the spontaneous expression of the Samaritan who himself was a victim of the systemic evil of untouchability.

On their way to Jerusalem, Jesus' disciples claimed to have been humiliated by the Samaritans while passing through a Samaritan village. These 'Sons of Thunderbolt'

demanding a wrathful outburst of fire and brimstone from the heavens. But Jesus' perception of the Samaritans did not count them as deserving divine wrath. He refused to victimize the hapless people excluded by the self-styled 'pure' Jews. He was able to see the fairness behind the wrath of the 'polluted' people.

In the same way, the detested Samaritan woman with questionable morality became a dialogue partner with Jesus near the public well in broad day light. In course of the spontaneous exchange between the deplorable woman and the venerable 'Rabbi', what transpired was not the exposition of her misbehavior. The horizons of her mind and heart, oppressed so far by gloomy secrets, were widened with the hope of abundant life, committed to a new integrity.

Another Samaritan was portrayed as resuscitating an anonymous person dying on the road after being hit by criminals. The half-dead person was humanized by the caring touch of the Samaritan untouchable. The construction of purity by the priestly classes stands condemned. The Syro-Phoenecian woman gently instructs the Rabbi by her dynamic faith in the life-giving God in the face of the demonic powers assailing her daughter. Jesus' experience of being educated by her faith-praxis is manifested in his profuse compliments on her exemplary faith.

Jesus owns up whoever does good to others, especially to those suffering. He seeks to alleviate the sufferings of the abandoned ones habitually labeled as 'sinners' by self-styled puritans. In doing so, his aversion towards self-proclaimed supremacy runs counter to the disciples' obsession about 'who is the greatest?' This large

heartedness enables him to extend his hands to win over friends even from among marginalized: Levi, the tollgate attendant, and Zachaeus, celebrate their table fellowship in their respective houses. This fellowship is based not on birth or status but on being co-humans. Even when caught red handed, the woman accused of trading her body was treated by Jesus as respectable with a right for personal discernment in the face of men ready to sleep with her in private, but to stone her to death in public. The children, driven away by the disciples, are welcomed kindly. These are typical expressions of Eucharistic culture.

4.1.3 Defiance of Power-accumulators

The Eucharistic culture of Jesus never shied away from excluding those obsessed with power.

- Those seeking to lord it over others are the gentiles for Jesus.
- Those authoritatively preaching to others in public while never practicing the same in private are the accursed ones.
- Those self-styled puritans setting one yardstick for themselves, while setting another for others are condemned.
- The local power-brokers surrendering the hard-earned resources of the people at the feet of the colonial powers (symbolized by the eagle) just for maintaining their power positions like Herod (symbolized by the fox) are denounced.

This is how the Eucharistic culture defied the power-accumulators who excluded the large majority of the common folk.

4.1.4 Eucharistic Alliance

One has to enlist those with whom Jesus was seeking to join hands in his mission of democratizing the breath of the living God. All those defaced by habitual exclusion practiced by the Jewish elite are his friends. The land owning/educated elite treated the diseased ones (physically famished or mentally handicapped, perhaps due to malnutrition) as unwanted sinners possessed by the evil spirits. These 'unwanted others' were the natural allies for Jesus. His alliance with these people was at work, not with a claim that he was above them as their king, but with the affirmation that their inner power (faith) was capable of raising them up from their vale of tears to become fully human and fully alive. In other words, the wretched ones were encouraged by Jesus' credible solidarity with them to rise from the debris of their brokenness.

The victims are affirmed by Jesus' intervention to identify and activate their inner energies to fight out the culture of death imposed on them by the power-seeking elite. Jesus' promise of salvation (becoming fully human) became a reality in the lives of those crippled by lack of self-confidence, not through the promotion of a magical consciousness reducing them to passive recipients of his own dominance but as active agents co-operating with God's grace in faith. To enable the broken ones to stand on their own legs with confidence and courage is Jesus' style of healing intervention. The disempowered are awakened to new possibilities of self-confidence, self-reliance and self-esteem based on the realization that they are daughters and sons of the one and the only Mother/Father God. This process of a gradual 'politicization of the poor' goes beyond the scope of mere charitable and developmental contributions.

We look forward to this dynamic process of enabling the disempowered through the Eucharistic culture as nurtured by Jesus. When are we, as the Church, going to be awakened to this dimension of the Eucharist? When are our priests going to function as the vanguards in forging such a bond of union with the last and the least in society?

4.1.5 Broken Body to Heal the Broken World

In any situation, the act breaking a living body is a cruel act. Because, along with the body, one cannot deny that life and honour with the powers to think, feel and will are also demolished in tandem. Down the centuries, we watch the humans becoming increasingly creative in torturing other co-humans, even with a sense of aesthetic fulfillment. The acts of violence imposed on working class women or the so-called ‘untouchable’ labourers or the defenseless before the law by brutal forces with or without uniform, whether reported or not, bear testimony to this.

But on the other hand, the heart-beat of the God of life never permits any blood-shed. “What I want is not sacrifice, but compassion.” When s/he dismisses the blood of animals, how could s/he be pleased with the weak humans being sacrificed on the altars of the strong?

In order to give life to the least and the last, one has to undertake the righteous struggle against the sins of the world and to pay the price to the last drop of blood as Jesus did. It is not Caiaphas’ brand of sacrificing someone else for the sake of many, but Jesus’ brand of self-sacrifice for the sake of all. Some poetic minds sing eloquently that even when a single stomach goes hungry, we will destroy the whole cosmos. But Jesus offers his own life to give abundant life to the others. Those, Christians or not, who live out this culture of self-gift, after the example of

Christ, become his heirs.

4.1.6 Self-sacrifice - For Whom?

When the body is broken, the well-placed in the society protect themselves with defensive shields, offensive weapons, or at least with medical treatment. But when the defenseless body is broken, what happens? When the head is attacked, the hands rush to defend it from further damage. When the legs are crushed the back bends down to protect them with the shield of one's own head. Just like the mother who throws her whole body as the shield when her child is about to be crushed by a tree falling, Jesus offers his own body as a ransom for many. When the military cadres ripped open the naked bodies of the hapless tribal women in Manipur in North East India, women Human Rights activists vehemently protested against this atrocity by a non-violent naked parade. The Military camp with heaps of arms and ammunitions could not open their doors or fire against these women who dared to register their righteous wrath through their 'collectively humiliated bodies' against the excesses of the Military. In this context, the 'defenseless body' became a medium of protest against the acts of humiliating the 'defenseless body' of women. The eloquent message from this 'naked parade' was that if the Military with their habitual patriarchal arrogance crushed our 'body' in broad day light, our 'crushed body' will be the weapon of the weak to protect the rights of the defenseless 'body' of the rest of the Tribal women.

4.1.7 Dreaming with the Broken

The concept of the 'Reign of God' found in the Gospels was the 'heart-beat' of the Divine addressing the people in

crisis. The people with apocalyptic expectations expressed this concept as the world of abundant joy of perfect communion divested of every trace of violence, projected either as the future heaven or as the golden past. They were dreaming dreams out of their helplessness. Such dreams are the luxuries available even within the minimum space occupied by them in society.

On the other hand, their leaders had their control mechanisms. The legalism of the Pharisees, the puritanism of the Essenes, the retribution of the Zealots, the lobbying of the Sadducees, the ritualism of the Priests, the scholarship of the Scribes were projected as mediating the will of God. Each item was 'the weapon of the strong' in their respective ideological schools.

Jesus did not fall into the habitual rut of the helpless dreams of the disempowered and the ideologies of the powerful. Rather, he saw the hand of God when an elderly woman was healed of her fever and a young maid of her hemorrhage, when the dead young boy was restored to his widowed mother at Nain and the buried young man back to his sisters at Bethany; he had an eye for divine intervention when a little girl is enabled to eat her meal after his life-restoring pronouncement *talithacumi*.

These are but glimpses into his entirely different ideology which permits a free hand to the divine heart-beat to usher in transformation like the dynamic restlessness of the mustard seed silently sprouting or the leaven mutely leavening the dough unnoticed. In other words, Jesus has a sharp perception in spotting out the silent steps of the Divine in small details, especially when the hapless victims are restored back to life. All his active interventions in the human world were empowered with

this spirit of attending to the details of the life of the victims which may not become the headlines among the power-holders of his time.

For Jesus, the proclamation of the Reign of God through the acts of transforming the broken world as fully human and fully alive is as important as the institution of the Eucharist during the celebration of the Last Supper. His acts of healing the sick, forgiving the sinners, and feeding the hungry are the continuation of his supreme act of offering his energies and potentials - 'This is my Body! This is my Blood! They are an indispensable part of Jesus' life, mission and priestly ministry.

4.1.8 All-embracing Ideology

During the Last Supper, the Jewish heart of Jesus remembered the originary Exodus-event of the indescribable escape of his forefathers and foremothers as the bare-footed run-away bonded labourers from the murderous chase of the Egyptian army, well-equipped with fast moving chariots of horses and lethal weapons. It was a memory of the defeat of the Egyptian imperialism. This Divine intervention had the strong message, to be communicated through the leadership of Moses and Aaron, that they were supposed neither to be enslaved nor to enslave others. They were to become a counter-cultural community, growing as a tribal confederation promoting the culture of solidarity, compassion, and egalitarianism, especially with affirmative intervention in favour of the abandoned ones – the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the sojourners, with a democratic distribution of all resources like land, water, food. An inclusive ideology of living together in total solidarity with one another, this Paschal memory had the following movements:

Unorganised Bonded Labourers→ Organised People
Towards Egalitarianism; Exclusive Ideology of Rulers→
Inclusive Ideology among the Equals. These movements
enacted by the Aramean wanderers were led by none other
than God as their only Leader. The tremors of these
memories were expressed in and through the annual
Paschal celebration celebrated by the community and
family.

Remembering the exodus event Jesus must have been
aware of the abandoned ones of his time – the ordinary
folk labelled as sinners, faceless *ochlos* (crowds/ masses)
assailed by the visible human powers of the Romans and
their own collaborating leaders and the invisible demonic
forces as he offered his body and blood for them.

4.1.9 Life itself as Liturgy

The Eucharistic culture enables us to identify the
movements of the divine Spirit activating the life-seeking
struggles of the common folk outside the comfort zones of
the habitual worship within the confines of Church
buildings. When identifying such divine movements our
hands of solidarity will be freely extended to the people
constantly assailed by visible powers and invisible forces.
Such solidarity could create a synergetic collaboration to
intensify their on-going struggles against life-negating
forces in order to bring in the culture of compassion with
the spirit of egalitarian sharing with one another. In other
words, the broken body of the common folk will be healed
by the intervention of those who offer their body to be
broken in the act of defending their God-given human
dignity. Such attitudes of self-sacrifice for the sake of the
many will be the effective antidote to the demonic culture
of excluding others in the name of creed or caste, birth or

origin, status or gender, language or location. The washing of the dirty feet of the so-called 'untouchables' will definitely ensure the death-knell of the culture of discriminatory hierarchy in every form. Such efforts of struggling against the sins of the world will usher in the culture of effective compassion in place of apathetic indifference.

5.0 Commitment amidst Conflicts

In the act of struggling against the sins of the world, there are prices to be paid. Such concrete acts could demand my own body to be broken and blood to be spilled. When my body is broken in the act of defending the subaltern broken body, then I become the defending shield of the poor. As the Eucharistic body, our lot is to voluntarily become a ransom for many.

If so, never worship anyone (or anything) who should not be worshipped. Never shy away from democratizing the hope-generating and life-promoting prophetic stories even if the stiff-necked stick on to the culture of domination leading to death. Keep on doing the works in continuity with the Lamb of God, where God is also working with right intervention with right intensity at the right time. Cherish the sense of belonging to God as an eagerly awaiting spouse with an open mind and open heart welcoming every initiative for making the universe fertile with life-giving water. Celebrate life in enlivening others by immersing yourself in the culture of life, as the hope-engendering agents of God and never as the minions of the devilish Empires of dehumanization.

Let not the Blazing Fire of the Eucharist and the
Priesthood

Be Reduced to a Soothing Balm!

Let not the Brilliant Sun of the Eucharist and the
Priesthood
Be Minimized to a Wet Match Stick!

¹ According to the recent statistical data (Cf. Dinamalar dated May 19, 2010), we come to know that armed struggles are quite active in 195 Districts in 10 States of India. The numbers of people who were killed violently in 2009-2010 as recorded from among the ordinary folk, armed personnel and the Maoists are given as below:

2009-2010

States	People	Armed Person- nel	Naxals	People	Armed Person- nel	Naxals
Andhra	10	0	18	4	0	2
Bihar	37	25	16	22	6	3
Chat- tisgarh	87	121	137	7	87	54
Jhar- khand	74	67	76	27	9	6
Maha- rashtra	12	52	23	1	0	1
Orissa	36	32	13	20	16	11
West Bengal	135	15	9	50	27	23
Other States	1	0	2	0	0	1
Total	392	312	294	131	145	100

It is in the above context of the bloodshed, marginalization, and violation of human rights, that the Civil Society comes out with its critical analysis and alternative visions for a new life.

Hindu Catalyst for Catholic Priesthood

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Abstract: An overview of the origin and development of priesthood in Hinduism is given. It was Vedic sacrifice that led to the importance of Hindu priests. Hindu priesthood has changed with the times. It is in the performance of sacraments, especially the last rites, that Brahmins hold sway. Knowledge of the Vedas is of utmost importance to Hindu priests. For Catholic priests too, preaching and teaching the Word is primary. The need of the hour for Catholic priests is to be worthy Ministers of the Eucharist, to be prophetic, and witness to the kenotic nature of Christian priesthood. The ideal for Hindu priesthood is to be one who has mastered his senses.

Keywords: Priest, priesthood, Hindu priest, Brahmin, Vedic sacrifice, development of Hindu priesthood, Catholic priest.

Introduction

The origin of Priesthood is co-terminus with the development of human civilization and socio-religious structures. Priesthood existed in all cultures and religions at all times, in some form or other. Even in Islam which denies any priestly order, the Mufti fulfills the function of a teacher and interpreter of religious laws and the Imam leads the people in ritual prayer. Similar is the case with 'Bhikku' in Buddhism. Hinduism, from ancient times, developed a well structured order of priesthood within an even more structured institution of Varna system. It would be naïve to assume that the notion of priesthood is the same in all religions. Priest and priesthood mean different things to different religions, yet they play similar roles within their systems and can be seen as homologous

concepts having similarity in difference. This similarity in difference provides us with a good foundation for a fruitful and mutually enriching dialogue between the understanding of priesthood in other religions and Christianity. In the following pages, beginning with a brief study of the origin and development of Hindu priesthood, I intend to reflect on some of the significant insights of Hindu and Christian Priesthood and see how these insights can work as a catalyst for a more relevant and meaningful Christian priesthood in India today.

1. Origin and Development of Hindu Priesthood

The earliest priests of the Vedic times were sage-poets. The Rig Veda mentions 150 such seers (*Rshi*). The important figures among these include Bharadwaj, Kashyap, Gotam, Vishwāmitra, Jamadagni and Vāṣiṣṭha. They were composers and singers of hymns or Mantras. Vāṣiṣṭha composed the highest number of Sūktas, the entire seventh Mandala of Rig Veda consisting 104 Sūktās, and Bhardwaj has sixty Sūktās of the Rig Vedic Mantras to his credit. These figures were royal priests (Purohita) and recited the Mantras and offered sacrifices for the welfare of their ‘Yajamāna’ the King, and for his victory in war. For instance, Bharadwaj was the priest of King Divodas, and Vasishta functioned as the priest of King Sudas. The earliest recorded horse-sacrifice (*Ashwamedha Yajña*), found in the Rig Vedic Aitareya Brahmana (8.4.21), is performed by Vāṣiṣṭha on behalf of King Sudas. Besides being composers and singers of Mantras, the early Vedic priests also functioned as ministers or advisors (Mantri) of the King and occasionally as commanders of the army. Vasishta speaks with great pride about the role of the priest in the success of the king:

“(King) Tristu Bharat was like an orphan child. When Vasishta became his priest, he became mighty.” (RV. 7. 83. 4). Priests Bharadwaj, Vasishta and the sons of Vishwāmitra actively engaged in warfare. Thus, it is not surprising that the priest Bhardwaj prays for physical power than spiritual power — “*Aśma bhavatu nastanu*” i.e., let our body be of stone (R.V.6.75.12). The King would remove the priest if he failed to bring success in war through the recitation of Mantras, performance of rituals, by providing strategies or even as commander of the army. Bhardwaj was removed from the position of Royal priest and minister by Sudas because his Mantras failed to be effective.¹

The only allusion in the First Veda to priesthood as part of a well ordered social structure is found in the famous Purusha-sūkta. In this hymn of cosmogony, the whole creation – sun, moon, animals, plants, humans and even social structures – originate from the sacrifice of the Purusha who is “the life giving principle of this whole universe, whatever has been and whatever shall be” (R.V.10.90.2). The Sūkta provides a philosophic-theological foundation for the validity of the Varna system as divinely ordered. In this well defined hierarchical system, the Brahmin class enjoys primacy due to its origin as the “mouth of the Purusha” (*Brahmano ‘sya mukham āsīd*)² and exercises superiority over the other three classes which represent the lower parts of the Purusha. Being “the mouth” of the Purusha, Brahmins are to be the seat of speech and teachers of the world.³

The development of the Brahmana priests as a hereditary, exclusively endogamous class within the hierarchical Varna system as well as their primacy over the other Varnas, to a great extent, can be credited to the

emergence of Vedic sacrifice. The earliest and originary experience of the Veda was one in which gods and humans communicated freely and spontaneously. The world of the gods, humans, animals and all beings moved in a smooth and interrelated order called Ṛta. Gradually, this spontaneous relationship was replaced by a rigid structure called Sacrifice (Yajña). Yajña began to be considered as the custodian of the cosmic order, and even gods could be controlled by the sacrifice. The supreme value in life was the imperative prescribed by the scripture to perform sacrifice because sacrifice was seen as the “navel of the universe” (Yajñovai *bhuvanasya nābhi*). With the ascendance of sacrifice, it was natural that the performer of the sacrifice, the priest, too gains supremacy.

Priesthood became a complex affair with a shift in importance from the *Grahya* (domestic) sacrifice to the *Srauta* sacrifice. In the *Grahya* sacrifice the householder himself was the sacrificial priest and there was only a single domestic sacrificial fire. On the contrary, the *Srauta* sacrifices were undertaken by kings, nobles and rich householders for specific intentions, and these required many priests, immense wealth and several days of performance. The chief priest in a sacrifice, *Purohita*, was appointed by the *Yajamāna*, the undertaker of sacrifice. Sacrifice itself being complex, its various aspects required specialized priests. Based on their varying functions in the sacrifice, there emerged four classes of officiating priests called *Ritvij*, besides the *Purohita*. They are (1) The *Hōtri* who recites the Mantras in praise of gods who would partake of the sacrifice, (2) *Adhvaryu* who prepares the altar, looks after the fires, cooks the oblations and thus acts as an over all in charge of the sacrifice, (3) *Udgātri* priests who sing the *Sāman* verses as well as songs

addressed to particular gods, and (4) Brāhman, the expert of the ritual and the expository of sacred power who makes sure that the rituals are performed accurately and according to Vedic prescriptions.

Nomenclatures such as Acharya, Upadhyay, Guru, Pundit etc. have been used as correlatives for Hindu priesthood. Manusmriti, while employing all these terms for priests, clearly distinguishes them – “a Brahmin who initiates a student in the sacrament of ‘Yajñopav ’ and teaches him the Veda and the Upanishad is Acharya. A Brahmin who teaches the Vedangas for livelihood is Upadhyay...”⁴ In the classical Hindu thought a Brahmin need not be an Acharya or an Upadhyaya, but, for exceptions notwithstanding, only a hereditary Brahmin would be eligible to be Acharya, Guru or Upadhyay.

Hindu priesthood has treaded a long path from the Purohita of Vedic times to the Pujari of modern times. Without going into the details of this journey it suffices to say that while retaining many of the ancient characteristics, Hindu priesthood has changed with times. The Pujari or Pandit’s role today is much reduced in terms of influence in socio-political sphere. As temple priest he performs the consecration and worship of the idol (*Shasopachār*) and does the daily ‘Arati’. In some temples special Yajña, Satsang (singing of Bhajans) and ‘Pravachan’ (preaching, mainly based, on the stories of the Puranas) are also undertaken by the priests. Hindu Puja is not centred merely on temple worship. Worshipping in the temple is neither obligatory nor is it seen to be essential. The Puja today is a simple worship form in which the priest receives the offerings of the devotees on behalf of the deity and returns it as ‘Prasad’ of the deity. He may also bless the devotee by sprinkling holy water and giving

the same to sip. Many upper caste families, both in the urban and rural areas have a special place of worship such as a prayer room with the idols of their personal god or a Tulsi plant in their yard. In the domestic worship, a priest is not present except when invited for a special occasion. Then there are public rituals such as that takes place during festivals. In Durga Puja, Ganesh Chaturthi, Saraswati Puja and such other festivals idols are installed in Pandals for public *darshan* and worship, and in those occasions the priest plays a significant role in transforming the image into a deity through the rite of consecration called '*Pranapratishta*'.

It is in the performance of the sacraments (*samskāras*) that the Brahmin still holds sway. Not all sacraments requires the presence of a priest, but in the last sacraments – *Antyeshti* and *Srādha* – a Brahmin priest's participation is considered essential, because what the Brahmin eats (during the *Shrādha* ceremony) goes to the ancestors and "satisfies the fathers" (*Pitṛnām tasya triptih*) for seven generations.⁵

In villages, and even in urban areas, people often consult the priest to find the auspicious time (*Muhūrta*) for important functions. They help find right partners for marriage by matching the horoscopes of eligible boys and girls. The Pujari of today, especially those in the villages, need not necessarily be a scholar, a knower of the scriptures or even a pious person. He might just know sufficient Mantras to perform a ritual. A Hindu Pujari may not command the respect of the village as he often demands a big sum for his services. Kanchan, a young man from the village of Khaspur where my residence is located, expresses his view of the priest graphically – *aaj ka pandit "paisa dijiye, katha pathenge"* (pay up the

Pandit first and listen to the Katha). But he adds in the same breath – “but we can’t do without him, *Pandit toh Bhagawan hi hai*” (after all, Pandit is equal to Bhagawan).

Having considered the origin and development of priesthood in Hinduism, I shall proceed to reflect on some of the important insights of Hindu priesthood and interface them with the Catholic understanding of priesthood.

2. The ‘Vedapāthi and Veda Pāragam’: Priest as Knower and Teacher of the Word

Scripture is closely associated with the priest in all religions. One of the important functions of the priest is to explain and interpret the revealed Word to people. In Hinduism, from the early Vedic period, a true Brahmana was perceived to be a knower of the Veda, and teaching the Veda was his sole privilege. The Veda, being direct knowledge (*aproksha Anubhūti*) and not human word (*apurusheya*), is accepted as Divine Word. Hence the mandate given to the Brahmana during the Upanayana rite “to go beyond what is human (*apakrāman paurusheyād*) and take up the divine Word (*Vṛnāno Daivyaṃ Vachah*)”⁶ The Rig Veda identifies the Brahmana with the inherent power of knowledge (RV.VIII.35) and the Atharva Veda (22.22) prays for the birth of Brahmanas possessing the lusture of Vedic knowledge (*Brahman Braahmāno brahmavarchasi jayatāma*).

Manusmriti insists that being born as the mouth of the creator, it is both the right and duty of the Brahmin to teach the Veda. One must never accept a person as Acharya if he is not a Brahmin and who does not possess the knowledge of the Veda and the Vedangas. A non-Brahmin can be accepted as teacher only in an emergency situation when the Brahmin is not available.⁷ Indictment

of the priest who does not know the scriptures is harsh and sharp – “a wooden elephant, a stuffed deer and a Brahmin without the knowledge of the Veda are only namesakes (*nām vibhrati*) and are not real...just as a eunuch is fruitless (*aphalah*) among women so also a Brahmin without the knowledge of scripture is fruitless (*Vipro anrichoaphalah*).”⁸ For Manu, the greatest ‘Tapa’ a Brahmin could undertake is the study of scripture (2:166). According to him, “feeding a single Vedapāthi priest during Srādha (*Brahmabhoj*) brings the same fruit as feeding ten lakh priests who do not know the Veda” (3:131). The Guru who teaches the Veda is graded higher in respect and honour than the students’ parents who gives him birth (2:146). A true Brahmin is a knower and teacher of scriptures (Vedapāthi or Veda pāragam). According to Satapatha Brahmana, a scholarly priest (*Brāhmanam Vedapāragam*) makes the place of sacrifice holy by his very presence.⁹

Teaching the Veda and learning it, both demand certain inner and outer dispositions, because both these acts are considered as sacred as a sacrifice. Manu calls Vedic learning and teaching ‘Brahma Yajna’ that is, sacrificial offering to God – *Adhyāpanam Brahmayañnah* (3:70). Connectedness to the divine is essential for the knowledge of scripture. Scripture as direct revelation (*aparokshanubhūti*) is ‘Sruti’ (heard) and to “hear” one must be connected to the Divine that reveals Itself. Hence the teacher of the Veda is not a mere ‘Shāstri’ but a Guru and Acharya. The Acharya gives a second birth (*brahmajjanma*) to the student and becomes his second father, the first being the biological father. Manusmriti asks the student as well as the teacher to be ‘*Jīvendriya*’ (one who has control over the senses) to qualify for

learning and teaching of the Veda (2:115) The understanding of Self-control as a pre-requisite for scriptural knowledge is symbolically expressed at the ‘Upanayan’ ceremony when the student receives his ‘Kaupeen’ (loin clothes) and ‘Mekhala’(waist band).

Moral aptitude and behavior based on Dharma must mark the character of a Vedapāthi. Manu prescribes non-violent attitude (ahimsa), purity of mind (*manasi shudhe*), tolerance to humiliation (*avamānasya ākānśet*) and endearing speech (*Vākchaiva madhura*).¹⁰ External behavior of the Vedapāthi must be marked by politeness, discipline, respect for the Acharya, elders and women as well as purity and cleanliness of the body.

3. The Catholic Priest as Teacher of the Word

Vatican II in its document *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (4), places, in no uncertain terms, preaching and teaching the Word as the “first task of priests”. The eligibility and authority to teach is not given to any and everyone in the Church, neither can this authority be earned by any means. It is a grace “given and offered...authorized and empowered by Christ. From him, bishops and priests receive the mission and faculty (“the sacred power”) to act *in persona Christi Capitis*.”¹¹ Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest receives a “special grace of the Holy Spirit so that he serves as an instrument for his Church...as a representative of Christ.”¹² Vat. II affirms that priests are “authentic teachers of the apostolic faith endowed with the authority of the Church.” (LG.25), and the Word of God is “rightly sought from the mouth of the priests.” (PO.4).

Unlike in the case of Christian priests, priesthood is not bestowed on the Brahmin priest by a higher authority nor

is he authorized or mandated by any external authority to teach. Yet, he is bound by his priestly duty to study and teach the Word. His responsibility and authority to teach is intrinsic to his nature and priestly state. The Christian priest's task as teacher of the Word is more challenging than his Hindu counterpart in that his hearers are different and diverse. He is mandated to teach, interpret the scriptures and form the Christian community on the one hand, and proclaim the gospel to people of other religions on the other.

The Catholic priest's mission of proclaiming the gospel to all is increasingly becoming complex in India today. Verbal proclamation, sometimes even proclamation of gospel values through social upliftment, is perceived by many people of other religions as part of a strategy to convert and Christianize the country. The Hindu fundamentalists are more vehement and audible today than ever in branding Christian proclamation as immoral and even as anti-national. The Christian fundamentalist groups, by their fiery preaching and utterances that hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus have also been fanning the fire of mistrust.

In Hinduism, no mandate is given to the priest to "go out" and preach. Hindu priest or Guru does not have to "go out" because people "come in" to hear and learn the Word from him. He is seen and experienced as a man of the Veda. It is interesting to note that the most commonly used literary word for priest among Christians in Kerala is 'Vaidikan'. During Vedic times the 'Ritvij' priests were known as 'Vaidik' due to their close association with Vedic mantras and rituals. The Sanskrit word 'Vaidik' in its adjectival form literally means "born from the Veda" or "in the image of the Veda"¹³. An ideal Hindu priest's life

is to be so rooted in the Veda that he was to be ‘Vaidik’, i.e., in accordance with or in the image of the Veda. If we apply this meaning to Christian priesthood, a priest is one who is so rooted in the Word of God that he is the image of the Word or in other words, he **is** the Word. The Christian priest, as he reads, reflects and teaches the Word, “must ask himself: how can I **be** the Book that I read...how do I make God’s Word my flesh...we must seriously strive to **live** scripture, to be the Book, to give visibility and voice to the Word of God.”¹⁴

When the priest becomes the Word, he needs to “go out” less. He will attract people to “come in” and hear the Word. His proclamation must be more with life than with words. The Bhagavad Gita is emphatic in saying that it is not words of the priests and elders that people follow but what they do or act (*Yadyatācharati*) and what they prove (*Yat pramānam kurute*) through their life (BG.3:21). A less intimidating and more receptive way of proclaiming the Word in India today is by using fewer words and by being the Word.

4. The Purohita: Priest as Minister of Sacrifice

The Priest and Sacrifice (Rituals) are inseparable twins in most religious traditions. In Hinduism, the very etymological sense of the word ‘Purohita’ is “one who is placed in front” (in the performance of Yajna and in the council of royal ministers). In the Vedic sacrifice, the priest offered gifts and food meant for gods into the sacrificial fire, accompanied by sacred Mantras, and the sacrificial fire carried the offerings to gods. Yet, “What is interesting for us is that in the Vedic conception the ‘sacrificer’ is the ‘lay person’..., though he is ‘consecrated’ for the liturgical function, while the

Brahmins act as his ‘ministers’ in the performance of the sacred action.”¹⁵ The priest does something similar to what the sacrificial fire does to the oblation – facilitating the transformation and transporting of the offerings to the divine realm. This is the reason why Agni is said to be the first priest and the prototype of priesthood.

The purpose or intention of Sacrifice (Yajña) could be specific personal needs and desires of the Yajamāna (purushartha). Yet, sacrifice itself contained an inner transformative power related to the well being of the whole cosmos. The structure of sacrifice represented the warp and woof of the cosmos and sacrifice maintained not only individual prosperity but universal and cosmic order. Manusmriti articulates this understanding in a graphic way – “oblation offered in the fire goes to the sun, from the sun comes rain, from the rain comes vegetation and food (*annam*) and from food originate human beings” (3:76). Ultimately, it is sacrifice that maintains and keeps going the cosmic order and its process. The priest’s role as mediator in promoting this order is vital.

Today’s Hindu Pujari continues to fulfill the mediating role of the Purohita by performing the ‘Shadśopachār’ (16 forms of worship) to the deity in the ‘garbhagriha’ of the temple, by receiving the offerings of the devotees on behalf of gods. Most importantly, the role of the Brahmin priest is inevitable in the performance of Srādha. In Srādha karma his role is much greater than mediation. He represents the ancestor. Feeding the priest (*Brahmabhoj*) is the most important ritual for the Srādha ceremony because the ancestors (pitarah) eat and get satisfied while the Brahmin eats. In his detailed description of the Srādha ceremony (Manusmriti 3: 187-284), Manu instructs the Brahmin priest to continue eating even if the food is

unbearably hot because as long as he keeps eating, the fathers (pitarah) continue to eat the same food and are satisfied (*Pitarah tāvāt aśnanti*, 3:237). A satisfied Brahmin would say the final word of blessing “*svadhāho*”, implying, “may the fathers obtain the food” and the ancestors are considered fully happy and enter the abode of gods. Be it sacrifice, Puja or Srādha, the actual performer is not the priest but the layperson. He is only a mediator, a representative and an agent. He “stands in front” (Purohita) on behalf of the people, not as a leader but as a minister.

5. Catholic Priest – Minister of the Eucharist

The centrality and significance of the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is well summed up by Vat.II: “...in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself our Pasch and the living bread which gives life to men through his flesh—that flesh which is given life and gives life through the Holy Spirit”. (PO.5). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (#1356) outlines three important dimensions of the Eucharistic celebration – (1) thanksgiving and praise, (2) memorial and sacrificial meal, (3) the presence of Christ. Eucharist is communitarian by its very nature and all the above three are actualized in the “Eucharistic assembly of the faithful”. In the assembly of the faithful the priest stands “acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ...and make present again and again...the unique sacrifice of Christ.” (#1566) Thus, the priest as minister of the Eucharist plays an indispensable part as he 1) represents Christ (“act in the person of Christ”), 2) leads the faithful in thanksgiving and praise 3)

unites the offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ and 4) makes present Christ sacramentally through the celebration of the Eucharistic meal and consecration of the bread and wine.

One of the accusations against Catholic Mass is that it is too “priest-centred”. Even after the reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council, it is not a rare sight in Churches today where priest is the “performer” and people’s role is often reduced to a few mutterings of “Amen”, “Alleluia” and “also with you”. The priest must not forget that it is Christ himself who offers the sacrifice in union with the community. When the priest acts “in the person of Christ”, it implies that he does not act in his own person. The instrumental and mediatory role of the priest needs to be retrieved today.

The Vedic idea of the instrumentality of the priest could be insightful for us. In the Vedic sacrifice it is the intention (*niyoga*) of the layperson that is central to sacrifice. The power of the mantra and the expertise of the priest are only instrumental in the accomplishment of the intention of the Yajamāna. The Catholic priest, as his Hindu counterpart, is called to offer the sacrifice in the name of the community. But the instrumental nature of the priestly role in the Eucharist is often forgotten or ignored. Michael Amaldoss has rightly pointed out this discrepancy: “The presbyter plays an indispensable role of praying and offering in the name of the community. But we offer our thanks and prayers ‘through, with and in Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit’...we should rather say that presbyter as ‘priest’ has an instrumental role in relation to Jesus Christ and the Spirit (God) and a coordinating and facilitating role in relation to the community”¹⁶

When people speak of the “sacred hands of the priest that bring down Christ to earth” one must sense the danger of a wrong understanding of the doctrine of “ex opere operato”. The words of consecration are not magical words uttered with the magical power of the priest. “He is not putting on his own show in which people are the spectators. He is not set apart with special magical powers to make Christ present on the altar...it is the faith of the Church and the Spirit of God who do this, even when the presbyter happens to be an unworthy servant”.¹⁷

The Vedic sacrifice assumes a universal significance as the sacrifice holds the potential to accomplish not only the personal intention of the Yajamāna, but the maintenance and upkeep of the cosmos and its processes. Through oblations and other rituals the Vedic priest offered the whole cosmos as a sacrifice. The cosmic nature of sacrifice reflects vividly in the Eucharistic sacrifice too. In their celebration of the Eucharist Vat. II invites the faithful to “offer themselves, their works and all creation with Christ”. The Catholic priest as he presides over the Eucharist is urged to help the community of believers to connect with the world and the cosmos. The ritualistic sacrifice that celebrates Christ’s sacrifice on the cross must be united with the actual crosses of the crucified people of the world who are victims of hunger, exploitation, violence, dehumanization and deprivation. No priest in India can truly and authentically offer the Eucharistic sacrifice unless he makes himself part of the struggle to overthrow altars of structural injustice on which Dalits, Adivasis and the marginalized people are daily sacrificed.

6. Brahmana: The Upholder of Dharma

A Brahmin is said to have three births. The first is from the mother, the second from the Guru through the sacrament of Upanayana and the third from the study and performance of sacrifice (*Yajña dīksha*).¹⁸ One becomes a Brahmana (Brahma + an, i.e. related to Brahma) not just by his first birth from the mother but from the latter two births too. Being related to God and being a knower of God, the Brahmin priest possesses an innate divine power which not only distinguishes him from the others but also raises him to a position of moral authority and power. Atharva Veda X.5 uses hyperbolic terms to describe the innate power obtained during the stage of Brahmacharya and especially in the sacrament of Upanayana. The student ‘being carried in the womb of the Acharya’ (*acharya Brahmachārinām krunute garbhamantah*), when born through Upanayana is visited by the Devas, and in him the Devas meet in concord (*tasmin devāh sanmanaso bhavanti*). Verse 5 of the same Atharva text goes on to say that the twice-born Brahmin now is given the power and responsibility to “grasp the worlds together, constantly drawing them together (*lokān samgribhya*). ‘Lokān samgibhya’ reminds us of ‘loka-samgraha’ in Bhagavad Gita 3:20 and the social responsibility of the Hindu priest.

The Dharmasastras continued to bestow the same sublime position and sacredness to priesthood, but not without reminding the Brahmin of the ideal he is expected to live and teach. Manusmriti affirms the moral, intellectual and spiritual superiority of the Brahmin over all other humans – “*Sreshtāh nareshu Brāhmanāh*” (1: 96). By virtue of his knowledge and innate power “a ten year old Brahmana must be considered father to a hundred year old Kshatriya.” (2: 135). A Brahmin is not born for himself. He is born as ‘the immortal body of Dharma’

(*Murti dharmasya śāśvati*) and he is born for dharma-
“*Dharmārtham utpanno*” ((1:98). This is so because he
holds the power to protect the dharma of all beings -
“*Sarvabhūtānām dharmakoshasya guptaye*” (1:99).

Artha Sastra reiterates the great moral power and responsibility of the priest to stand for truth. As Purohita and minister (mantri) of the king, the priest provided advice and counsel to the king. But if the king erred, the priest was expected to play the admonitory role. This was easier said than done, as the priest was often in the payroll of the king. Yet, Kautilya, in his Artha Sastra, reminds the priest – “Just as the disciple follows the teacher, the son follows the father and the servant follows his master, so too the King must follow the priest” (4.8.2). Already the Atharva Veda had declared autonomy to the priest. After the Rajasuya sacrifice at the coronation of the king, the priest addressing the people says, “Ye, people! This is your king. But Soma is the king over us Brahmanas.” (AV.Vs.9.23). The independence of priesthood held its own by its claim to spiritual power and wisdom. The priest and the sage exerted a healthy check on the king. “The internal balance of power between Brahmana and Kshātra-spirituality and politics- during the Vedic period prevented politics from assuming dictatorial powers or expansionist militarism, and spirituality from surrendering to the harsh asceticism or anti-secular outlook on life.”¹⁹

7. The Prophetic Role of Christian Priesthood

Faced with a declining public confidence and fast fading image in the post-modern world, priests are challenged to rediscover their prophetic role. The prophetic dimension of Christian priesthood finds its source in the very person and mission of Jesus. The

priesthood attributed to Jesus in the Letter to Hebrews is not an overly cultic and hierarchical priesthood but one that is obtained through his self-giving death that he offered as the perfectly efficacious sacrifice. Jesus' attitude towards cultic practices and observances were threatening for the Pharisees and scribes. "Continuing the mission of Jesus and adhering to the value system he proposed would always and everywhere invite the ire of the establishment."²⁰ The sending out of the apostles, narrated in all the synoptic gospels, discloses the prophetic character of discipleship.

The apostles are sent 'to proclaim the Kingdom and to heal' and they are given "power and authority over demons" (Lk.9.1). They are sent as signs of the Kingdom and as counter signs of the worldly values of money and power (9.3). They are to "shake the dust from their feet in testimony against" those who do not welcome the Kingdom values (9.5). They must not strike a compromise with the powers of the world but must be ready to face opposition and persecutions because they are sent as "lambs among wolves." (10.3).

The Christian priest who shares the priesthood of Christ is called to be a prophet. An overly hierarchical, cultic and institutional priesthood cannot fulfill the prophetic mission but would rather fall prey to the temptation to side with the powerful of the world. The Church-feudal lord nexus in medieval Europe and the Brahmana-Kshtria-Vaishya coalition in the Hindu Varna system greatly deprived priesthood of its prophetic power. The Catholic priest of today is often perceived by people as economically powerful, politically influential and socially exclusive. The physical and psychological boundaries and walls that priests build around them, often keep them away from

people as a privileged class.

A growing number of priests today are inclined to engage in elite educational and other institutions. They often relate with people more like administrators and even as businessmen than godly priests. A Hindu alumnus of a prestigious school, in his letter to the editor of a national news paper, paints such an image of Catholic priest graphically: “often the first Christian priest we Hindus meet is the arrogant administrator in a Christian school.” Such views of the Catholic priest, perhaps exaggerated and generalized, indeed convey some truth about the inadequacies of today’s priests in fulfilling their prophetic role.

The prophetic mission of the priest, in the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, is “to refashion creation and restore it in God’s image”. Wherever God’s image is tarnished and disfigured, especially of God’s preferred people, the last and least of society, the priest must stand up as a sign of God’s justice and love, without any fear of intimidation by the powers of the world. It is noteworthy how the Vedic priest has defined himself in relation to his prophetic role: “Being stationed in the front (*purohitāh*), we shall remain wakeful in the kingdom.” (YV. Vs.9.23). The Christian priest too is “stationed in front” not to rule and control but to serve and defend the weak.

8. Jitendriya: The Ascetic Dimension of Hindu Priesthood

Hinduism is primarily a religion of the house holder, and Hindu priesthood retains this characteristic. The Brahmin priests differed from the Buddhist and Jain Sramanas and the wandering Hindu ascetic sages in that they remained householders, exercising their priestly

occupation, enjoying wealth (artha) and pleasure (kama) and very much a part of the social and family fabric. However, the ideal of a Brahmin priest underscores a sense of detachment and renunciation. He is to be a conqueror of the desires of the senses (Jītendriya), not just during the Brahmacharya stage, but throughout life.

Manusmriti (2: 88-100) instructs the priests to subdue and control the senses just as the rider controls the horses. Mind, considered to be one of the senses, too needs to be restrained. Senses and mind can be controlled by the practice of ‘Japa’ and ‘Tapa’. A Jītendriya is identified by his equanimity, not getting too exuberant (*na hrshyati*) and not getting too disheartened (*na glāyati*). A true Brahmin is advised to shun praise and honour as if it is poison (*sammānah vishādiva*) and welcome humiliation as if it is nectar – “*Amritasyeva Avamānasya sarvadā*” (2:162). He must not please the world in order to earn his livelihood, but must protect his integrity (4:11).

The epic Mahabharata identifies three important marks specific (*kevalam*) to priesthood – teaching, self-control and practice of austerities (tapas).²¹ The Bhagavd Gita (18:42) expands these defining marks of the Brahmin – calmness, restraint, austerity, purity, patience in suffering and uprightness, wisdom, learning and faith in God. The distinctive characteristics (*lakshana*) of a Brahmin are outlined in the Bhagavad Purana – Peacefulness, self-restraint, austerity, purity, contentment, kindness, devotion to God and truthfulness.²²

9. The Kenotic nature of Christian Priesthood

Christian Priests, by reason of their sacerdotal consecration, are “enabled and obliged even in the midst of human weakness to seek perfection” (Vat. II. PO.12).

Priestly perfection consists in following Christ who “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant...and became obedient unto death.” (Phil.2:7-9). Jesus demanded from all who wanted to follow him closely, detachment from material possessions, hunger for power and positions. To be an apostle, freedom from all attachments was a non-negotiable. This kenotic spirit of priesthood, in a way, renders the distinction of ‘secular’ priest and ‘religious priest’ redundant. The Christian priest is not to withdraw from the world but immerse in the affairs of the world to rebuild, to heal and to transform. Yet, he is to do all these with total freedom from attractions of the world, greed and selfishness.

The Sanskrit word for asceticism is ‘Tapas’. It is interesting to note that the word literally means ‘fire or ‘heat’, and Agni is viewed as priest par excellence. Agni burns and consumes and connects the worshipper with God. The priest is to be ‘tapasvi’ burning up all the attachments that bind him to the worldly values so that he is enabled to connect people to God. The Hindu priest in ancient days was expected to retreat to forests in the stage of ‘Vānaprastha’. It was a withdrawal from the chaos and confusion of the world. Today’s Catholic priest needs to “withdraw” from the rat race of accomplishments, achievements and accumulations, and bring an element of ‘Āranyaka’ in his life by heeding to Christ who invites him to go off to a deserted place to be with him (Mk.6:32).

Conclusion:

In the above pages I have made an attempt to derive some of the significant and positive insights on priesthood from Hinduism and show how these insights can synergize and enrich Catholic priesthood in India today. Hindu

priesthood and Christian priesthood both have, at different phases of history, suffered distortions such as exaggerated sacralization, clericalization and abuse of institutional power. Within the Varna system Hindu priesthood has theologically justified and enacted the subordination and dehumanization of a large section of people, the vicious effect of which continues till today. The Catholic priesthood, as a powerful institution, has failed to address many inherent inadequacies. Yet, the understanding of priesthood in both traditions provides valuable insights that are relevant for today.

The ministerial, cultic, prophetic and kenotic dimensions of priesthood in Hinduism and Christianity point to a mediatory role of priesthood in which priests are instruments and servants who mediate between people, God, and the cosmos. The challenge and task of Christian priests in India today is to be “stationed in front” as a convincing sign and sacrament of God’s reign in our world.

¹ See Samkriyayan, Rahul, *Rig Vedic Arya*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 2004, Pp.26-31

² R.V. 10.90.11

³ Based on the rules of Sanskrit syntax, *Brāhmano'sya mukham āsīd* does not mean Brāhmana was formed from the mouth of Purusha, but rather, Brāhmana was his mouth. Cf. M.Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism*, Rome: Universita Gregoriana, 1982, p.139

⁴ Manusmriti 2: 140-143

⁵ Manusmriti 3: 146

⁶ AV. VIII. 105

⁷ Abrahmanam adhyayanam aapatkaale vidheeyate (Manusmriti 2: 241-42)

⁸ Manusmriti 2: 157-158 (translation is my own).

⁹ Satapatha Brahmana III.1.1.5

¹⁰ Manusmriti 2: 159-162

¹¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, #875

¹² Ibid. #1581

¹³ Apte, Vaman, *Sanskrit-Hindi Kosh*, Delhi: Nag Publishers, 2002, p.979

¹⁴ Francis Gonzalves, "Be Book, Be Bread, Be Bridegroom", in *Vidya Jyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol.74, June 2010, p.36

¹⁵ Gispert-Sauch, "Priesthood in Hinduism", in *The Divine Shepherd's Voice*, Vol.1, Jan-Mar 2010, p.19

¹⁶ Michael , Amaladoss, "The Presbyter as Priest", in *The New Leader*, Vol.123, June 1-15, p.9

¹⁷ Ibid.p.9

¹⁸ Manusmriti 2:169

¹⁹ Chandra Bose, Abinash, *Hymns from the Vedas*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966, p.17.

²⁰ Malipurath, Thomas, "Re-Emerging the Christian Priesthood for our Times", in *Bible Bhashyam* Vol.XXXVI. No.2, June, 2010, p.133

²¹ Mahabharata, Shanti parva 60:8-29

²² Bhagavad Purana VII.XI.21

Samadhi in Yoga: An Experience of Encounter with Deathlessness

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Abstract: Yoga is based on the relationship of body, mind and soul. The regular practice of yoga makes the body healthy, the mind to overcome tensions, and helps a person to liberate oneself from desires, attachments, suffering and pain. Yoga helps to live a holistic life leading to liberation. Insights from yoga and Christian saints are integrated in the pilgrimage to the Absolute.

Keywords: Yoga, Patanjali, Sankhya, liberation, purusa, prakriti, holistic living, samadhi, discipline, energy.

1. Introduction

It is a miracle that people in the modern world live healthy as they are, in spite of the adulterated food they eat, polluted water and air they drink and breathe, indiscriminate use of pesticides and manures, careless consumption of antibiotics, exposure to electro-magnetic vibrations and stress and tension in their life. Because of these unhealthy factors, the human body accumulates carcinogenic and chemical materials which will affect the *homeostasis i.e.*, the relative constancy of the body's internal environment and the functioning of the vital organs. The organs which are comparatively less utilized, like appendix, gallbladder, prostate, uterus, breasts, thyroid etc., have greater chance of accumulating harmful elements. The main reasons for sickness in the modern humans are unhealthy food habits and life style, lack of sufficient exercises and relaxation. Due to lack of exercise,

fresh blood supply to the vital organs will be reduced and as a result the harmful elements will get sedimented in those organs. Defective functioning of these organs will lead to sickness and ill health. Most of the precautionary and remedial measures lack a holistic approach to human health and well being, be it modern exercises, games, medicines or any other means. In such a situation people all over the world are realizing the value of yoga as a holistic exercise and as a spiritual discipline.

2. Yoga: An ancient way of liberation

Some scholars are of the opinion that Yoga can be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization and the early Vedic religious traditions. Archaeological excavations had brought out seals and miniature statues in cross-legged and yogic postures from Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.¹ There were references on yoga practice and techniques of meditation in some of the ancient Upanishads,² which existed even before Patanjali.³ Patanjali was influenced by the Sankhya principles of *purusa* and *prakrti*. *Purusa* is the ultimate principle and *prakrti* the subservient. The aim of Patanjala yoga was to liberate the *purusa* in each being through systematic and disciplined practice of yoga and meditation. In course of time yoga, because of the influence of the Vedanta philosophy, replaced *purusa* and *prakrti* with the terms *paramatma* and *jivatma* and presented yoga as a means to union between the two. The union between *paramatma* and *jivatma* is a mystical union.

Yoga is well-known as a holistic physical exercise for the health of the body and peace of the mind. Many practise yogic postures to get rid of back pain, complaints of arthritis, headache and neck pain or to maintain a good

and flexible physique. To some others yoga is a means to reduce mental tension and worries, and to assure sound sleep. Yet another group vigorously pursues the practice of yoga for greater vitality and satisfaction in sexual life. A small minority through the practice of *hatha* yoga adopts short cut methods to activate extraordinary powers (*siddhis*).

3. Benefits of the practice of yoga

The intimate relationship between body, mind and soul is the guiding principle of the Yoga philosophy. Regular practice of yoga ensures the healthy functioning of the different systems like digestive, respiratory, blood circulatory, glandular and skeletal systems in a person. Yoga makes the body slim, the face graceful, the voice clear, the eyes bright, eliminates diseases, transforms the sex energy, stimulates the gastric fire, and purifies the nerves (*nadis*).⁴ Though the body wears away like an unbaked earthen pot immersed in the water, the practice of yoga can revitalize it.⁵ The vital energy (*prana*) unites the body and soul of a person and enables him to have control over his senses. Our senses, through their contact with the external world, constantly feed innumerable data into our brain. Based on these data the mind creates tensions, desires, needs and images. Regular practice of yoga enables one to liberate oneself from desires, attachment to material possession, suffering and pain in this world. Yoga is successfully performed by the following six methods: effort, perseverance, courage, discriminative knowledge, abandoning public contact and determination.⁶

4. Yoga means union and harmony

The word 'Yoga' comes from the Sanskrit root *Yuj*

which means to join, to yoke, to connect, to fasten, to harness, etc. In the sense of 'yoking' the term aims at bringing the senses under control. In a strictly spiritual sense the word means union and re-instatement. Union takes place in two levels; union between soul, mind and body in the empirical level and union between the individual self (*jiva*) and the Supreme Self (*Brahman*). This union leads to the experience of harmony within oneself; harmony with others including nature, earth, animals, birds, plants trees and everything in this universe and harmony with God. In order to attain the union one has to follow a spiritual path characterized by moral restraints, ethical disciplines and hygienic living. Yogic way of life helps a person to consolidate his physical potentialities and develop his mental and spiritual powers. This will lead to physiological harmony, mental poise and positive outlook in life. Practice of yoga has two aspects, that is, the physical and the spiritual. Yogic exercises will take care of all the systems in our body and keep the internal organs in good health. "The vital organs will retain their youthful vigour and efficiency. The body will become light and resilient with better neuro-muscular co-ordination and metabolic efficiency. With increased suppleness of body and mind, the senses also will work better."⁷

The spiritual aspect consists of practice of concentration and meditation leading to self realization. In the Bhagavad Gita yoga means integration of the personality. Integration requires total detachment from all desires. Among the four ways of liberation in the Indian traditions,⁸ Yoga comes under *rajamarga* which is divided mainly into three; they are *mantrayoga*, *hathayoga* and *kundaliniyoga*. *Rajayoga* is also known as *astangayoga* or

patanjalayoga.

5. Yoga is a holistic way of living

Yoga is presented in various ways, as a philosophical system allied with Sankhya, as a disciplined method of attaining beatific experience (*hathayoga*), as a technique of attaining extraordinary powers of the mind or body, (*kundaliniyoga*). We focus on the spiritual aspect of yoga through the harmonious growth of mind, body and soul which will eventually lead to the beatific (*kaivalya*) experience of God. Patanjali, in his *Yogasutra*, defined yoga as a science of ‘restraining the mental modifications’⁹ in order to reach the deathless silence (*Samadhi*)¹⁰. In this process

To live entirely for God, to move towards him, with my “three” properly in balance, with my body playing its part, and my soul with all its lofty considerations withdrawing when required, so that the voice of the Almighty might be heard in my heart—this had become a kind of obsession with me.¹¹

St. Benedict gives importance to silence in prayer life, “When the Work of God is finished, let all go out in deep silence, and let reverence for God be observed,”¹² “But Yoga also produces a more active, willing and generous disposition. It quickens the life of faith, the love of God and our neighbour. It sharpens our sense of duty and responsibility as men and, above all, as Christians.”¹³

Patanjali taught yoga as a holistic way of living leading to liberation (*mukti*)¹⁴. The process of liberation has to be started from the concrete life situation of each person. The first step is to accept oneself as one is with all the limitations and talents. These limitations can be of mind, body, speech or intellect. Through systematic and regular practice one can avoid the harmful and negative habits and

cultivate positive qualities in life. People addicted to smoking, alcohol, saying lies, insulting others, inflicting pain on others, stealing things etc., should eliminate such bad habits gradually. Cultivation of positive thinking and positive qualities is very important for one who practices yoga. Control over diet and a disciplined life style can greatly enhance the results. In order to maintain a healthy body, yoga suggests a number of physical postures (*asanas*). Proper practice of physical postures will assure a harmonious growth of different systems¹⁵ in a human body.

6. The spirit-matter duality

In the Judeo-Christian tradition body, mind and the world are considered to be factors obstructing the salvation of souls. Hence the Christian approach had been to subject these obstructing factors to rigorous and cruel discipline for spiritual growth. Against this approach Origen, one of the Church Fathers, over and again stressed the importance of balance between *anima*, *animus* and *spiritus* as a necessary precondition for the growth from human image to the divine resemblance. Body, mind and spirit are united with each other hence salvation of the soul has to be effected through the proper care and integration of the other two factors i.e., body and mind.

In the Yoga tradition body, mind and spirit are united with each other through the vital energy (*prana*). Control over the vital energy can help a person to have control over one's senses. Our senses, through their contact with the external world, constantly feed innumerable data into our brain. Based on these data the mind creates desires, needs and images. The human mind is never at rest which like a drunken monkey, runs after desires. When one

desire is fulfilled, another arises; when the second one is fulfilled, a third one arises and it goes on unending, like the waves in the sea. Wealth, position in society, fame, sex etc., are unable to give lasting peace and happiness to a person. The best way to peace of mind is not to have any desire, but this is the most difficult thing. The rich young man who came to Jesus in search of liberation had plenty of wealth, but no peace of mind. He refused to give away his possessions, because he thought that his possessions would satisfy his desires and give him happiness. We have the wonderful examples of St. Francis Assisi, St. Ignatius, Mother Teresa, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharshi and others who knew how to have control over their desires. Yoga philosophy underlines the intimate relationship between body, mind and soul. Practice of yoga enables one to liberate oneself from desires, attachment to material possession, suffering and pain in the world.

7. Matter and spirit: One composite principle in the yoga philosophy

The dualistic realism of Samkhya¹⁶ philosophy admits only two ultimate realities that are *purusa* and *prakrti*. *Purusa* is an intelligent principle whose very essence is consciousness. *Prakrti*, which is a non-intelligent principle, is the ultimate cause of this universe. Yoga accepts the epistemology and metaphysics of Sankhya with its twenty-five principles and presents God as the highest object of contemplation. The Sankhya metaphysics of *purusa* and *prakrti* is the foundation for Yoga philosophy and practice.

“We have created the myth of the dying yogin as a narrative strategy for incorporating the *siddhis*, thus Patanjali the philosopher and the conceptualization of the *Yogsutra* emerge

from an encounter between a Samkhya philosopher and a virtuous practitioner.”¹⁷

Purusa in association with *Prakrti* is the cause of this universe. *Purusa* left to itself is insentient and inactive. But in association with *prakrti*, *purusa* gets enslaved in each living being. *Purusa* in each living being longs for liberation but finds it difficult to break out of the control of *prakrti*.

The Sankhya philosophy accepts the bondedness of the soul and the emancipation is possible through obtaining the right knowledge. In order to have the right knowledge Sankhya turns towards Yoga. Yoga philosophy provides a systematic and well developed set of physical and mental exercises for the purification of mind and intellect leading to the liberation of the soul. The metaphysical foundation provided by the Sankhya philosophy presupposes four foundational assumptions. 1. The universe is the result of the interaction between two fundamental principles *i.e.*, *purusa* and *prakrti*. 2. *Prakrti* (matter) manifests itself under three distinctive aspects *i.e.*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. 3. *Purusa* associated with *prakrti* gives rise to bondage of endless transmigrations. 4. There is a practical discipline which will enable a soul to disengage itself from the bondage which is elaborated in the science of Yoga.

8. Yoga is the science of mental discipline

Patanjali defines yoga as restraint of mental modifications *chittavrttinirodhah*. Yoga is the control of the thought-waves in the mind (YS1.2). *Citta* consists of three components, that is *manas* (the recording faculty), *buddhi* (the discriminative faculty) and the *ahamkara* (the ego-sense). A seeker (*sadhaka*) has to gain control over these three factors and harmonize them through the

practice of yoga. According to the *Yoga Sutra*, Yoga can be defined as “a suspension of the modifications of the thinking principle which is obtainable through different methods such as controlling the vital breath and steady pose, both of which are intimately connected with the mind.”¹⁸ Yoga is a science, which raises the capacity of the human mind to respond to higher vibrations and to perceive, catch and assimilate the infinite Conscious movements going on around us in the universe. According to the Bhagavad Gita, yoga is the breaking of contact with pain. Yoga is sameness and indifference (*BG* 11.48); Yoga is skill in works (*BG* 11.50). Yoga is seeing God in all things and all things in God, (*BG* 6.29). Zaehner defined Yoga as a process, which results in integration.

Thus, the crux of Patanjali’s intuition is the association of dualism and disintegration with the yogin’s silence and behaviour. Immersion in meditation, disassociation from the world, indifference to violence and pain, disregard for hunger and thirst, reported experiences of invisibility and levitation, unusual powers of memory, apparently close contacts with animals and so forth, have all been associated with the vision of disintegration and Samkhya metaphysics. In the history of philosophy and ideas of classical India, Patanjali’s interpretation of yogic silence has come to be the most authoritative and viable. And yet, though integrative and particularly stimulating in its approach to the quality and meaning of (“post-disintegration”) silence, his *Yogasutra* is another scholarly attempt to overcome stark otherness in the figure of the lonely, inaccessible yogin.¹⁹

Patanjali integrated the Samkhya metaphysics into Yoga meditation on the dualism of *purusha* (pure Subjectivity) and *prakrti* (objectivity), meditation on the human being and the material world.

In fact, there are a few who have already transcended the limitation of space and time and can see the past, present, and

future without this tiny intellect. These persons are called seers or saints and they have a scientifically devised method of finding truth that can satisfy the intellect, although their knowledge is above it. Looking deceptively simple, their method is very difficult for untrained and impure minds. They use the same dissipated rays of the mind that the majority of mankind uses for external observation and feeling, and focus them on the dark inner recesses of the heart, in turn, the one-pointed rays of the mind illumine the dark corners of the unknown.²⁰

9. Deepening of silence through the different stages of Yoga

Sages and thinkers in the Indian tradition spent time in solitude trying to unravel the mysteries of the world, life, death and the Ultimate principle. In the Upanisadic period thinkers were mostly concerned about ‘being’; whereas Sankhya and Yoga the allied systems, tried to understand the mystery of existence in a complementary approach. The former analyzed reality based on the two fundamental principles *purusha* and *prakrtii*, while the latter provided a practical system through which the Ultimate reality could be realized. Patanjali had systematized the practice of yoga in eight stages in a progressive order. Forbearance, observance, posture, regulation of breath, withdrawal of senses, concentration, contemplation or meditation and bliss are the eight-fold stages of Yoga.²¹

9.1 Freedom from the negative tendencies

As a preparation for the practice of yoga one has to abstain from harming others, from falsehood, from theft, from incontinence, and from greed. (YS 2.30) A person deeply rooted in non-harming (*ahimsa*) in thoughts, words and actions will be friendly (*meta*) and compassionate (*karuna*) towards every creatures. Animals and other

creatures will cease to feel enmity in the presence of such a person (YS 2.35). Jesus told his disciples, 'you shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment' (Mt.5:21). He continued, 'Love your enemies, pray for them who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven' (Mt. 5:43-45). Jainism teaches non-violence as one of the most important principles. A life guided by non-violence will be the remedy for most of the problems of cruelty, exploitation and violence in the world today.

Truthfulness in life will lead one to inner freedom and to God. One of the most important insights of Mahatma Gandhi was that Truth is God and God is Truth. Jesus' life was to reveal the truth to others, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8: 32). Speak the truth and live in righteousness is the traditional Indian wisdom. People confirmed in truthfulness (*satya*), will receive the fruits of actions.²² The consumerist world-view, which controls our life and interpersonal relationship, reduces persons to mere commodities for personal gains. The level of happiness and satisfaction in life seems to depend on material possession which will encourage a person to acquire more and more wealth. When a person is confirmed in abstinence from theft, all jewels come to him.²³ Thou shall not steal; one of the Ten Commandments in Christianity reminds us of the importance of non-stealing in the process of becoming perfect.

The conservation of the vital energy is important for the balanced progress in spiritual life. *Brahmacarya* means to live, move and have our being in Brahman (God), one who is rooted in *brahmacarya* gets the conservation of the highest energy.²⁴ St. Paul underlines this idea when he

says “In Him, we live, move, and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) One can keep celibacy irrespective of the state of life. According to the *Sandilyopanisad*, *brahmacarya* is giving up or renouncing sex action at all places and in all states of consciousness, namely conscious state, dream state and sleep.²⁵ Control over the senses, food, talk, sleep, discipline in life, regular physical exercises, proper breathing and meditation will help one to preserve the vital energy. Remember the words of Jesus, “I say to you, that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart’ (Mt. 5.27).

Most of the time we are pre-occupied with the existential struggle and greed for more, hence our minds are restless and distracted. When a person is totally devoid of greed, there arises the knowledge of how we exist and why.²⁶ Everyone in this world is led by desires, ambitions and frustrations. Most of us live in a state of inequilibrium of mind *i.e.*, in disharmony. One who has overcome this state of mind will enjoy lasting peace and harmony.

Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor about your body what shall you put on. Is not life more than food and body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet, your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Mt. 6:25-26).

Lord Krishna reminded Arjuna, “Father, mother, creator and grandfather of the world am I. I bring to those people who worship me with undivided devotion, ever controlled, the assurance of blessedness.” (*B. G* 9:17-22). The first stage of the practice of yoga enables a person to be totally detached from the worldly attractions and desires.²⁷ Detachment from the desires, actions and their

results is the basic requirement for the liberative *sadhana*; thereafter one can proceed to the next stage of yoga i.e. the positive observances.

9.2 Cultivation of the positive qualities

Discipline in life is the next stage in the progress in yoga (YS, 2.32). One who is able to find satisfaction with limited facilities, resources, food, dress etc, will be a content and happy person (YS 2.42). The greedy mind ends in grief and misery. Practice of yoga and meditation are to be performed in a clean and neat place with a concentrated mind. (B. G. 6. 11, 13). Human body, in the Christian tradition is considered as the temple of God; hence we have to keep it clean and healthy; so too the surroundings. As a result of mortification and discipline impurities are removed and the body and mind get special powers. Through self discipline and austere life one can burn up impurities in body, mind and word, this process is known as *tapas*. *Tapas* comes from the root '*tap*,' means to burn, suffer pain or be consumed by heat (YS 2.43). Through the practice of austerity the seeker develops strength in body, mind and character, and she/he attains courage and integrity. Repent, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Mt.4:17; unless you repent, you will all likewise perish, (Lk 13: 3,5). Reading and studying the sacred scriptures (YS 2.44) will enable a person to be in constant remembrance of the lord. *Brahmavit Brahmavaivabhavati* – One who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. Constant remembrance of the Lord will help a person to discern the will of the Lord and fulfill it. One has to love the Lord God, with the whole heart, with the whole soul, with all our strength and with all our mind, (Deut 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Lk 10:27) and experience the presence of God in every

living being (Sp. Ex. 235,236). Such a person will see God in all things and all things in God, (BG 6: 29,30; *Isa. Up.* 6,7).

9.3 Physical culture

Physical postures are many in the yoga tradition and very often practice of yoga is wrongly identified with the practice of *asanas*. The practice of asana implies two things – the place and the way one sits. The place should be clean and of reasonable height (BG 6.11); the way one sits should be straight and relaxed (BG 6.13 ; YS 2.49,50). Patanjali in his *Yogasutra* gives three definitions for the physical posture: posture which is firm and comfortable; mild effort and meditation on the endless; thence no assaults from the pairs of the opposites.²⁸ The practice of asana should be steady (*sthira*), causes least painful sensation (*sukham*) and has to lead one to the meditation (*dhyana*) on the infinite. These three characteristics make the practice of asana distinct from other physical exercises. The first three steps are for training the physical body so that the body will be fit enough to go through the succeeding stages. One has to abandon the negative aspects of one's personality and cultivate the positive qualities in life. The regular practice of asanas will keep the body healthy and flexible so that one can proceed to the next stage *i.e.*, training in *pranayama*.

9.4 Preservation of the vital energy

Patanjali used the term *prana* which means breath, in three places in the *Yogasutras* 1.34, 2.29, 2.49. In all these three places *pranayama* means only breath.²⁹ In Hathayoga texts the word *prana* is used to indicate 'a subtle psychic force'. Patanjali presented only four kinds

of *pranayama* in his *Yogasutra*. Later Svatmarama in his famous work *Hathayogapradipika*, brought out eight kinds of pranayamas. V. G. Rele's *The Mysterious Kundalini* is an insightful attempt in the field of Pranayama. But most of these insights are based on speculations. Rajendra Nath Seal in his work *The Positive Sciences of The Ancient Hindus* attempted a scientific interpretation of pranayama. But he lacks experimental support for his conclusions. Through the regular practice of *pranayama*, one can ensure the continuous dissemination of the vital energy throughout the body and develop extraordinary powers. Control over the breath is important for the progress in concentration and meditation.

9.5 Mental discipline

The systematic practice of *pranayama* will help a person to withdraw the senses from the sense objects and gradually to empty the mind; when the mind is withdrawn from sense objects, sense organs also withdraw from objects,³⁰ thus leading one to concentration. Concentration is holding the mind within a centre of spiritual consciousness in the body whereby the external and the internal worlds converge into one. Concentration is associated with the seven psychic centres situated in the spinal cord.³¹ Breathing, stilling the mind and concentration help to strengthen the astral body.

9.6 Emptying of the Intellect

A seeker who starts the meditation after going through the previous stages will come across various experiences like hearing sounds, seeing strange visions or colours, encountering images of saints or sages. These experiences whether positive or negative should not deter one from

continuing with the regular meditation. Silence, both external and internal, is important for the progress in meditation because it is in silence that we are able to listen to God. Silence is the language of the heart and in silence one communicates with other human beings, animals, creatures and with the nature. In the ordinary life situations our mind and senses are preoccupied with many things, as a result the deeper self is not attuned to the Supreme Self. When we withdraw our senses and still our mind and our brain, consciousness will become alert and active to receive the higher vibrations that are around us. Meditation enables a person to experience peace, tranquility and happiness and these experiences can be communicated with other people, and other beings. The very sight of a person well advanced in meditation is capable of bringing in peace and happiness in the mind of others. Meditation is an unbroken flow of thought toward the object of concentration.³² Constant practice of meditation enables a person to transcend both the physical and astral body and be in the realm of causal body. In this state of existence (Samadhi) the spirit is not controlled either by the ego or by the physical body or mind, but by the atma.

9.7 The experience of deathless silence (*Samadhi*)

The practice of yoga is a pilgrimage towards the foundation of our very existence.³³ In meditation, the true nature of the object shines forth, undistorted by the mind of the perceiver. Absorbed in meditation, the seeker sees God within himself and all things in God. In the final stage, the spirit is totally liberated and has transcended all barriers of physical, astral and causal bodies. In the liberated stage the individual spirit merges with the

Universal Spirit *i.e.*, the Pure Consciousness.³⁴ Liberation is the awareness of one's own real nature, "Yesterday I lived bewildered, in illusion. But now I am awake, Flawless and serene, beyond the world... Now I have given up The body and the world, I have a special gift. I see the infinite Self."³⁵

10. Extraordinary powers: A hindrance to spiritual progress

Extraordinary feats of *siddhas* and yogis are common in Indian tradition. Most of them are stories or myths which are not empirically verified. But it is possible to attain superhuman powers through rigorous and disciplined practice of yogic techniques. Ramakrishna exhorted his disciples to avoid any kind of miraculous powers like filth.³⁶ Ramana Maharshi was of the opinion that one should not accept thaumaturgic powers etc., even when directly offered to one, for they are like ropes to tether a beast and will sooner or later drag one down.³⁷ "On the one hand, the 'powers' are inevitably acquired in the course of initiation, and, for that very reason, constitute valuable indications of the monk's spiritual progress, on the other hand, they are doubly dangerous, since they tempt the monk with a vain 'magical mastery of the world' and, in addition, are likely to cause confusion in the minds of unbelievers."³⁸ A. Danielou perceives greater danger in acquiring extraordinary powers, "These attainments are the greatest obstacles of the adept in his journey towards reintegration. Nature herself, in a final effort to keep the adept within her bonds yields him magic powers, if he uses them for any worldly end; he is apt to fall back into the arms of worldly enjoyments. All true seekers, therefore, are careful to perform miracles except

in very special circumstances.”³⁹

11. Conclusion

Happiness and pleasure are the guiding principles in the life of most of the people and they adopt various methods to attain this end. The different means they employ be it consumerism, achievements in life, drug induced pleasure, material prosperity, recognition and fame, rigorous physical discipline or religious experience, give only ephemeral happiness. In this kind of a reckless life, many lose the harmony between mind, body and spirit. A harmonious development of the human person and lasting peace and happiness elude modern humans. The science of yoga takes the human person as a unified whole in synthesizing body, mind and spirit into one composite reality and ensure lasting peace and happiness.

Patanjali taught yoga as a means to spiritual liberation. This spiritual liberation has to be started from the concrete life situation of each person. The first step is to accept oneself as she/he is with all her/his limitations and talents. These limitations can be of mind, body, speech or intellect. Acceptance of one's own negative qualities necessarily leads one to avoid the harmful and negative habits and to cultivate positive qualities in life. People addicted to smoking, alcohol, saying lie, insulting others, inflicting pain on others, stealing things etc., should eliminate such bad habits gradually. Cultivation of positive thinking and positive qualities is very important for the one who practices yoga. Control over diet and a disciplined life style can greatly enhance the results. In order to maintain a healthy body, yoga suggests a number of physical postures (*asanas*). Proper practice of physical postures will assure a harmonious growth of different

systems in a human body.

Yoga philosophy underlines the intimate relationship between body, mind and soul. Body and soul are united with each other through the vital energy (*prana*). Control over the vital energy can help a person to have control over one's senses. Our senses, through their contact with the external world, constantly feed innumerable data in to our brain. Based on these data the mind creates desires, needs and images. The human mind is never at rest. Like a drunken monkey, mind runs after desires. When one desire is fulfilled, another arises; when the second one is fulfilled, a third one arises and it goes on unending, like waves in the sea. Wealth, position in society, fame, sex etc are unable to give lasting happiness to a person. The best way to peace of mind is not to have any desire, but this is the most difficult thing. The rich young man who came to Jesus in search of eternal life had plenty of wealth, but had no peace of mind. He refused to forsake his possessions; because he thought that his possessions would satisfy his desires and give him happiness. Practice of yoga enables one to liberate oneself from desires, attachment to material possession, suffering and pain in this world. Through the practice of yoga and meditation one withdraws the senses and looks into oneself; into the dark corners of one's own deeper self. Practice of yoga is a pilgrimage to the Absolute through integrating the faculties of body, mind and spirit. Gradually the experience of dualism and separation disappears and a state of bliss (*kaivalya anubhava*) ushers in. Thus a yogi remains in union with the Supreme Being, and at the same time remains united with earth, nature, animals and fellow human beings.

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¹ Ramdas Lamb, "Raja Yoga, Asceticism, and the Ramananda Sampraday," in *Theory and Practice of Yoga*, ed., by Knut A. Jacobsen, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi: 2008 p. 317-18.

² The *Katha*, *Swetaswtara*, *Taittiriya*, *Maitrayani*, *Yogakundali*, *Darsana* and *Sandilya Upanisads* are considered to be older than the time of Patanjali.

³ Patanjali who is believed to have lived in the 2nd Century BCE is not the founder of the system but he systematized the different traditions of yoga that already existed before him. His system of yoga is also known as *astangayoga* because it was developed in eight stages.

⁴ *Vapuh krsatvam vadane prasannata nadaspudatvam nayane sunirmale; Arogata bindujayoagnihdeepanam nadivisudhih hadasiddhilakshanam. Hathayogapradipika* II, 78.

Asanam vijitam yena jitam tena jagattrayam, He who masters the asanas conquers the world. *Trisikhibrahmanopanishad, Mantrabhaga* 52.

Yuva vrddhoativrddho va vyadhito dhurbaloapi va; Abhyasat siddhimapnoti sarvayogsatandritah *Hathayogapradipika* 1.64; He who untiringly practices Yoga in all its aspects attains success even if he is young, old, decrepit, diseased or weak.

⁵ *Amakumbha ivambhsto jiryamanah sada ghadah / Yoganalena samdahya ghasudhim samacareth; Gheranda Samhita* 1. 8.

⁶ *Hathayogapradipika* 1.16

⁷ *Simple Yoga and Therapy*, Yogeswar, Yoga Centre, Madras 1986, p

3.

⁸ Indian philosophy presents four ways of liberation: they are the way of devotion (*bhaktimarga*), the way of action (*karmamarga*), the way of knowledge (*jnanamarga*) and the way of systematic and disciplined life (*rajamarga*).

⁹ *Yogascittavrttinirodhah*, *Yogasutra* 1.2.

¹⁰ Patanjali refers to two kinds of *Samadhi* in his *Yogasutra*, *Samadhi* with consciousness (*Yogsutra* IV.28) and *Samadhi* without consciousness (*Yogasutra* IV.33). *Samadhi* is the result of devotion to God, *Yogsutra* II.45

¹¹ J.M. Dechanet, *Christian Yoga*, Burns & Oates, London: 1966 p. 2

¹² *Rule of St Benedict*, Ch. 52 tr., and edited by Abbot Justin McCann, Burns & Oates, London: 1952.

¹³ Dechanet, *Christian Yoga*, p.26.

¹⁴ *Yogasutra*, IV.33

¹⁵ The harmonious functioning of the digestive system, respiratory system, blood circulatory system, skeletal system etc., is very important for the health of a person.

¹⁶ Sankhya, one of the systems of philosophy in India is usually allied with Yoga. Sankhya presents its philosophy based on the two fundamental principles i.e., *Purusha* and *prakrti*, of which the former is the intelligent principle and the latter the material principle.

¹⁷ Yohanan Grinshpon, *Silence Unheard-Deathly Otherness in Patanjala-Yoga*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2002 p. 11.

¹⁸ Swami Vishnudevananda, *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*, Pocket Books, New York. 1960 p. 13

¹⁹ Yohanan Grinshpon, p.2.

²⁰ Swami Vishnudevananda, p. 2.

²¹ *Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharna, dhyana, samadhi*, are the eight different stages, *Yogasutra* 2.29.

²² *satya pratistayam, kriya phalasrayatvam*, *Yogasutra* 2.36

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- ²³ *asteya pratistayam sarvaratnopasthanam*,. *Yogastura* 2.37.
- ²⁴ *brahmacarya pratistayam virya labhah*, *Yogasutra* 2.38.
- ²⁵ Yogacharya Sundaram, *Raja Yoga*, 1975. p.68.
- ²⁶ *aparigrahasathairye janmakathntha sambodhaha*, *Yogasutra* 2.39.
- ²⁷ *Ihamutradiphalabhogaviragah*, detachment from the result of actions which one may get in this world or in the world yet to come, is the first stage in the Vedanta scheme of spiritual progress.
- ²⁸ *sthiraasukhamasanam* YS 2.46; *prayathna saithilyananta samapattibhyam* YS 2.47; *Tato dvandvanabhigatah* YS 2.48.
- ²⁹ *Pranayama* means pause in the movement of breath, Swami Kuvalayanda, 1972 p. 37. *Tasmin sati svasaprasvasayorgativicedah Pranayama*, *Yogasutras* 2.49,1.34, after accomplishing this one goes to *pranayama*, the cutting of the course of inhalation and exhalation.
- ³⁰ This is known as *dharana*, *svavishayasamprayoge cittasvarupanukara ivendriyanam pratyaharah*, *pratyahara tatah parama vasyatendriyanam*, Y.S.2. 54. There after complete mastery over senses. Y S 2. 55. *desabandascittasya dharana*, *Yogasutras* 3.1
- ³¹ *Muladhara*, *Swadhistana*, *Manipura*, *Anahata*, *Vishudha*, *Anjna*, *Sahasrara* are the seven nerves centres (*cakras*) in the spinal code
- ³² *tatrapratyayaikatanata dhyanam*, *Yogasutras* 3.2. *cittavrttiyavarthanam dhyanam*, Y.S. *dhi ayate iti dhyanam* Panini, *aviccinnathailadharavat dhyanam upasanam*, are some of the definitions given for *dhyana* in the Indian tradition.
- ³³ *tadevarthamatranirbhasam svarupasunyamiva samadhihi*, *Yogasutras* 3.3
- ³⁴ *Samadhi* is of two kinds: *samadhi* with empirical consciousness (*savikalpasmadhi* or *samprjnatasamadhi*) and *samadhi* without empirical consciousness (*Nirvikalpasamadhi* or *asamprajnatasamadhi*).
- ³⁵ *The Heart of Awareness*, a translation by Thomas Byrom of the *Astavakra Gita* a classical work by an unknown author in the advaita tradition. p. 6, Shambhala, Boston & Shaftesbury, 1990.
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³⁶ *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 1920 p. 201.

³⁷ A Osborn, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 153.

³⁸ M. Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, 1973 p. 177.

³⁹ A. Danielou, *Yoga: the Method of Re-Integration*, 1949 p.137.

The Priest and Politics: A Critical Examination of Some Common Assumptions

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Abstract: There are doubts in the minds of people about the role of priests in politics. Among the reasons being the confusion between governance for the common good, and narrow party politics; and the role of one who has renounced the world. Clarifications are provided about the role of lay persons and of the clergy in politics. Priests as leaders of their faith community have a legitimate role with regard to politics. Official Church documents are quoted in support of the position taken by the author.

Keywords: Priests, politics, elections, pastoral letters, community leadership, social mission, conscience formation.

1. Introduction

As elections approach, controversy about the priests interfering in politics also arises. Politics is still regarded as the sacred territory of professional politicians, scrupulously guarded by them irrespective of the colour of their flag. Comments and remarks that often appear in the news media are indicative of the outlook: "Priests stepping into politics is dangerous to the secular fabric of our nation", "It will reinforce the communal forces operative in our society", "Let the priests and bishops confine themselves to their proper field, viz. the spiritual field". The context of these comments is that of some priests/bishops making public statements on 'non-Church'

topics, speaking on public issues from the pulpit, or issuing pastoral letters giving guidelines to the faithful on the approaching elections or on issues that concern the Christian community. Pastoral letters, especially in states where Christians are a significant group, have come in for criticism.

The following themes seem to be the assumptions underlying the perception: (i) a priest, because of this identity, does not possess the normal rights a citizen possesses; (ii) it is not proper for a priest, as a leader of the community, to engage in the affairs of the community that are not strictly spiritual. By this logic, all the burning issues of the day like caste conflict, terrorism and war, environmental crisis, denial of human rights, etc. fall outside the purview of the strictly spiritual; (iii) public statements by priests that do not play the tune of one political group or another are easily branded as political interference; (iv) once branded, then it is only a short step to its being projected as communal. But these assumptions need to be examined critically.

2. Priestly Ministry in a World of Politics

There was a time when Christians kept away from politics which was regarded as being dirty. Today in the Church there is a better appreciation of the political field, and a growing awareness that the identity and role of a priest is closely aligned with the concerns that are generally considered political. This view assumes that a priest is also a political person, properly understood. However, this thinking is still mired in controversy both within the Church and in secular circles so that priests are left to defend themselves if they touch upon issues of a political nature. Often they feel unsupported or left alone

by their own brethren in faith as a result of the prevailing confusion. This article is an attempt to explore the identity and role of the priest as a political person in today's context. I confine my discussion primarily to the Catholic priesthood.¹

Politics is generally understood as public activity associated with the conduct and management of the affairs of the community (as different from private concerns). It is based on Aristotle's belief that it is only within a political community that human beings can live the good life. The nation-state is a modern form of political organization and an autonomous political entity based on citizenship and nationality. We need to be aware of the two senses in which the term politics is used, the broad sense which refers to the dynamic organization of society towards the common good, and the narrow sense which refers to activities carried out by persons, groups or parties in order to attain and preserve the power of governing in a given society. The latter is usually referred to as party politics. "If politics is the way of organizing man's secular life in view of the common good, political life is not to be the preserve of a few power-hungry politicians and vested interests behind them, but the concern of all who are devoted to that common good."²

"My first political act was at the moment I was born" – whoever has said it has said it well. No one can escape being political, properly understood. Today we live in a context where politics embraces all spheres of our everyday life, and we, as Christians, cannot be oblivious of this fact. Theological rediscovery of politics is a new phenomenon the Church is yet to come to grips with. The social encyclicals have paved the way for an enlightened appreciation of political engagement on behalf of justice

and peace. The era of watertight compartmentalization of disciplines is over. The trends of blind anti-communism or anti-capitalism also belong to a bygone era. The recent call of the Archbishop of Thiruvananthapuram to the members of the Latin Catholic community to actively participate in the civic body elections scheduled to be held in September 2010 is one illustration of the new awareness.³ The time is ripe for the priest to look afresh at his role in a world undergoing fast political changes. New analytical tools and practical skills may become necessary to take on the new role, and that remains the urgent task ahead. The context of Dalit and Tribal theologies, environmental movements and resistance to human right violations, and more recently anti-communal interventions make this task more urgent.

3. The Priest is a Political Person by Right – As a Citizen

“Priests and religious are to be debarred from practicing law in the courts, since they are otherwise engaged in a religious profession” – this stand of the bar association has been making headlines recently. Does being a priest or a member of a religious congregation make one a professional in the technical sense? Does it confine a person strictly to the private sphere and deny the right as a citizen to engage in a public profession? Does a person become less of a citizen because he serves a faith community as its priest?

A closer look would show that the Christian priesthood is a fine example of grassroots democracy at work; candidates to priesthood come not from hereditary families or caste groups, but from each and every stratum of society. Any male individual from any social strata of

the faith community can aspire to become a priest. The years of formation culminating in the ordination, with the attached status and privileges, may be understood as designating them into a priestly class. That is beside the point. The priest comes from the common background of every citizen, impelled by a call for a greater service for God and human beings. It requires of them self sacrifice and renunciation of certain worldly comforts and pleasures.

From a secular perspective a person opting for the priesthood does not mean that he renounces any of the civil and political rights that are his due as a citizen of the country. Nor can anybody deny him these inalienable rights. Basically he is a citizen like anybody else with the accompanying rights and duties. He can reside and work in any part of the country, he can own material assets, and he can stand for elections or campaign for political ideologies of his choice. He can also choose not to exercise these rights, but that is his own choice, and not something imposed upon him. In short the priest, as an individual, is fully a citizen of the nation with all the accompanying rights and privileges that the Constitution and the UN Charter ensure.

Why does the public perception, in spite of the above assurance, tend to deny the priest the legitimate rights of a citizen? This seems to emerge from a confusion around priestly identity vis-à-vis that of the *sannyasi* in the Indian context. The *sannyasi* is seen as a 'world-renouncing ascetic' deep in meditation undisturbed by the affairs of everyday life. Sociology would present the *sannyasi* as one of the functional roles in a faith community; but the priest, in the Christian tradition, incorporates many roles into one' (a cultic priest, a teaching guru, a community

leader, an administrator, etc.), and so cannot be identified with that of a *sannyasi* alone. It is this faulty perception that needs to be corrected to be fair to the religious identity of the priest. The priest, in Christian understanding, is not a person who renounces the world, but a person who engages the world in order to transform it. What Gandhi wrote about a *sannyasin* may be more appropriate in the case of the priest: “A sannyasin is one who cares not for himself but cares all his time for others. He has renounced all selfishness... Politics properly so called rule every detail of our lives today.... The state affects our moral being. A sannyasin, therefore, ... must concern himself with the relations of the people with the state...”⁴

4. The Priest is a Political Person by Role – As Leader of a Faith Community

The Church understands the role of the priest as that of ‘ministerial priesthood’ in relation to a faith community called the parish. A priest or bishop acts not only in ‘*persona Christi*’ but also ‘*in persona ecclesiae*’, thus emphasizing his sanctifying mission in and for the community of the faithful. The ordained ministers are conferred “a sacred power for the service of the faithful”, and they “exercise their service for the People of God by teaching (*manus docendi*) divine worship (*manus liturgicum*) and pastoral governance (*manus regendi*)”.⁵ The priest acts in the person of the parish community, and the specifically religious functions entrusted to him are listed under Canon 530. But these do not exhaust his role as a community leader on account of his distinctive participation in the threefold ministry of Christ, viz. as priest, prophet and king.⁶ In modern terminology these

would amount to various leadership functions required in any human community, political not excluded. It is evident in traditional faith communities even today, in spite of the modern attempts at differentiation and specialization of leadership functions.⁷

The priest's ministry of leadership presupposes three things:

i) The faith community the priest serves is a political entity.

There has been an inherent struggle in the church to theologically situate the priest as leader of the faith community, on the one hand, and of the political community, on the other. Initially the political entity called the State was seen as merely providing the 'locus' for the church in its spiritual mission. The priority was on the social order over claims of justice and rights. Gradually the State came to be understood as the provider and the guarantor of conditions necessary to ensure justice and wellbeing. It was a transition from the notion of an individual to that of a person with political rights and responsibilities. The multi-religious, multi-ethnic nature of the Indian society forces the Indian church to define itself in broader terms as a political entity operating within the reality called the State. Questions of discrimination, denial of basic human rights, attacks on the community in the name of religion, etc. unfold the political dimension of a faith community in vivid terms.

ii) The priest's engagement in political affairs is integral to his mission.

The priest in the pre-Vatican II Church was defined primarily in terms of his cultic functions. In focusing on the conversion and transformation of the individual, it

failed to take note of the collective/political dimension of society. Should the priest refrain from commenting on current political issues that affect the lives of people? “No politics from the pulpit” is a refrain often heard, especially in times of elections. The fact is that the priest need not be and cannot be apologetic about his involvement in politics. We have to deepen our conviction that engagement in politics is an integral part of the church’s task of witnessing the Gospel in concrete socio-political situations.⁸

The FABC states it emphatically:

If the Church must be involved with the human being in his or her concrete historical reality and temporal dimensions, it cannot avoid involvement in political concerns and questions which pervade, influence and sometimes dominate the temporal life of people and affect deeply their salvation. Politics is an inescapable concern of the Church. There is thus necessity for the Church to involve itself with political concerns.⁹

iii) The social ministry of the Church necessarily takes the political into account.

The social ministry of the church has gone through much transformation over the past few decades – from charitable activities through development programmes to interventions of a political nature. Problems of poverty and illiteracy, homelessness and discrimination have come to be seen as resulting from institutional and structural defects that call for reform of the society rather than of the individual. Here social engagement takes the form of socio-political intervention aimed at changes in societal structures and policies. The agency gets transferred to the affected people; their empowerment and capability enhancement makes them participants in decisions that

affect them. It may take the form of collective action or struggles against injustice or popular movements that bring better bargaining power to the affected people. Priests' involvements in movements for human rights and environmental rights, against the exclusion of Dalits, etc. thus have come to be accepted as legitimate. *Caritas in Veritate*, the recent encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, insightfully points to the *political path* in the practice of charity.¹⁰

The new understanding is well articulated by the FABC. It says:

Since the Church must concern itself with concrete human beings and communities, it cannot be unconcerned with politics. Its mission does not allow the Church to be uninvolved in the organization of society towards the common good, which should be the task of politics. It cannot be indifferent to political decisions and arrangements which have such a far-reaching and lasting impact on the people to whom Christ came to give life. The Church as a community of Christ's disciples must become more and more politically conscious in order to infuse more life and grace into human and societal life... The Church needs to enter the political field, not to gain temporal advantage, but to be a servant ready to make its unique contribution, together with others, to a wounded humanity that needs the service of healing and promotion of life.¹¹

Over the centuries there were various models of priestly ministry in the Church: the jurisdictional model, the cultic model, the pastoral model, the prophetic model, monastic model, etc.¹² The fact is that in the contemporary context the priest incorporates many of these roles within the nomenclature of the priesthood.

5. Internal Restrictions by the Church on the Political Role of the Priest

Why should the priest assume political leadership? Is it not best left to the laity? These questions need probing. Vatican II has rightly highlighted the role of the laity in working for the renewal of the temporal order including the institutions of the political community. It affirms that qualified Catholics should not decline to enter public life, since it provides opportunity to work for the common good and the Gospel.¹³ Recent church documents further specify that direct political involvement is the duty of the laity vis-à-vis the clergy. Experience shows that the church either fails to promote the laity for effective participation in politics, or alienates those lay persons who get into party politics actively. The framework of Christian analysis of the socio-political realities to guide Christian politicians remains still vague.

The political role of priests and the hierarchy often presents a very confusing picture, and deserves urgent examination. In today's aggressive media culture, expressions of public opinion on controversial political issues are in high demand, and channels seek out diverse opinions to make issues sensational. Isolated bishops or priests are often trapped into it, and their words are presented as solemn statements of the Christian community, and at times manipulated as caricatures. Adequate structures incorporating lay competence to formulate and present well thought-out Christian positions on critical political issues are lacking. The merging of the spiritual, ecclesiastical and political leadership of the community in the person of the bishop/hierarchy is detrimental to cultivating proper political leadership in the community.

The attempt of this paper to underscore the political role of the priest is in no way meant to be an unreserved

promotion of the priest as a political figure. The age-old wisdom of the Church has taught her the value of internal restrictions on the political functioning of the priest in spite of the rightful claims for civil and political rights. Priests “are not to play an active role in political parties or in directing trade unions unless.... this is required for the defense of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good.”¹⁴ The reason for this prohibition emerges from the essential nature of the priest’s ministry which requires of clerics “always to do their utmost to foster among people peace and harmony based on justice”.¹⁵ His ministry, in normal situations, has to take into account all the faithful irrespective of their political or trade union affiliations. We may note that the Canon provides space for the priest for playing an active political role in special situations. Therefore the prohibition is not absolute.

There is also another dimension to the restriction on priest’s involvement in politics, and that relates to the political role of the lay faithful vis-à-vis that of the priest. “Clerics are to acknowledge and promote the mission which the laity, each for his or her own part, exercises in the Church and *in the world*.”¹⁶ (Italics added) Unfortunately the phrase *in the world* is often forgotten as clerics tend to assume the political role themselves instead of acknowledging and promoting the laity for the political role that is duly theirs. *Deus Caritas Est* states in clear terms that direct politics is proper to the laity, and that the clergy has an indirect role of promoting it through proper training and guidance.¹⁷

6. Insights from *Deus Caritas Est*: Purification of Conscience as Key

Deus Caritas Est, the first encyclical letter of Pope

Benedict XVI, reflects seriously on this thorny issue of the Church's role in the political sphere. Acknowledging that the just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics, it presents the role of the Church as helping to "form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly". Building a just social and civil order is a political task, which is not the Church's immediate responsibility. "She cannot and must not replace the State." This, in no way, reduces the responsibility of the Church, for "she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper." This is done "through the purification of reason and through ethical formation".¹⁸ Much work is required to convert these principles into action plans in concrete situations.

The encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* affirms unambiguously that "the just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics" respecting the autonomy of the temporal sphere as shown by Vatican II.¹⁹ Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. The document understands politics as "more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics." In its attempt to clarify what justice is, and how to achieve it here and now, the State resorts to practical reason; "but if reason is to be exercised properly, it must undergo constant purification, since it can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests." Then the document adds: "Here politics and faith meet. Faith by its specific nature is an

encounter with the living God—an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason. But it is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly.” It is here that the political role of a priest as the leader of a faith community becomes evident. In other words, a priest as the leader of a faith community has the inevitable responsibility to help the community to purify its practical reason. Here the priest assumes a political role.

According to the first guideline the political role of the priest includes helping to “form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest.” Its base is the very understanding of the mission of the Church of which the priest is a functionary: “Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.”²⁰ It is all the more important in our context where everybody laments the erosion of values and ethics in the political field.

The document is also realistically cautious about the dangers involved. “The Church cannot and must not take

upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.” Yes, a priest cannot and must not replace a politician; he is not meant to be that. Yet he cannot and must not remain on the sidelines when issues of justice are involved. Here is the crux of the matter: In what manner should a priest involve in political issues? Unfortunately the document does not enter into a discussion of this aspect; perhaps it is left to us to explore in our own concrete religio-political context. “A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.”²¹

The document affirms that “the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.”²²

The second guideline tries to distinguish the political role of the priest from that of the lay person. “The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation ‘in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*.’

The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility.”²³ The priest needs to avoid encroaching on the specific political role the Church expects the laity to play. Sadly this awareness is found wanting in many priests and bishops.

7. Some Pointers

a) Education for Political Engagement

Most Christians in our context are still confused or unsure of the place of politics in the plan of God, and of the political demands of their faith. They hardly see any political message in the Bible. How to prepare such Christians to assume political responsibility? This remains a major task for the priest. This would require equipping the priests in formation for this crucial task. Raising questions about the quality of formation of the army of sisters in the country for political engagement, T.K.John observes: “From a close scrutiny of that which trains these large number of personnel it becomes evident that the social, economic and political content of their formation syllabus is virtually zero. Enter the seminaries and formation houses of the men religious. There too the social, the economic and the political content of their syllabus is virtually zero. What most of them got at their university/school level is all that they have.”²⁴ The situation demands urgent remedial measures.

Political science is a popular subject being taught in many of our Christian institutions of higher education. But unfortunately their sphere of interest is confined to the merely academic, and so they do not equip students for

effective political analysis or political engagement. Topics like political science, philosophy of politics, political theology, etc. remain largely unknown in our faculties of philosophy and theology. An inter-disciplinary approach in theological formation is necessary to make theology more politically sensitive and responsive. The National Commission for Justice, Peace and Development of the CBCI issued *Ten Commandments for Indian Voters* indicating a healthy approach to politics and political education.²⁵ Four principles seen to be underlying it: the basic duty to be on electoral rolls and to exercise the right to vote or not to vote; acquiring the skill in analyzing political manifestos; discerning and critically assessing political parties and candidates; and finally, taking steps to report malpractices to the authorities concerned. Here the Church is only fulfilling its duty.

b) Pulpits and Pastoral Letters – Double-edged Sword

Pastoral letters have acquired a new political status in the emerging dynamics involving the state and religion. The shrinking-space phenomenon is forcing both of them to regain lost space, or to appropriate space they consider their legitimate zone. The pastoral letters of bishops as instruments of public intervention has been noted in the current discourse, especially in the run-up to the parliament elections in April-May, 2009. Elections have always remained the sacred territory of political parties; does religion have a role here? Do the priests/bishops have a role here? The church is convinced that it has a definite role, and these documents could be seen as attempts at asserting this role.

Pastoral letters, traditionally, were intended for the Christian faithful. Now we see its sphere expanding

suddenly. Pastoral letters remain no more private documents. First, the church leadership consciously uses the pastorals not only to instruct the faithful, but also to answer the state with which it is at loggerheads. Second, the mass-media, particularly the visual channels, pay close attention to the pastorals, take up their contents for public discussion, and even celebrate them in a politically charged atmosphere. Pastoral letters have *discovered* their potential as instruments of political intervention, on the one hand; they are *being discovered* by the secular society as a new entrant in the same arena, on the other. We need to be judicious in the use of pastoral letters, at the same time. By their very nature pastoral letters communicate only in one direction, and are not consultative or dialogical. It should be possible to remedy this flaw.

c) Dialogical Approach with the Political Establishment

Politics is still seen by the Church in general and the priests in particular as the murky field of corruption, casteism, criminalization and opportunism, and hence to be shunned. Inefficient administration and anti-people policies of the ruling government often frustrate churchmen that they develop an attitude of contempt for the political establishment. Given their role as community leaders, this attitude can have a devastating effect on the faith community, and can discourage the faithful from active political participation. Some priests yield to the temptation to set up parallel administrative structures disregarding the government. Priests need to be cautious of this danger.

In spite of all its inadequacies, politics still has an overarching function of coordinating various functional units of a society into a harmonious unity that ensures

every unit what is due to it. Attempts to set up parallel government imply a denial of this rightful role of politics. The priest, as leader, has a duty to help cultivate an attitude of reverence for the political establishment. This is a basic requirement for a political awareness that would enable the community to influence policies and decisions that affect their everyday lives. The National Consultation on Christian approach to general elections 2009 prepared and presented a memorandum to political parties and candidates. To object to these as priests interfering in politics betrays ignorance or a malicious outlook. It is part of a priest's mission to help purify politics by engaging responsibly in the political process.

8. Conclusion

The intervention of the priest in the political field will continue to bother our thinking on priestly ministry for many more decades. This is because of the overarching function of politics in any society in harmonizing the different spheres including the religious. Gone are the days the spiritual and the political remained antagonistic. The Church documents assure us that the priest engaging in political issues need not be defensive or secretive. Instead, it may be demanded by the very nature of his priestly mission. The present state of affairs asks of us to help clarify the nature not only of the priesthood but also of politics. The prophetic words of the 1971 Synod of Bishops still remains instructive: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."²⁶ No

sphere of human life is alien to the mission and ministry of the priest.

¹ The term priest is used as inclusive of the three degrees of the ministerial priesthood as understood in Catholic theology, viz. bishops, priests and deacons. Cf. LG 28; CCC 1593.

² Vimal Tirimanna (ed.), *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil* (Collection of TAC and OTC Documents 1987-2007, Bangalore: Claretian Publication, 2007, 76.

³ See *The Hindu*, July 12, 2010. Archbishop Susaipakiam was speaking at the Convention of the Kerala Regional Latin Catholic Council (KRLCC). Indifference towards politics and reluctance in developing leadership skills in the community resulted in not getting due representation in governance or in the leadership of political parties, he said.

⁴ M.K.Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, Vol. 2, Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1961, 269.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Theological Publications in India, 1994, No.1592. (Hereafter referred to as CCC).

⁶ LG21, PO1, CCC1581

⁷ For a discussion on the leadership roles of a priest in a fishing community, see P.T.Mathew, *We Dare the Waters – the World and Worldview of Mukkuvar*, Chennai: University of Madras, 2001, Chs. 6&7.

⁸ G.S. 39.

⁹ Tirimanna, op.cit. 85.

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 7.

¹¹ Tirimanna, op.cit., 70.

¹² For a detailed discussion of these models see Isaac Padinajarekkuttu, “Priestly Ministry – Historical Perspectives and Theological Responses”, in *Towards Building up the Local Church*, ed. by T.Manjaly et. al, Shillong: Oriens Publ. 2004, p.2ff.

¹³ AA, nos. 7, 14.

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- ¹⁴ Canon 287/2.
- ¹⁵ Canon 287/1.
- ¹⁶ Canon 275/2.
- ¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005, no.28.
- ¹⁸ *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28.
- ¹⁹ *Deus Caritas Est*, no.28. All quotations in this section are from the same number.
- ²⁰ *Deus Caritas Est*, no.28
- ²¹ *Deus Caritas Est*, no.28
- ²² *Deus Caritas Est*, no.29
- ²³ *Deus Caritas Est*, no.29
- ²⁴ T.K.John, "Christian Commitment to Nation Building", in *Christian Commitment to Nation Building*, ed. by A. Thumma and A. Sahayam, Bangalore: Dharamaram, 2003, 127.
- ²⁵ See <http://www.cbcisite.com/cbcinews2812.hlm>
- ²⁶ Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, 1971.

Priesthood and Professionalism: The Need to Support the Process of Professional Development in the Church

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Abstract: Professionalism can be viewed in positive and negative perspectives. In the contemporary world people expect the positive type of professionalism from priests. The priestly ideal of professionalism is to serve, in a proficient manner, with total dedication, those who are in need. This will require effort to know as much as they can about their field. Today's world does not automatically give respect to priests, but only on the fulfillment of certain standards of behavior and practice, and being accountable. This includes a life-long commitment to keep learning and acquiring professional attitudes.

Keywords: Priest, professionalism, life-long commitment, proficient service, standards of behaviour, accountability.

Priesthood, its lifelong commitment, its evangelical counsels, and the church law are all in full view in informed discussions of priestly professionalism. One must look elsewhere for discussions of those aspects in the history and traditions of the church. Professionalism, its well defined commitment over a much shorter period of some professional occupation, priestly or some other, its character, its principles or code of core values, are more on focus in the discussions in this paper.

There have been voices heard from all over the world

expressing disappointment with the professionalism and lack of fidelity of priests, from bishops, from priests, from laity, from non-catholic and other faiths as well. Whatever be the merits of this observation, people have been disappointed and shocked and they will take necessary actions and precautions to deal with their loss and disappointments. The step taken in this paper is simple to understand how and in what ways priesthood and professionalism complement each other both for priests and laity, where problems could arise either for the individual professional priest or for the church community.

The image of a priest may have changed at the beginning of this millennium from someone who speaks authoritatively on all matters of religion. At sometime in the past, priests, particularly theologians and others had such professional airs that they spoke very authoritatively on all matters of religion. Everyone else humbly listened to what they had to say. That professional image of the priest has changed.

That image is certainly changing, in part we have more variety of professionals in the church and in part because that image has been shattered and broken as we have confused, directionless, incompetent, ineffective, insecure, dictatorial or authoritative, visionless priests and bishops who have no real authority on understanding of matters of faith and religion and are not very convincing. There is no doubt, that there are various professions and professionals in the church and there are also professional priests and bishops who carry out various professional activities. In a recent visit to Belgium, I saw how the professionals respond to deep crisis in the church. It is good to have professionals respond to the crisis and have professionals

show the way forward, out of the crisis.

Someone has said that the “tragedy” of the latter part of the 20th century for the church has been the “professionalization of ministry”. It is a reference to a change, not only in the performance of the ministry, but a lack of movement, a lack of openness to the world. There are more managers than leaders who can lead in the church. There are more therapists than priests or pastors who can bring about healing and reconciliation in the church. There are more maintainers rather than missionaries and missions in the church. It is a reference to a kind of professionalism not well suited for the future of the church in the 21st century. People are asking for change, they want change. No one is sure what the real problem is, whether the professional priest is the problem or professionalism is the problem, and what to do about the so called “tragedy”.

Are Priests Unfulfilled in the Context of their Ministry in the Church?

“Unfulfilled”? No. But the question will not go away. It keeps recurring as though there is some truth to it. Starting with the end of ministry in view, every ministry is for the service of others, but does it bring fulfillment to the priest who performs the ministry? Is there self-sacrifice involved which is part of the fulfillment of ministry? Does one necessarily become unfulfilled because of the self-sacrifice? Does the practice and spirituality of the ministerial priesthood leave room for unprofessional practice making priests unfulfilled and laity disappointed?

“Fulfilled”? Many, yes; but some, no. Most priests who are happy and fulfilled, though they have their imperfections, they continue to develop in their

professional awareness and point to opportunities that are available for their continued spiritual and professional renewal and development.

The spirituality of the ministerial priesthood has been understood as fully ordered to its pastoral mission. It also has its roots in the call to a state of life that includes the evangelical counsels and consecration to the person of Christ. Nevertheless there are concerns raised for accountability, the question of authenticity, transparency, and professionalism.

Priesthood is seen as gift of Christ to the community and essentially as a service to the community. There is also the long cherished ideals of priest as “representative of the community”, “man for others”, “a docile instrument in the hands of God for the building up of the church community”, “Christ for others”, etc. These ideals appear so perfect, that the church has constantly upheld them as light to the community. In other words, there are processes of personal and professional development taking place everywhere in the Church. The ideal of the twelve and other apostles, going out in all different directions after Pentecost, but united in the love of Christ makes us constantly aware that our priestly pastoral vocation is personal and ecclesial at the same time.

Just like perfect priests in a perfect church, it's left to anyone's imagination to imagine what perfect professionals can be like in a perfect society. That heavenly view may need down-to-earth grounding, having an imagination take root in reality. It is another thing to take a view of earthly or on-the-ground realities of actual professions in actual societies in the way they function currently. And there are changes taking place continually

in both these views of two different worlds, one bounded in possibilities as is and the other boundless in possibilities as always. The process of professional development could bridge the gap between the ideal and the reality, and enable continued personal and professional development of priesthood in the Church.

“Happy”? “in the priestly traditions of the church”? Yes, mostly. There is a living tradition of “traditional priesthood” typically originating in the idea of “mediator” and manifested in its three fold functions of “ministerial priesthood” as being “set apart” through ordination from the “common priesthood”. The living tradition is having trouble to treat the troubles it is currently experiencing. The offices which are integral to the priesthood exercised by any priest are the teaching office, the sanctifying office, the ruling or governing or shepherding office is seen within the context of the church, in its preservation, continuation, renewal, unity and vitality as a lived communion of a community of faith and love, which has hope of eternal salvation. On its journey to becoming a perfect society, the church has a special and most central place for priests in office, in its life, a position of complete trust, complete dedication, lifelong commitment, of proficient service of others, especially of those entrusted to their care.

This living priestly tradition has affinities to the professional and professionalism as experienced and found in the wider society in the world in the diversity of professions and professionals. In some areas of community professionals and their professions have replaced the ministerial offices and roles played by the priest. The affinities make for easy passage to replace various roles, only a few roles remaining un-replaced, to

be fulfilled by priests. In some cases professionals in society may be functioning as “trusted priests”, just as, in some other cases priests also function as professionals.

The living tradition of ministry and priesthood has been explained in tradition as given by God for the purpose of equipping “the saints”, that is, the Church for the unity of faith, until the Lord comes (Eph, 4:11-13). In history there are examples, also in the biblical context, of people chosen and set apart performing certain priestly functions as for example, the patriarch Abraham, as head of the family, is called upon to offer sacrifice (Gn. 22). In the course of time, as history, knowledge and awareness increased, an office of priestly functions or priesthood evolved and a priestly professionalism developed and took root in the church as well.

Are Priests Immature Professionals?

“Immature”? Not all. But immature behaviours are encountered, yes. Immaturity is not simply a matter of “faults and failings” of priests, people understand that. People are disappointed with the immaturity of some priests who do not recognize natural barriers and who break them, who do harm to the suffering victims. A type of immature blindness pervades the priestly profession in the eyes of the lay person.

Most priests who are mature think of the ideals and character of the priestly profession. They live a life of principles in the true spirit of “profession”.

Professional Ideals and Character

Does the priestly service of others meet the professional ideals and characteristics? The professional

ideal requires a complete and total dedication to proficient service for all in need. The ideal also requires the professional to transcend his/her self-interest. This is expected usually under favourable conditions which the society provides for the professional. In such a context, the interests of the professional will be served fairly by serving others.

This means, that it is not only the duty of professionals to serve others without regard for self-interest, and it is not only that they have to serve having enjoyed the privileges of favourable conditions provided by the society at large, they must want to serve others willingly and readily.

Obviously, if they are willing to serve others, they must also know how to serve others. They have to obtain the knowledge, the “oil of gladness” and increase and expand their knowledge to serve others better and more proficiently.

The professional is “set apart” from the people also in two important ways. In his dedication to serve others, he or she is seen as second to none, that is, it is a complete and total dedication usually for life once the professional enters it. Secondly, it is his proficiency or knowledge of how to serve others that sets the professional apart from those he /she serves. It is an interesting process by which a professional is set apart for people, something paralleling also the process by which a priest is set apart for the people to serve others. The priest and the professional understand each other, there is the natural affinity but both also have their distinctive areas of operation and the ways of “setting apart”.

Among other ideals, the professional has to respect the autonomy of the client whom (s)he serves with utmost

confidence. It recognizes that the client's life has other elements of the good life or healthy life and it is something not determined or defined by the professional. A professional is required to value and respect client autonomy. Anything that impinges on client autonomy by the professional is seen as unbecoming of that professional and is to be detested.

The professional ideal also means that the professional needs to have an imaginative and probing mind. Professionals are expected to know as much as they can about their field. Even they are expected to contribute to produce new knowledge, from their experience, from their research, from sustained reflection and listening to other professionals in their field and mutually continuously learning from them, interacting with other professionals in professional associations etc. The reality may be that in some this development stops or terminates at some point in the development of the professionals and no new knowledge is added, or no new experience is created, only past experience and knowledge is used to create, to interpret, protect and supply the services needed by people.

The professional ideal is that one does not turn away or send away someone who comes to him/her seeking professional help and does not discriminate the one who comes in any way, whether he or she is rich or poor, informed or ignorant, literate and educated or illiterate and uneducated, privileged or underprivileged. The professional accepts everyone who comes to him/her in need, obviously within the limits required for competent service, a reasonable work load and economic and social survival. Some even make the heroic sacrifice of putting their economic and social survival at risk in the service of

others. The professional does not preselect who should come to him/her. There is no natural selection, or survival of the fittest, that he promotes. In fact it is exactly the contrary he learns to accept the diversity and the entire field of persons who come to him/her from whatever background

The professional has an obligation to meet human needs, but this can possibly be met well only within manageable limits of professional excellence. Certain aspects are seen as guiding the practice whether or not to engage in the service of a new arrival when existing commitments are present. Protecting the existing clients, having regard for their welfare takes precedence. Things can get complicated in some professions, where client autonomy is paramount. Also the principle of service on demand, may take a different form, waiting for the service or the need to be met or going to see another professional who can likewise meet the need.

However, in some cases, in reality, whether in the church or in any society, none of these ideals may hold true, there could be lapses. It is to prevent such lapses, there is need to regulate professional practices to restrain possible immoral and amoral agents from acting primarily from their own self-interest, to support behaviour which transcends self-interest and to prevent harm resulting from self-interest behaviour on the part of the professionals. Every society has such regulations some may be weaker, while others have stronger regulations. Professions have the duty and obligation to comply with such regulations.

What Professional Ends are the Priests Seeking?

There are professional ends, the ideals of priestly profession – whatever they may be – which priests should

be serving. But we have priests seeking professional ends as priests. What professional ends are the priests seeking? Are they seeking their own fulfillment or self actualization?

Finding a Place in the World

One of the ends that priests may be seeking is to find a place in the world, a place of stature, personal wellbeing, and professional engagement. For many priests, they know they have a sure place in the church but that is not enough, they would like to have more – the real problem is that they would like to find a place in the world and make a mark on it, leave a legacy behind, etc. They have aspirations of self-actualization, self-fulfillment, self-realization, etc., which are not met in the framework of the traditional priestly ministry in the church. Particularly where priests are seen as respected, but employees of the church rather than as its equal members, they may seek self-actualization elsewhere if their ministry does not provide the desired opportunities. These aspirations of self-actualization, give rise to the search for opportunities to show they are professionals and they want to be seen as professionals.

There are several felt problems experienced by priests today, indicating perhaps that many do not find opportunities for self actualization in the context of their appointed ministries. Examples are:

1. The way authority is exercised in the Church
2. Too much work
3. Unrealistic demands and expectations of lay people
4. Loneliness of priestly life

5. Being expected to represent church teachings with which they have difficulty
6. Celibacy
7. Uncertainty about the future of the Church
8. Relationship with the diocesan bishop of the diocese in which they work
9. Relationships with superiors or pastors
10. Difficulty of really reaching people today

All these problems indicate lack of support for their self-actualization and professional development. Most know what a priest is and what priesthood means, there is no problem there. Most priests receive remarkable support from their families, from non-priest friends, from staff and people they minister. But it may be that there is need to have support for professional self-development while engaged in their ministries. In the future, the vision of ministries is likely to change and cause some kind of diversity in understanding. There are indications that some would be satisfied to restrict their work to sacramental and liturgical duties, while others would be dissatisfied with such restrictions. A process of professional development may be necessary.

Many young priests want to be seen as professionals, as men of advanced training and specialized expertise. The urge for professional standing is not necessarily related to the desire for more money, but to the underlying need or fear of security for what lack of money can do to self-worth, to a strong sense of individual identity. In one way a healthy trend is developing, as more and more people are taking to specialization and are preparing for a specialized ministry rather than the traditional form of generic

ministry where one was rotated from place to place with a number of general common jobs. To be in a specialized ministry you have to be professional and have advanced training and education that go with it.

There are others who are concerned with their personal growth and want to achieve self actualization with the priesthood, within the church. Professionalism is linked to the desire for self actualization. They aspire to a higher status, professional status, something more than self-esteem and relationships with others. They want to be seen as achievers. They want to be more independent, more self-defined and more high-status. They want to do quality work, keep up their self-esteem as a professional. A generic theology and philosophy formation is not enough, many given an opportunity would want to do master's degrees or more advanced training and openly shift to a more economic and financial rationale seeing themselves as considerable value to the diocese and to the church.

In the light of such developments it appears that many are still satisfied with the model of traditional ministerial priest without any pretence of professionalism, and there are others who are satisfied with being specialized ministers wanting to carry out a specialized ministry which requires professionalism. The need to find a place in the world can be expressed in both these ways, but the professional way appears more attractive and appealing.

Professionalism as a matter of skills and competence

Professional skills and competence are in demand today. Some have referred to professionalism in the context of the church as the skill and competence possessed by the minister enabling him to fulfill the Church's task. It means professionalism is placed at the

service of the church and it is a quality worth developing and nurturing. But we are in a society where services provided by professionals are valued more than those offered in the church.

In many places, it is likely that in a consumer society, as the consumer society developed and rose in prominence, the church also was seen as a “service provider” to people, where the Bishops and their diocesan teams as administrators and employers, and the priests and laity as employees, or frontline sales and marketing persons. If not careful, this type of “management model” contains a secular reality, but distorts the deeper meanings and vocation, the dedication and commitment of priests and laity for the ministry in the church. In the environment of scientific management that swept across societies enabling a few at the top to control and direct large organizations with powerful impacts on the lives of people regarded as members. It created also efficient bureaucratic levels of ministry and service. The central value in such forms of providing service is “control” and also a social control over the priests and laity both engaged in the ministry and over the people in general. In the past, one preferred to work for the church when a position became open and opportunity became available. The church had the preferred choice of talent that most other organizations lacked. The church had outstanding talented people with the intelligence, the brilliance that marked the church members. This has changed. The choice of talents that church has is limited, as people prefer professional bodies in the secular society, in preference to working in and for the church. The talent pool available for the church has shrunk.

For the professionals or those seeking a place in the

world, those wanting to learn professional skills and competence, the world outside the confines of the church greatly enlarged and grew to be far bigger than most in the church could imagine or think. As human relations model and movement became prominent in the 1950s, it also had its rubbing shoulders effect on the church as well. Another central value “healing” became prominent, and there appeared a therapeutic model in part to heal the employees and other members of institutions of the society and build human relations and nurture good and healthy human relations. More “healing” through various professions and professionals is seen taking place in response to peoples’ desire for healthy lives. This development may have recast the priest and lay model or the management employee model into something of a therapeutic leader follower model or a counsellor client model. It may also have reduced the role of the priest offering healing and comfort to those in distress. Just as the previous model this model too distorts the relationship which the church members experience with its real head as forming one spiritual body or unity. It is not to be applied directly or strictly. But “priest as healer” carrying out healing, reconciliation ministries in general is compared to others who are engaged in “healing” and found to be unprofessional or ineffective.

The ineffectiveness could come from many different factors. But the contrasts between two kinds of professionalism is evident in that when control is the focus, the priestly calling remains largely confined to the fulfilling of managerial and bureaucratic roles of contemporary society and when healing is the focus, the priestly calling does not move away from the controlling aspects to the healing aspects of the ministry. It is a loss

when bishops, head teachers do not teach, and head doctors are too busy to heal.

It may be noted that in our contemporary society, professionals are paid full time and differently from part time or amateurs. It made sense to develop oneself professionally and learn the skills and competences expected of any professional. Professionals were marked by the sound advice and professional service they rendered to those who came to them. They had through their service acquired a reputation for professional service. It created a class, a class which meant they were sociological equals sharing the stature in the community. These sociological dimensions of professionalism also provide a self understanding and basis for “esteem” and priests can get caught in these temptations as well, just as others in the society, forgetting their main calling and focusing more on learning professional skills and competence.

With many lay people skilled in professional provision of care and having the competence and trust of the people and reputation of practice behind them, the priests need not any more understand themselves as the sole providers of pastoral counsel and spiritual direction, as there are many other persons in the church who are not ordained, who can perform these roles with ability and grace and professional excellence. Our contemporary society does not bestow on the priest automatic respect for counsel or guidance or direction any longer as it once used to be the case. Standards of behaviour and practice have to be met by everyone, whether they are priests or lay persons. If the priests and lay professional expect the same sociological privileges of being professional, they have to have same standards of behaviour and practice, offering the same level of professional excellence.

Where “experience” is emphasized more than skills and competence, there can be other concepts of lifelong commitment than professional as “manager” or as “therapist”. There can also be another concept of professionalism that goes against, or in contrast to these sociological dimensions, namely, the concept of the “elder” in which lived faith is valued more. An elder is someone who voluntarily and freely does a service and is not paid for the services he or she renders. There are many elders, their services are valued for the community, not necessarily for their advice they bestow, but for the focus they bring to its self understanding as a community. For example, an experienced “professional theologian” can be an elder who can guide and can serve as an important resource, something much more than simply a source of information and authority, creating bonds of mutual accountability and co-responsibility for the local and global church.

Professionalism as Building a Character

“Profession” as a word with its origins from the Greek, means “principles” or “character”, so the term professionalism when used as a process of building or developing an indelible character, one which marks out the professional from other people. In the past, this concept of indelible character was used to communicate an image of the priest as “professional” rather than as “elder” in the community. As “character” it has connections to ethics and also for the priestly life and ministry, even a reference to divine ordination in the sense of an indelible character. It has created a problem for the church to understand what is the precise nature of the priestly character, is it more ethical or is it more a transformation

through grace of the ordination. Priests were set apart by their “consecrated character” and by their “lifelong commitment”. For the priests, “character” (“profession”) is indeed a part of ordination. The “character” produced is a result of the divine action, which is emphasized here, rather than the human agent’s moral condition (Heb 1:3). It is the consecration of one’s whole life to God for the service of the church. But building a character and the professional characteristics requires motivation, sustained effort and time, resources and support.

Priestly Identity: Vocation and Professionalism

Priestly identity is for ministry, it is not so much the psychological or anthropological aspects that matter. Speaking about priestly identity, it is possible for the sake of understanding to compare the vocational model and the professional model. The distinctive nature of the priestly vocation in relation to other occupations is always emphasized. The theories of vocation as seen in the vocational literature dealing with occupational choice, career development, and professional identity, etc., focus on individuals who are thinking about careers, preparing to enter the world of work, pursuing and changing jobs, and making the decision to retire from permanent employment, etc. Most individuals find greatest satisfaction in occupations or jobs that are congruent with their view of their selves.

Most general theories of vocation propose “self actualization” as the core motivation for their choice of occupation and job. This humanistic element can be atheistic or it can also be seen in the light of the Christian understanding of the mystery of the human person. In the Christian understanding of the mystery of the human

person, the priestly vocation has its existential and essential reference to the new humanity in Christ and the priesthood of Christ and the realization or actualization of self takes place in a graceful relationship that transcends the human self and embraces the divine, self orienting itself towards God. This means all anthropological and psychological theories of vocation and identity while adding an element to our understanding do not complete the mystery of the human person and are insufficient to understand the identity of priestly vocation. Anthropology and psychology may provide self concepts, but self-ideals transcend any concept so offered.

Professional model also has been used to compare and contrast priesthood with other occupations. The social and cultural development of professions has been traced to the rise and expansion of educational academies, institutions, and universities. The professions that developed and rose to prominence are “learned professions”. So while comparing priesthood with other occupations or professions, it is natural to encounter serious theological and sociological questions depending on what one’s core beliefs are. At the back of the professional model, as its support, is the university in all its faculties, powers, knowledge, and wisdom. Priests working in the universities are competitors to other professionals. The university, as a place where occupations and professionalism is exercised does not distinguish priestly professionals from non-priestly professionals. Their commitments are also well defined and limited to a segment of their life which is professionally most rewarding. Getting into a university system with entrance into higher education and remaining in it by contributing to it professionally, and guiding the younger generations

in their search for self-transcendence and self-realization and self-fulfillment in knowledge and wisdom, indeed requires a deep commitment to the development of the university itself by the professionals.

Professionals at the university were models of cultured gentleman (woman), and one learnt to be a member of the profession under the guidance of a senior member of the profession. To be a professional was a status to which one belonged by virtue of education in a hierarchically ordered society. One's engagement though was within a specific occupation, through it one engaged with the hierarchically ordered society. One built up a reputation as a professional through professional engagement and professional development.

There are structural affinities of priestly profession with other vocations or occupations of professionals. It provides an idea of societal structure that characterizes professions and supports its continued development including (1) the creation of a full-time occupation in response to needs in the social structure (2) the establishment of a training school which transmits specialized knowledge and skills (3) the formation of professional associations which are responsible for selection and training (4) the development of a code of ethics enforced from within the profession itself.

There are several attitudinal affinities among priestly and other vocations and occupations, of professional attitudes including (1) a sense of accountability to the professional body (2) An ideal of service rather than profit orientation (3) an ideal of merit (4) an ideal of conducting oneself in accordance with the principles of the profession (5) an ideal of non discrimination, etc.

All these structural and attitudinal affinities are not a substitute for religious commitment of the priestly profession because of the central role of the development of a personal relationship with God which marks out priestly vocation and occupation from other vocations and occupations. But the affinities can mean a greater involvement in the secular world, more financial and economic security in life for necessities of life, lesser engagement with sacramental and liturgical involvement, greater professional recognition, etc. So these vocational and professional models may not lead to the development of a stronger sense of priestly identity, but to a stronger sense of professionalism in ministry. It is a possibility that priestly identity can be lost, though it is not necessarily so.

There must be space within the priestly identity to develop the sense of a society, which is priestly, apostolic and prophetic within the context of priestly vocation.

Priest as Theologian and Teacher

The priest also functions as teacher and as theologian. The professional also acts as a teacher and in doing so acts as a priest theologian. There are two ideological models of the teacher and they have been distinguished. In one model the teacher is acting like a missionary. It is not uncommon for teachers to act as “social and cultural missionaries” dedicated in a secular way to the work of building the “civilization”. This is the ideology supported by secular education and it could be a form of secular control exercised by the ruling class in their interests. Nevertheless, there is a secular missionary dimension to the “teacher” in our secular societies. Then there is another ideology, referred to as the “professional” ideology in which teachers see their profession as representing more

of their concern for respectability, for advancement and self-actualization. It could be that the two ideologies conflict or they could be reinforcing each other.

The question we can ask, of our priest theologians whether as teachers, they too share a missionary dimension, if not an explicit missionary ideology, along with their professional dimension, if not necessarily a professional ideology? Could it be that the pursuit of one ideology, has meant that the other is left for some “non-professional” to fulfill? Is the church which we serve, fundamentally missionary or professional? If the church priests serve, is fundamentally missionary, then what role does professionalism have while it does not engage itself in missionary activity? What really is missionary activity in the future? What is our mission, after all, whether as professionals or as priests? Can we say those values which comprise the core of our mission is what makes us truly professional as we act on them, having knowledge of them, having deeper levels of understanding and judgment, making affirming decisions guided by them?

Professions have autonomy and controlled by the opportunities or prospects for advancement. Can these conflict with the mission and the missionary side or can these ideally complement the mission and the missionary side of priestly theologian teacher professionalism?

Professional ideology thrives on certain characteristics like, performance of task or service, mental labour (as opposed to manual or technical or skilled), appeals to reason more rather than to form, sponsors the service ideal with its orientation to clients, values individual action (as opposed to collective action), etc. As professional individuals, they will have different perspectives and

strategies on how best to accomplish the vision and goals they have set for themselves in their capacity as professionals. Even when the professional dimension complements the missionary dimension, it may not take into account the whole community as having and sharing the missionary dimension.

Professionalism and Professional Education

Professionals have been at the helm of managing public affairs without representing the public or without having their consent as in a democracy. Unlike the professionals who control public life and public affairs in society and wield all forms of earthly powers, a priest is meant to represent people before God and meant to represent God before His people. As a mediator of the covenant between God and people, a covenant renewed and sanctified by the life of Jesus, a priest must act as one who is above all earthly powers and desires.

A priest offers eternal salvation, priesthood provides the assurance of that for all times. Obviously, this is a turn to something other-worldly, not of this world. In contrast, what the professional offers is this worldly service which meets some felt need of the people. Just as the priest claims legitimacy as the authentic, real interpreter, the protector and supplier of this grace of eternal life, so also the professional claims legitimacy for the this-worldly service he/she provides, claiming legitimacy for being its authentic, real interpreter, the protector and the supplier of this worldly service. This structure appears intrinsic to both the priest and the professional, making it a real possibility that we already have in many areas an effective replacement for the priest, that fulfils many a need of the people, except perhaps, eternal salvation.

What is the mark of the professional? Can it be the income that he or she earns, the long training which qualifies him/her, the special and delicate task he or she does professionally, or the social standing with which he/she is accepted and recognized? None of these things appear to be the mark of a real professional. It is his/her authority and power to describe and define a person as client in need of his/her services, to define or determine that person's need, and to hand out the need fulfillment prescription. The professional usually has an idea of a more complete person, but deals with a less complete person without his/her services, creating a need. The professional values his or her autonomy and thrives on it, he or she has learnt the art of using his or her professional autonomy to shape the future as he or she sees it.

Professional education is very important to the professional something like a "passport". Professional education is guided by the ideal of professionalism, that is, by an ideal of commitment for the sake of service. The services sectors of the society and of the economy have grown and presently in its variety of services that comprise the services sector, the services sector is the major contributor to the national growth and development. The importance of the services and the professionalism necessary for the growth and development of the services sector drives the professional education and development. An examination of the values implicit in professional education may clarify the ideal of commitment for the sake of service.

This ideal of service and commitment should not be lost from view in professional education. The knowledge and skill set contained in professional education and passed on to younger professionals has been changing and

perhaps will keep on changing. But the ideal of commitment to service is worth preserving and supporting even when it is not of religious nature. Professionalism is understood as an ideology of commitment to mastery in order to serve. In that respect, it demands a moral commitment to a way of life and for the priest, a way of life keeping in view his ordination vows. The moral commitment implies being committed to distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' professional practice and having the courage and commitment to putting good above the bad, and doing the good practice with the excellence it deserves, attained through professional education.

Commitment to professionalism also involves commitment to lifelong learning and commitment to acquisition of professional attitudes. Lifelong learning is not cherished by many priests active in ministry, resulting in slow decline in professionalism and lay people whom one ministers have reason to be disappointed in the lack of professionalism. In preparing the person for professionalism, it would be helpful to have opportunities for those attempting to master the skills and knowledge necessary to practise professional occupations and to serve clients, to explore what professionalism really means, what professional commitment really means.

In Conclusion

Professionals are people with vision, with a sense of creative fidelity to the mission, mature people, fulfilled people, people who are able to commit themselves, develop professional characteristics that are helpful in serving others in the society.

The idea of priestly professionalism makes people nervous and may be raises discomfoting questions. But

people who are comfortable with professional development in society, see priests as lagging behind in professionalism in their ministry and service. Even sometimes they recognize priestly commitment as falling short of professional commitment, though it should not be.

The idea of “indelible character” may or may not facilitate the development of professional characteristics necessary for professional engagement with society and other professionals in the service of the people. Diversity of professions, can also make us ask, whether there are diversity of vocations in the Church which may also be marked with “indelible character”, which involves doing something for Christ, whom one has chosen to follow most closely and lovingly, with a lifelong commitment? Are there ways open to all those who follow the Lord Jesus, and who want to do something for Him in the church with a lifelong commitment? Is there professional freedom in the Church, as all are one in Christ? (Gal 3:28) Is there need for priests to be more involved with broad social and moral issues beyond the church boundaries? Is there a felt need for priests to achieve greater status as competent professionals in the eyes of the Catholic community? Is it true that priestly identity is felt more strongly in sacramental ministry, worship and preaching and less in professional activities in the service of people or this is a reflection of exclusive sacramental and worship leadership roles allocated to priests and closed to non-priests?

Priest and bishops are theologians, that is, teachers of the word, the word that gives eternal life, and they are expected to be very close to Jesus, the one in whom eternal salvation is offered by God to humankind. They are expected to teach as Jesus taught the people and carry

out their ministry for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Like everyone else, they are expected to be born of faith and the spirit. Interesting questions are raised about the offices of priest and bishop in the church today from the perspective of professionalism. A Priest, who devotes all his time to the Church's work, will also be able to serve the church and its people professionally. Priesthood contains within it an element of professionalism that serves to serve people better.

Professionals have exerted institutional and social control over individuals and over societies. A professional is also the creator of the need for his services and in doing so he acts like the role of priest in the society. Professionals as a body only complete that control and ritual for the society. Examples are many:

The teacher professional: The professional teaches his profession, effectively replaces the theologian priest

The entrepreneur professional: The professional creates the need for his / her services, effectively replacing the pastoral priest.

The activist professional: The professional like the missionary hunts down the downtrodden, the disadvantaged, the underprivileged, the marginalized, effectively replaces the missionary priest.

Priestly professionals therefore understand how competitively they have to respond and keep to the deep characteristics of their commitment as professional researchers, teachers, knowledge creators and providers, as missionaries, as visionary leaders, as builders of church communities.

The church needs professionals and their service. We

need to support professional development in the church more actively.

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The Eucharist and Community Building in 1 Corinthians 11: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract: George Kudilil first situates the teaching of St Paul in 1 Cor 11:17-34 within the *Sitz im Leben* of the Church in Corinth and shows the unbreakable link between the Eucharistic celebration and community building. Kudilil then compares the socio-religious context of the Indian Church with that of Corinth and applies some of the implications of 1 Cor 11:17-34 to the Church in India. The author challenges the Church to celebrate the Lord's Supper more meaningfully by following the Table Fellowship of Jesus as well as the teaching of St Paul.

Keywords: Eucharist, Lord's supper, church, Pauline Eucharistic theology, casteism, community, Indian Church, community building.

Introduction

During Paul's time, Corinth had grown as the third largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. The boom city of Corinth had its wealth from trade and commerce, which thrived due to its strategic location on the isthmus, between the Saronic Gulf and the Gulf of Corinth, that enabled it to control the ports of Lechaum and Cenchreae. These ports had been gateways of Greece to Asia. A commercial and bureaucratic city, Corinth had attracted people from all walks of life, belonging to diverse confessions and beliefs, as well as races and nations. It offered chances of survival to all

those who tried to seek their luck in the city. Romans, Greeks and Orientals as well as slaves, seafarers, hand workers and many other groups settled in the city. Gradually Corinth developed into a pluralistic city in its fullest sense.

Corinth was the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia at the time of Paul's preaching there. The cultural diversity of the city was remarkable. Gods and goddesses like Poseidon, Artemis, Dionysus, Asclepius, Isis and Serapis had groups of devotees who performed rituals in the temple complexes dedicated to the respective godheads. Mystery cults were popular in Corinth. There were followers of Cynics too because Diogenes and Demetrius, the leading figures of Cynicism, were citizens of Corinth. It had a considerable number of Jews who formed a Jewish colony there and gathered in their own synagogue (Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 281; cf. Acts 18:4). Theatre, sports arena and sacred places dotted the city of Paul's time.

Paul founded one of his beloved communities in Corinth. Most probably Paul came to Corinth in 50 CE after having preached in Greek cities like Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea and Athens. He preached and founded a Christian community there between 50 and 52 CE. Because of his long stay of some eighteen months there, Corinth became a centre of Pauline missionary activity in the Greek world as Ephesus was in Asia Minor. The constitution of the community reflected the social and cultural milieu of Corinth. It had converts from both the Jewish religion and the Gentile population. It might have been first of all proselytes and God-fearers from the Gentiles who embraced the new way preached by Paul (Acts 18:7). The majority of the Pauline community was

Gentile. They had not fully abandoned their former practices. They continued to indulge in idolatry (1 Cor 6:10-11; 8:7; 12:2), enjoyed cultic festival meals in pagan temples (8:1-11:1) and approached pagan judges with their grievances (6:1-6), which a faithful Jew was forbidden to do. Corinthian laxity concerning prostitution and marriage is proverbial and seemingly the Christians also shared this view (6:12-20; 7). There was a strong Jewish minority in the Christian community in Corinth (1:22-24; 7:18; 9:20; 10:32). Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, who was baptized by Paul (1:14; Acts 18:8), was a prominent member of the church. The Corinthian community had members from various economic strata of society too. There were poor and rich members alike. It is possible that some members like Crispus, Erastus, the city treasurer (Rom 16:23) and Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15) were from the upper layer of society.¹ The Corinthian church participated in the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:7-15; 9; Rom 15:31).

The community in Corinth was made up of many house churches. One reason must be the lack of a public building for Christians for worship. The Church was only an emerging phenomenon. Paul mentions the names of the house churches in the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16; 1,15), Prisca and Aquila (1 Cor 16,19), Gaius (Rom 16:23) and Crispus (Acts 18:8; cf. 1 Cor 1:14). The church in Corinth had only fifty to one hundred members.² It is possible that the house churches were formed on the basis of an inner dynamics of allegiance to the four leaders named in 1:11-13 (Paul, Apollos, Cephas and Christ). Each group had its own identity and the members clung to it to the extent of endangering the unity of the Christian community. A defining factor of adherence to a particular

group was baptism by the respective leader of the group.

1. Conflicts in the Corinthian Community

Now it is unanimously accepted that the church in Corinth was beset with various problems. These problems had not only religious or theological reasons but also cultural and sociological causes. Questions of ethical and history of religions nature also are to be asked in relation to the tensions within the Corinthian community.³ Most probably the problems can be best understood against the Hellenistic background of the Corinthians and in their effort to integrate the newly introduced Christian teachings in their day-to-day life which had been already defined by the cultural and socio-ethical status of the city. Their understanding of the gospel as preached by Paul had to be reconciled with their convictions, practices and traditions, and this process led to tensions, rivalries and conflicts which were both sociological and ideological.

The first problem addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians is factionalism in Corinth (chapters 1-4). One cannot be sure how these four groups arose. The patrons of these groups were not personally involved in strengthening them. We are also not sure whether these groups had adopted the ideas criticized by Paul. It is a matter of conjecture that in the house churches not all the members gathered together but only groups which declared allegiance to a particular leader. As Brown rightly points out, 1 Cor 14:23 envisions the possibility of the whole church coming together.⁴ Undoubtedly, the church in Corinth was embroiled in factional feuds that threatened the unity of the church.

History of religions approach to the ideological problems offers three solutions. 1. The problems are related to an early Jewish wisdom tradition, brought there

and popularized by Apollos. Understanding of 'wisdom' was a matter of contention among the Corinthians. The frequent use of the term '*sophia*' and '*sophos*' in the first three chapters point this out. 2. Gnosticism also could have been behind the Corinthian issue. The Hellenistic idea of 'higher knowledge', which considered 'spiritual existence' to be more desirable, had permeated the Corinthian community and occasioned a discussion on 'what is spiritual'.⁵ It led to an intellectual pride on the part of those possessing 'knowledge' who looked down upon the 'non-spiritual.' Paul's use of the term *pneumatikos*, some 14 times in this letter, and his criticism of their claims argue for it. Was some kind of Gnostic influence at work in Corinth? Paul's reference to 'knowledge' (8:1,7-11; 13:2,8; 14:6) may bear that out, but scholars are not unanimous in acknowledging it in Corinth.⁶ The implications of Gnostic ideology are to be evaluated properly. The so-called Corinthian slogans have a direct reference to Gnosticism. They actually stand for a conviction that whatever is done in the physical body has no absolute value. Such a philosophy may lead to libertinism and disrespect for the others and their values. 3. An influence of Graeco-Roman Philosophy/Rhetoric was behind the fascination for wisdom in Corinth. This is more evident in the four groups in chapters 1-4. Christianity was conceived by them as a philosophical school taught differently by various teachers and hence the various slogans and groups.⁷

The context of 1 Cor is strictly related to the problems that plagued the Corinthian community. In Ephesus Paul received a letter from Corinth (16:8) to which he wanted to write a reply (7:1; 8:1; 11:18; 12:1; 15:12; 16:1,12). From the reply of Paul one can learn that there were

problems in the Corinthian community concerning sexual behaviour, attitude to pagan festive meals, unity of the community, gifts of the Spirit and the destiny of the dead. Among them the crucial problem was that of endangered unity.⁸ Corinthians had not understood the meaning of freedom inherent in the gospel of Jesus (Gal 5:1,13). This freedom liberates one from the fetters of the past and encourages one to live out one's faith in love (Gal 5:6,13). A person who is free is independent of certain things like sin, law, death and alien powers and feels free to certain things like righteousness, conformity to Jesus and suffering. Above all, faith in Christ results in a personal and life-giving experience of liberty.⁹ Lack of this freedom accounted for their factionalism and other problems which Paul wanted to address. Another important reason for the letter was Paul's apostleship and authority as understood by the Corinthians which demanded clarification.

2. The Social Set-up of the Corinthian Church

Deissmann had suggested that Pauline Christianity was more popular among the lower strata of society. In the 20th century, researches showed that the Pauline communities presented a cross-section of society itself. Unlike organizations such as sports clubs or other voluntary unions, Pauline communities welcomed members from all social classes. Perhaps members from the highest and lowest ranks were absent in them.¹⁰ The majority were not rich. They were slaves, daily wage earners, workers at the port and the like. They had to work hard for their living. For them the message of the cross preached by Paul must have been a fascinating invitation to a God in whose presence no human being can boast (1:29). In his presence no one is superior or inferior on the basis of what one

possesses. In the Corinthian community there was also a minority group who were rich and well-to-do (11:21, 34), who had hoarded things or like Gaius who had possessed a house (Rom 16:23).

3. What Does Paul Say in 1 Cor 11:17-34?

Commentators agree that the reconstruction of the practice of Lord's Supper in Corinth is difficult. One can only say that there were divisions in the community. How such divisions arose and why they persisted in the community are not clear. The exact procedure of the meals also is unknown to us. For the church today, the Lord's Supper/Eucharist has a fixed frame of sacramental celebration, and therefore it differs very much from the practice in Corinth. During the time of Paul's writing the Lord's Supper included a festive meal and a celebration of the memorial of Jesus' salvific act, revealed in his passion, death and resurrection, and as commanded in and modelled after the Last Supper. For them it was a cultic ritual as well as an affair of their daily life. This togetherness of faith and life is absent in today's practice and it makes an exact evaluation of the Corinthian practice difficult.

3.1 Abuses at the Lord's Supper (11:17-22)

At the very beginning of the instruction regarding the Lord's Supper, Paul mentions what he has heard about the Corinthian community: When they assemble as a church (*ekklesia*) there are divisions (*schismata*) and factions (*haireseis*) among them. One may doubt whether these divisions were formed because of the four leaders mentioned in 1:10-12. Here what is meant is the formation of groups on the basis of social and economic status.

Paul's intention is to remind the community to serve the unity of the community and thereby be acceptable to God in the judgment. So the behaviour at the Lord's Supper acquires an eschatological quality.¹¹

The issue in Corinth is mentioned in vv. 20-22: "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. 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" (RSV). Here we have the nature of the celebration in Corinth. It comprised both a meal and breaking of bread and wine i.e., a community meal and the sacramental celebration of the memorial of the Lord. The meal was followed with the bread word and ended with cup word. Many exegetes consider this to be the procedure.¹²

The understanding of the verb *prolambanei* is not unanimous. Should it be taken in a temporal sense or not? If temporal, it means that the rich members, who were the hosts of the common meals, have come earlier than the others and begun to eat, thus leaving the late comers hungry and thirsty during the Lord's Supper which followed. Besides, as the houses were not large enough for all the members, the latecomers had to sit in the *atrium* (courtyard) and not in the *triclinium* (dining hall).¹³ Class consciousness must have played a certain role in this practice. That is why the early comers could eat the meal they have brought without any prick of conscience. This behaviour brings drastically to light the cleavage between the rich and the poor in the one and the same community, which is the body of Christ. The celebration itself loses its

harmony, and the division in the community is perpetuated.¹⁴ With sharp sarcasm Paul says that the rich eat their own supper (*to idion deipnon*) and it is not the Lord's Supper (*kyriakon deipnon*) that they have thought to have practised.

It will be an injustice to Paul to conclude on the basis of the questions in v. 22 that he wanted a separation of the meal from the sacrament. The integration of the community will be endangered if the meal had to be conducted in private houses and the sacramental meal in the 'church.' Such a separation is against the spirit of Paul which has been vehemently expressed in 1 Corinthians.

3.2 The Institution of the Lord's Supper (11: 23-26)

It is in this context that Paul narrates the tradition of the institution of Lord's Supper. He has received this tradition and he will deliver this to his audience in Corinth. It is a treasure that must be handed on faithfully (the verbs *paralambano* and *paradidomi* are technical terms for transferring a *paradosis* (tradition)).¹⁵

The tradition makes it clear that Jesus gives himself to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. "It is for you." Likewise the new covenant is ratified in his blood. Body and blood stand for the whole person. That means, Jesus' total sacrifice for his people, of which the last consequence is his death, becomes present in the Lord's Supper.¹⁶ Jesus gives himself to his disciples. Jesus was delivered on a particular night, and it shows that his sacrifice is a historical event and not a fictional narrative.

The Eucharist is also the sign of the new covenant between God and his people; a covenant that is unique, ratified in the death of Jesus, and irreversible. It will be

celebrated by and in the community “until he comes.” It is the only sign of the eternal covenant and is valid till the end of times. As Paul says, it has also a forensic value and hence it acquires an eschatological significance. Besides, it suggests a parousaic experience of Jesus in the community. Therefore factional behaviour of the members in the community is detrimental to the unity of the community and destroys the spirit of Jesus. The questions of Paul in v. 22 acquire their full import in the context of the covenant. In order to add stress to the point Paul introduces his theology of the cross (11:26).

3.3 Partaking of the Supper unworthily (11:27-34)

After having questioned the behaviour of the Corinthians and making them conscious of the principle of Lord’s Supper by narrating its historical nature Paul now focuses on the consequences of such a shameful attitude to the poor members of the community. It is not only a sin towards the body of Christ but also towards the Lord who is present in the community. They do not understand the sacramental nature of the Eucharist and its realization in the community. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). So they are guilty towards the Lord (11:29). That is why he said in the introduction that they come together not for the better but for the worse (v.17). Many have become sick and some have died due to their faulty conduct. What should have been a blessing becomes a curse due to the character of the rich partakers. So Paul invites them to judge their behaviour lest the eschatological judgment be harsh.

In the final verses Paul gives some practical instructions. When they come together for the Eucharist,

they must wait for those who are late (v. 33). The verb *ekdechesthai* is here understood temporally as in the case of *prolambanei*. The non-temporal sense of accepting one another does not refer to the precise character of the conflict in Corinth. The communal celebration of the Eucharist is more than eating sumptuously and getting satisfied with food. Waiting for the other expresses the solidarity of the community which has come together to celebrate the solidarity of Jesus with humanity. Paul uses the word *koinonia* to denote the participation of the faithful in the bread and cup (10:16), and it reminds one of the communion one experiences in the Eucharist. Consumption of the same bread (Body of Christ) realizes the communion of the members among themselves and with Christ. Those who violate one of these aspects violate the other too. Paul calls such uncharitable handling of the fellow Christians as ‘unworthy participation’ which has caused sickness and death among the members of the community.

4. The Eucharist and Community Building in Corinth – a Failed Experiment?

Corinth had become a centre of Paul’s missionary activity. In spite of his personal involvement in the building up of the church in Corinth he was aware of the shortcomings of the members. They were still groping in darkness, not understanding the meaning of freedom that Jesus has promised them. Barriers created by a human way of thinking controlled their conduct; not only that they did adhere slavishly to the habits learned in their former religion, rituals or ideology. Paul had to use sharp criticism to remind them of their serious failures in the process of becoming a Eucharistic community. Divisions

and factions (11:18-19), egoistic and uncharitable behaviour in the church gathered for the Lord's Supper (11:20-22) and unworthy reception of the body and blood of Christ are a few such offences that Paul names in this section.

The Eucharist builds up the community and unites the members into the body of Christ. According to Paul the church is the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). But he has heard that there are divisions when they come together as the church (11:18). They considered faith as a personal matter having no social overtones. But it has a social dimension. Faith is a communal affair. According to Banks, to embrace the gospel is to enter into a community.¹⁷ They were only physically hungry and had no hunger for unity and communion.¹⁸ That is why Paul says that their coming together is for the worse; the divisions increase because of uncharitable behaviour. Paul applies the term *ekklesia* to this community most insightfully. It is a voluntary union, come together as a household community, as part of a larger, universal congregation. It resembles a family bond. Paul's imagery of the 'body' is most apt to bring out all the nuances of this community. One becomes a member of this body through baptism. "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 12:13; cf. Gal 3:27-28; Rom 6:3-4).

Factionalism destroys the unity of the community that has been united in the same baptism and now come together to celebrate the Eucharist, the source of Christian unity. The table of the Lord is the prime venue to affirm

the 'equality in practice' as expressed by Paul in Gal 2:15.¹⁹ As a result of factionalism they behave uncharitably. Paul calls it contempt for the church (*kataphroneo*) and humiliation for the poor (1 Cor 11:22). Such a celebration "is not the Lord's Supper" (11:20). This contemptuous behaviour is painful for the victims and for Jesus in whose name the community has gathered and who has offered himself fully for them with a view to gathering the people of God. A community cannot be built up when some members behave in such a manner. Besides, such people can be sure of an unfavourable judgment because they have not discerned the body. They behave in open contradiction of the intention of Christ. According to Meeks, "the *communitas* experienced in baptism, in which divisions of role and status are replaced by the unity of brothers and sisters in the new humanity, ought to be visible, in Paul's intention, in the Supper."²⁰

Paul's intention of building up a community of the saved in Corinth has seemingly failed, according to 11:17-34. One can perceive the agony of the apostle that runs through the letter. Conzelmann thinks that Paul wanted to interpret the unity of the community by means of the Lord's Supper.²¹ Therefore he introduces here a relation between the church and the Eucharist. "Since the Lord is identified with such food, those who partake of it may not violate its sacred character and his presence by abuses of individualism, of disregard of the poor, or of idol-worship."²² How foolishly have the Corinthians misunderstood the meaning of the community as the Body of Christ! How adamantly have they persisted in the idolatry of their class consciousness which is incompatible with the Eucharist! How stubbornly have they continued in their class distinctions even in their assembly for the

Eucharistic celebration! In fact 1 Corinthians may be seen as a desperate attempt by their apostle to help them to mend their ways so that the Body of Christ be restored. Paul teaches them as their apostle, admonishes them as their father and nourishes them as their mother. Meditating upon their misbehavior Paul proposes the only solution in ch. 13. It is none other than love, the more excellent way.

5. The Eucharist and the Challenge of Community Building in India

The Eucharist is the most eminent symbol of Jesus' salvific act for humanity. In the last supper he made it clear that the kenotic self-gift has to continue till everything consummates in God. In the Eucharistic celebration he breaks himself for his brothers and sisters in order to be with them and to save them. The Eucharist becomes the principle of the unity of his community. This is my body... this is my blood. By consuming his body and blood the community is transformed into the body of Christ. It has to represent him in its daily life and live out the freedom which he lived and to which his community is called. Therefore the Eucharist challenges the church to realize the freedom of the children of God.

The Church in India, as the Indian society itself, is a complex reality. The gospel of Christ reached India in the first decades of our era, after Jesus' resurrection, through one of his apostles. There were Christian migrations to this land. The spread and missionary activity of the ancient Indian church is yet to be explored. With the arrival of the European missionaries the church began to grow by breaking the barriers of culture, language and caste. With the Dutch and English missionaries Protestantism also began to spread to the expanses of India. During the past

200 years the church has taken roots in all the remote areas of the land. Therefore we do not see a homogenous Indian church. Each mainline church has members from various castes and classes. Theoretically speaking what unites them is faith in Jesus Christ, baptism in his name and participation in his body and blood. Practically, the Indian church, either Catholic or non-Catholic, is a divided church. Caste distinctions and class consciousness are still rampant in the church.

The Indian church is a cross-section of the Indian society. The hallmarks of India and Indian society are abject poverty, casteism, illiteracy of the masses, gender discrimination and violence, institutionalized injustices, all-prevalent corruption, total disregard for the rights of the poor, destruction of life and nature in the name of development, vanity in public life, etc. The majority of the Indians are poor, and they are at the mercy of the immoral alliance of the powerful – the rich, the police, the underground mafia, the landlords, the political parties. These enjoy the land, its resources, bureaucracy, rights and opportunities. It is thus a great challenge for the church to free herself from the fetters of slavery expressed in so many ways.

Being a cross-section of society, the Indian church too has all those characteristics that mark the Indian society. In spite of the gospel of freedom, the church is not free from the bondage of casteism which accord superiority to a few on account of their birth. “A caste is an endogamous group or groups, with a common name, whose members follow a single or many cognate occupations, claim a common origin, and form a homogenous unit, more closely allied to one another than to any other section of the society in which they live”.²³ The Dalits constitute

16.48% or about one fifth of India's population.²⁴ But they are the majority among the Indian Christians, forming almost two thirds of all the Indian Christians together.²⁵ They have abandoned their traditional religions and embraced Christianity in order to lead a life of dignity, because no caste distinctions exist in that religion. This is analogous to the spread of the Jesus movement in the Mediterranean world mainly attracting the downtrodden and the depressed classes. The gospel offered them a ray of light in the hopeless and dark tunnel of their otherwise colourless lives. But it is a matter of shame that the church has not yet grown to understand the full implications of Jesus' gospel of freedom.

Another important aspect is the petty provincialism and narrow-minded linguistic affiliation of some of the Christian groups which discard the universal character of the gospel and its liberative dynamic. These factors, however, hinder joint efforts of the Christians to eradicate social evils and spread gospel values. Caste, colour, place of origin, etc., still play a role in the church. For example, in promoting vocations, in admission and appointment in the institutions run by the church, in elections to the various offices, boards and councils, etc. The beneficiaries of this inhuman system try to perpetuate it at any cost. In spite of being a minority community in India, the church fails to mobilise its resources to fulfil its task of witnessing to the gospel in India. The Indian church has to face the challenge of becoming the light of the world and salt of the earth. A church which is united at the table of the Lord and nourished by the Eucharist has a witness value. In fact, the Eucharist challenges Christians in India to build a community on the foundation of its Eucharistic experience.

How is the church in India going to face the reality of poverty in this land and in the world? The church has to be broken for the life of the world. The church has to see Jesus not only in the broken bread and but in the sufferings of a broken humankind. A Eucharistic community has no choice other than to embrace the world and its sufferings because it is Jesus who was broken for the community and who is present in the broken bodies of our needy brethren. In fact it is a pivotal missionary challenge for the church in India where the gospel is being preached. Since disregard for the poor is the norm in society, the church must whet its dedication to form a community that witnesses and practises the brokenness of the bread that is Jesus. Casteism exacerbates poverty, and in order to break this vicious circle one needs the courage of Jesus. He offered himself on the cross for healing the wounds of a broken world. The sufferings and afflictions of humanity cannot be left unheeded by a Eucharistic community. Jesus' brokenness should lead the community that celebrates the breaking of the bread to break themselves to heal the intolerable wounds and vulnerability of our world. Only thus can a Eucharistic community be called by that name.

One of the means will be the collection of alms for the saints (1 Cor 16:1-3), as encouraged by the pillar apostles (Gal 2:10). It is a reminder of the Christian obligation to love one another.²⁶ The fundamental reality of poverty in all its dimensions should penetrate the thought and action of the church so that it initiates programmes that would solidify the unity of the church and demolish the walls of separation. Caste is against the will of God, and the church must dare to take bold steps leading to the formation of a community of worshippers who adore God with the

freedom of his children. Concrete ways that foster solidarity has to be explored with a view to practicing the will of God as expressed by Jesus in his table-fellowships. Because discrimination in the name of caste is not only an obstacle to social progress but also contrary to Christian ethical principles.²⁷

5.1 The Church – the Table Fellowship of Jesus

Paul was aware of the frailty of the Corinthians that they behaved as ordinary human beings (1 Cor 3:3). There were strife, jealousy, caste and class distinctions in the Church at Corinth. The celebration of the Lord's Supper brought the rich and the poor together, but the church was characterised by an inner social stratification that was responsible for much of the tensions in its communal life.²⁸ Therefore Paul was keen to promote attendance in the Eucharist with a sense of solidarity. For the community and its unity the Lord's Supper is indispensable (1 Cor 10:11-17). Since the issue in Corinth was one of social cohesiveness and not theological dispute, acceptance of and waiting for the other is a must in order to overcome divisive tendencies.²⁹ 'Coming together as a church' points to the solidarity that arises out of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. They share the same body of the exalted Lord and must grow into that body (10:17). The verb 'gather together' appears five times in vv. 17-22 and 33-34. By not sharing the food they dishonour the Lord in two ways: by ignoring the have-nots and eating one's own meal and by not properly remembering the Lord and thereby hindering the formation of the community.³⁰

With the gift of the self Jesus enters into a new relationship with the believers. He begins to live in them,

or better, they become members of *a body* with him. Paul underlines it in 1 Cor 10:16-17. According to St. Augustine the principle of unity is nowhere more visible than in the Eucharist. We are received into his body, we become his members, and are what we receive.³¹ Can the rich and forward individuals and communities in the Indian church wait for the poor and backward persons and communities?

When we think of the Eucharist naturally we are reminded of the table fellowship of Jesus. His table fellowship was with the publicans and sinners (Mt 8:31; 21:31; Lk 6:20; 12:12-14; 14:15-24). His contemporaries have been scandalised by his conduct and they questioned him (Mt 9:11; Lk 7:35; 15:2) because it was a revolutionary act. Jesus had a new experience of God and a new understanding of community. Meals were the most effective means for Jesus to express his solidarity with the poor. Therefore, when caste discrimination enters into the celebration of the Eucharist the sin becomes sacrilege.³² The Jesus Movement gathered momentum among the poor because of his oneness with and sympathy for them which was expressed by his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus' meals with the tax-collectors and sinners have been always remembered whenever early Christian fellowship meals were celebrated.³³ The church needs to be afraid of only becoming a "noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1) and of nothing else. Love is capable of everything – also of making a united Eucharistic community out of people of all castes, classes and races.

Conclusion

Conflict in the community in Corinth had many reasons and it showed its ugly head during the celebration of the

Lord's Supper. As the father and founder of the community in Corinth Paul was deeply perturbed and he pointed out their failures in unmistakable terms. It is the Eucharist that nourishes and rejuvenates the church and builds it up. Therefore the egoistic behaviour of the rich members who eat beforehand and do not wait for the weaker members who come late is detrimental to the unity of the community. They come with the good intention of celebrating the Eucharist but the result is worse, i.e., they show no solidarity with the poor, and the disharmony grows whereas Jesus was always a friend of the poor.

In India the situation of the Church resembles that of the Corinthian Church. The diversity of the members of the church, the coldblooded apathy of the rich towards the poor, the still persisting untouchability and the consciousness of caste, class and colour and the feeling of humiliation and unwantedness in the church experienced by the poor – all these are challenges faced by the Indian church as a whole and the local churches in particular. On the face of such glaring injustices how can an authentic Eucharistic community be built up? This challenge has to be boldly faced by the church. In the apostolic exhortation *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (§ 28) Pope John Paul II wrote: "I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These evils are present – albeit to a different degree – even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognised as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the

authenticity of our Eucharistic celebration is judged.”

¹ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987) 73 writes: “The ‘emerging consensus’ that Malherbe reports seems to be valid: A Pauline congregation generally reflected a fair cross-section of urban society.” See also G. Theissen, “Social Stratification in the Corinthian community” in his *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, ed. and tr. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 69-119 and Helmut Merklein, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (ÖTK 7; Vol. I; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1992) 31-42.

² Cf. Alfred Suhl, *Paulus und seine Briefe: Ein Beitrag zur paulinischen Chronologie* (SNT 11; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1975) 115.

³ William R. Baird, “‘One against the Other’: Intra-church Conflict in 1 Corinthians”, in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) 116-136.

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 526.

⁵ S. Hafemann, “Letters to the Corinthians,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* 174.

⁶ Brown, *Introduction*, 526-28.

⁷ T. Schmeller, *Schulen im Neuen Testament? Zur Stellung des Urchristentums in der Bildungswelt seiner Zeit* (HBS 30; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2001) 103-126.

⁸ M.M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993) 1 considers 1 Cor 1:10 as the “thesis statement” of the whole letter.

⁹ R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community. The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 32.

¹⁰ E.W. Stegemann – W. Stegemann, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte. Die Anfänge im Judentum und die Christusgemeinden in der mediterranen Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997) 71-74.

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- ¹¹ Juan Peter Miranda, "Solidarität und Feier des Herrnmahls", *Paulus* (Stuttgart: KBW, 2008) 48.
- ¹² Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 610-11; U. Schnelle, *Apostle Paul. His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 196-97; T. Schmeller, "Der erste Korintherbrief" in M. Ebenr – S. Schreiber (ed.), *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (KST 6; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008) 319-20.
- ¹³ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth. Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1983) 168-69.
- ¹⁴ A group of exegetes postulates the meal after the bread word and before the cup word. In this case *prolambanei* is not understood temporally but simply to mean 'to consume', suggesting that the rich eat the meal without considering the poor. The poor remain hungry even after the meal. See Schmeller, "Der erste Korintherbrief", 319 and J. Kurianal, "Eating the Lord's Supper and Christian Unity (1 Cor 11:17-34)", *Jeevadhara* 38 (2008) 164-77.
- ¹⁵ A. Kretzer, "Paralambano", *EDT* III, 30.
- ¹⁶ Miranda, "Solidarität", 50.
- ¹⁷ Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 35.
- ¹⁸ F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 277.
- ¹⁹ S.B. Marrow, *Paul. His Letters and His Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 138.
- ²⁰ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 159.
- ²¹ H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 172.
- ²² J. A. Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology", *NJBC*, 1411.
- ²³ M. Dhavamony, "Christianity and Societies Based on a System of Caste" (e.g., India), *Concilium* 130 (10/1979) 87. Cf. S. Painadath, "Church as the Continuation of the Table-Fellowship of Jesus" in Rosario Rocha – Kuruvilla Pandikatt (ed.), *Dreams and Visions. New Horizons for an Indian Church* (Pune: JDV, 2002) 71-91.
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- ²⁴ F. Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges. Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005) 113.
- ²⁵ R. Jabamalai, "The Problem of Caste within the Church" in T. Kadankavil (ed.), *Religion and Politics from Subaltern Perspectives* (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 1999) 50.
- ²⁶ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 110.
- ²⁷ Dhavamony, "Christianity and Societies", 91.
- ²⁸ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) 71.
- ²⁹ G. Theissen, *Essays on Corinth: The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 3. Cf. Errol D'Lima, "Eucharist in Paul: Table-fellowship with Charity", *Jnanadeepa* 12 (2009) 178-93.
- ³⁰ G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 558-59.
- ³¹ Augustinus, Sermo 57,7: PL 38,389. Cf. also Sermo 227: PL 38, 1099-100.
- ³² Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (New York: Orbis, 1984) 156. Sobrino calls the behaviour of Peter at Antioch casteism and says that Paul had opposed it (Gal 2: 11-16).
- ³³ G. Soares Prabhu, "The Table Fellowship of Jesus. Its Significance for Dalit Christians in India Today", *Jeevadhara* 22 (1992) 140-59.

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