

Kurien Kunnumpuram in Wikipedia

Rev. Kurien Kunnumpuram S.J. (8 July 1931- 23 October 2018) is a Roman Catholic, Indian Jesuit priest and well-known Christian theologian. Member of the academic staff of the Faculty of Theology at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV), Pune (India) (Emeritus), he contributed in the field of ecclesiology, particularly with regard to Vatican II.[1]

After a stroke and a fall, he was admitted in the hospital in September 2018. He passed away peacefully on Oct 23, 2018. He was the founder-publisher-editor of Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies,[2] from 1998 to 2010. He was also the founding editor of JDV's Encyclopedia of Indian Christian Theology, till 2009. He was the editor of AUC: Asian Journal of Religious Studies.[3] His Theological Journey After having taught Catholic theology for more than fifty years, Prof Kurien visualises Church as a community of faith and hope. He is optimistic about God's ever-growing presence in the world. His basic theological outlook can be summarised as follows:

God: The Deepest Human Longing

Faith in God is the foundation of his theology. This faith is based on his personal experience of God, and not on the rational arguments for the existence of God. Besides, he finds faith in God quite meaningful. For only God "meets the deepest longings of the human heart which is never fully satisfied with what this world can offer".[4]

And only God provides a fully adequate answer to the ultimate questions of humankind about life and destiny. Moreover, the common experience of humanity leads to faith in God. As Vatican II points out, "For their part, however, believers of whatever religion has always heard His revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. But when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible".[5] Perhaps the most beautiful statement on God in the Bible is this: "God is love".[6] The nature of God is love. It is remarkable that the official creeds of the Church usually speak of God as omnipotent, as all powerful. And the liturgical prayers are mostly addressed to almighty God, eternal King or supreme Lord and never to the all-loving God.[7] And it is out of love that God created the world. Vatican he has given us a comprehensive explanation of our faith in creation: This one and only true God, of His own goodness and almighty power, not for the increase of His own happiness, nor for the acquirement of His perfection, but in order to manifest His perfection through the benefits which He bestows on creatures, with absolute freedom of counsel, "from the beginning of time made at once out of nothing both

orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal, that is, the angelic and the earthly, and then the human creature, who as it were, shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body”.[8] This statement makes it quite clear that God did not create the world in order to get anything for himself. In fact, there is no need of God’s that we can supply, no luxury of His that we can provide. Actually, God created world to bestow his blessings on his creatures and to give them a share in his own goodness.

Further, Kunnumpuram holds that God’s saving work is based on love. As Vatican II has stated, God in His goodness and wisdom chose to reveal Himself and his plan of salvation. “Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to humans as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself”.[9] The Fourth Gospel affirms: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life”. [10] Thus God’s saving plan which was revealed gradually and which culminated in Jesus Christ was from beginning to end based on his love for human-kind and the world. It is part of our faith that God is one and three. Obviously, the Triune God is beyond the grasp of our finite minds. And human language cannot adequately express the mystery of God. This is what the Church means when it teaches that God is incomprehensible and ineffable. All the same, the doctrine of the Trinity has a great significance for the Christian community as well as human society at large. As Vatican II points out: “Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, ‘that all may be one... as we are one’[11] opened up vistas closed to human reason. For He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons and the union of God’s children in truth and charity”.[12] It is the faith of the Catholic Church that Jesus Christ, whom God has sent to us, is truly God and truly man composed of a rational soul and a body.[13] But unfortunately, people have not always taken the humanity of Jesus seriously. For many, Jesus is only the divine Lord. But the New Testament pictures Jesus as a true human being. John unhesitatingly declares: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us”.[14]

The Church: A Divine-Human Reality

For a casual observer the Church is just a social reality – an association of human beings who profess a common faith, who participate in a common worship and who endeavour to live by a common ethical code. But for believing Christians the Church is also a faith reality. There is a grace-filled depth to the Church. In the Apostles’ Creed we profess: “We believe in the holy Catholic Church.” It is the faith understanding of the Church that will be articulated here. The Church is not a purely human enterprise. God is at work in the origin and development of the Church. That is what we Christians believe. St. Paul speaks of “the Church of God that is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2). This probably refers to the local Christian community there. In The Bible “the Church of the living God”[15] most likely denotes the entire worldwide assembly of the followers

of Jesus Christ. The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) spoke of the mystery of the Church. The Church is a mystery because it is part of God’s plan of salvation. In the New Testament, particularly in the Letters of Paul, mystery refers to the divine design for the salvation of humankind. It was God’s plan to offer to everyone the possibility of salvation and to assemble in the Church all those who would believe in his Son.[16]

1. This plan was realized in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. What was once achieved in Christ is now being effected in the lives of the faithful through the work of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Church is thus seen to be part and parcel of God’s plan to save all humankind in Christ Jesus.

When we say that the Church is a mystery we not only mean that the Church is part of God’s plan of salvation for humankind but also that God is at all times present and active in the Church. As Pope Paul VI stated: “The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.”[17] The expression, the Church of God, also signifies a Church that is rooted in the experience of God. Just as Israel originated in the experience of the liberating God in Exodus, so too the Christian Church sprang up from the experience of the saving God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One becomes a member of the Church by sharing this experience. Against this background we can see how significant it is that in Ecclesia in Asia Pope John Paul II exhorts the Church to be ever more deeply “rooted in the experience of God which flows from a living faith.”[18] Only then can the Church fulfil its vocation to be a meeting place of God and human beings. As the Pope declares: “The Church cannot therefore be understood merely as a social organization or agency of human welfare. Despite having sinful men and women in her midst, the Church must be seen as the privileged place of encounter between God and human beings, in which God chooses to reveal the mystery of his inner life and carry out his plan of salvation for the world.”[19]

The Church: Its Vision and Mission

From the earliest days of its existence the Church was aware that it has the same mission as Jesus: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”.[20] Now the Kingdom was central to the life and mission of Jesus. It is the main theme of his preaching,[21] the referent of his parables[22] and the content of his symbolic actions (Lk 11:20; 15:1-3). Hence, the Church too has the mission to work of the establishment of God’s Kingdom. Unfortunately, some change took place in the Church’s understanding of its mission. Many Catholics tended believe that the Kingdom of God is already come and it is present in the Catholic Church. This led to a different way of looking at mission. It was held that the goal of the Church’s mission was the salvation of souls to be brought about through the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, especially baptism. However, it gradually dawned on the Church that God can save

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[Continued from p. 159] souls (humans) without the help of the Church. This led to a new approach to mission. The purpose of the Church's mission, it was now believed, was the planting of the Church in every new places and among even new peoples and cultures. In course of time even this understanding of the Church's mission was found to be not fully satisfactory.[23]

Vatican II has stated that the Church has received from Christ the mission to proclaim and establish God's Kingdom here on earth. In the post-Councilar period to both Paul VI and John Paul II held such a view.

Taking these developments into account, he wishes to adopt a holistic approach to the mission of the Church. To his mind the mission of the Church is to collaborate with God in God's work for the wholeness of the human person, the human community and the cosmos according to the pattern revealed in Jesus Christ. It is an essential element of the Judaeo-Christian tradition that God is present and active in this world of ours. The purpose of God's activity is the promotion of salvation. Wholeness is the nearest English expression for the biblical idea of salvation. But salvation is to be understood in a comprehensive sense. Lots of Catholics still think of salvation as something purely spiritual (salvation of the soul), merely individual (my salvation) and totally other-worldly (salvation in heaven). But Vatican II has rediscovered the richness of the biblical view of salvation. According to the Council, salvation is something personal (spiritual-corporeal), communitarian, societal, and both this-worldly as well as other-worldly. It is a process that begins here and now but which will find its final fulfillment in the age to come.[24]

In recent times, we are becoming increasingly more aware of the cosmic dimension of salvation. The destiny of humankind and that of the cosmos are inextricably intertwined. In the past, Christians often thought of their relationship to the world in terms of domination, possession, use and enjoyment. There was little awe and wonder before the mystery of the universe. This arrogant and irreverent attitude to creation is largely responsible for the serious ecological crisis we are facing today. But there is in the Christian tradition as well as in the Indian tradition a search for harmony and a quest for communion with nature. In fact, the final destiny of humankind is thought of as life in the new heaven and on the new earth. God is at work transforming the world so that the new humanity which God is fashioning may have a fit dwelling-place.[25]

All this is to be understood according to the pattern revealed in Jesus Christ, according to Kunnumpuram. What is revealed in Jesus Christ is God's offer of unconditional love to sinful human beings. The God of Jesus Christ is not an angry, avenging deity, but a God of mercy and compassion, who lets Him sun shine on the good and the wicked. It is also revealed in Jesus Christ that a person who accepts God's offer of love and surrenders him/herself to this God of love, is totally transformed. S/he becomes genuinely free and is ready to give herself/himself away in selfless love and self-sacrificing service. It is finally manifested in Christ that death leading to a fuller, richer life is the law of human existence.[26] [From Wikipedia, July 10, 2019]