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## The Salvific Significance of Other Faiths in the Teachings of Post-Conciliar Documents

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**Abstract:** The Second Vatican Council articulated a paradigm shift in the church's self-understanding and her relationship with the people of other faiths. The Council opened a new vision of the Church and her mission in the world. Against this background this article dialogue with the post-conciliar understanding of the Church's mission and the vision of late Kurien Kunnumpuram concerning the Church's relationship with the adherents of other faiths. In a world where intellectual arguments and scientific proofs versus the divine truths, genuine Christian witness based on faith experience play a vital role to convey the gospel message. For Kunnumpuram, the Church is the home for all people and religions. As he acknowledges the salvific meaning of other religions, he encourages Christians to appreciate the positive values in those religions. Therefore, this article attempt to respond to the views of Kunnumpuram Kurien, in the light of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio* and *Ecclesia in Asia*.

**Keywords:** Salvation, mission, Kingdom of God, other faiths, evangelization, proclamation, witness, dialogue.

## Introduction

In the contemporary world, there is a growing awareness that the Church need to be attentive to the temporal affairs of humankind. The post-conciliar documents have shown the need for a more holistic understanding of the Church's mission. Hence we ask: how do we account for the salvation of adherents of other faiths in the light of post-conciliar documents? According to Kunumpuram, the Church's positive approach to other religions calls for a radical rethinking of the missions. For him, missionary activity is "the manifestation of God's will and the fulfilment of that will in the world and world history."<sup>1</sup> He finds a paradigm shift in the Church's self-understanding and her relationship with the world. The post-conciliar documents find in other religious traditions immeasurable 'seeds of the Word' and consider them as a true 'preparation for the Gospel'. John Paul II exhorts: Though we appreciate the spiritual and moral goods God has bestowed on every people, we do not separate those gifts from Jesus Christ, who is at the centre of God's plan of salvation. *Ecclesia in Asia* affirms: Jesus is the universal Mediator between God and people for their salvation. The documents add that even for those who do not explicitly profess faith in him as the Saviour. Salvation comes as a grace from Jesus Christ through the communication of the Holy Spirit.

## Mission of the Church in the Post-Conciliar Documents

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Paul VI gives a synthesis of the Church's religious and secular mission as he states "the Church is certainly not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and dissociate herself from humans' temporal problems"<sup>2</sup>. In his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II, explores the theme of the kingdom of God

and highlights it as the purpose of Jesus' mission, precisely, the proclamation and establishment of God's kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the Church is called to partake with God's liberative activity. The post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation by John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* deals with the new evangelisation in Asia. The document emphasises that "The Church's first purpose then is to be the sacrament of the inner union of the human person with God."<sup>4</sup> In this light, we proceed to explore the significance of evangelization and missionary activities in a multi-religious context.

### a. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

The background of the formulation of the Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Paul VI was 10th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. The main objective of this Apostolic exhortation is stated as to make the Church of the 20th century ever better fitted for proclaiming the gospel to the people of this century.<sup>5</sup> On 22 June 1973 Paul VI reminded the Sacred College of Cardinals to search for means to convey Christian message to the modern world. He further added, "it is absolutely necessary for us to take into account a heritage of faith that the Church has the duty of preserving in its untouchable purity, and of presenting it to the people of our time, in a way what is as understandable and persuasive as possible."

<sup>6</sup> In the following, we analyze major themes which Paul VI discusses in the document about the mission of the Church in the present context.

#### 1. Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

The core of the Christian mission is the transformation of the present. This involves a conversion of the human heart, which in turn calls for a conversion of the society. Thus, the Christian community has become the salt, light and

leaven in society (cf. Mt 5:13-14), all of which are minority images. Paul VI repeated this call in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, “For the Church evangelizing means bringing the Good news into all the dimensions of human life and society and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”<sup>7</sup> It combines splendidly a wide spectrum of views expressed in the Synod of Bishops in 1974 and thus arrives at a global concept of evangelization. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* asserts the need for the proclamation of the kingdom of God. He explains that it would lead more human persons to understand and to sincerely accept the good news. Through the power of this acceptance and of shared faith, they may gather together in Jesus’ name in order to seek together the kingdom, to build it and to live it. He affirms that the proclamation of the Christ-event and proclamation of the kingdom of God are complementary.<sup>8</sup> The mission is centred on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which gives universal scope to his message.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the proclamation of the good news by the Church should be the proclamation of the values of the kingdom.

## 2. Commitment to Evangelization

A decade after Vatican II, Paul VI underlined the essential nature of the kingdom of God in Church’s Evangelization. Jesus himself, the good news of God, and he preached the message of the kingdom of God. The core of his proclamation is salvation i.e., liberation from sin and oppressive evils. Jesus had accomplished it through his death and resurrection. However, it must be carried out in order to be realised fully on the day of the final coming of Christ.<sup>10</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* highlights that Christ is not only an external model of evangeliser but is the effective intimate cause of the evangelisation. The Church is an evangeliser. However, she begins by being evangelised

herself. She is the community of believers therefore, “she has a constant need of being evangelised, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel.” This constant conversion and renewal are necessary in order to evangelise the world with credibility. The purpose of evangelisation is interior change through the divine power of message she proclaims.<sup>11</sup> Evangelisation is not identical with the cultures, but the hearers of the gospel message are linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Therefore “every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelisation of culture or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the gospel is not proclaimed.”<sup>12</sup> Hence, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* clarifies further that even in the face of the highest forms of natural religions, the Church believes that she has a unique mission on earth: to be the sacrament of salvation, which, in the words of Kunnumpuram as the sacrament of unity.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the good news of the kingdom of God is meant for all people of all place and times.

## 3. Witnessing Life and Explicit Proclamation

Christians are called to lead a witnessing life by which they transmit gospel values and become true evangelizers. However, witnessing life remains insufficient, which points to the necessity of due explanations of it. In other words, proclamation and witness life are as essential as two sides of a coin. For the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentic Christian life, based on the love of God in communion with one’s own neighbour.<sup>14</sup> The exhortation points out that the good news proclaimed by the witness of life has to be substantiated by the word of God. There is “no true evangelization unless

the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are proclaimed.”<sup>15</sup> In this respect, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* assigns a prominent place for kerygma and catechesis have given an important role in evangelization. The proclamation attains full development when it is listened, accepted and assimilated, and when it arouses a genuine adherence in its hearers.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, evangelization has to begin with the witnessing life of Christians. Christians are called to be like heaven to transform the society in which they live.

#### b. *Redemptoris Missio*

The missionary thinking of the Church is often articulated in certain remarkable mission documents. John Paul II’s Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* is one of them which has assigned due importance for both theological and practical dimensions of mission. One can find this document as positive and optimistic teaching to lead, guide, encourage and challenge the whole Church to a renewed commitment of mission, to re-evangelization and new-evangelization. John Paul II highlights that “it is the Spirit that impels the Church to proclaim Christ and also guides it to discover its gifts to other people, to foster them and receive in dialogue.”<sup>17</sup> The kingdom of God brought about by Christ and in Christ. The Church continues his mission by works and prayer for its perfect and definitive realization.

##### 1. Kingdom of God in the Person of Jesus

God manifested his plan of salvation for all in the person of Jesus of Christ. After receiving the Holy Spirit at his Baptism, he declared “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:14-15; cf. Mt 4:17; Lk 4:43). The proclamation and establishment of God’s kingdom are the purposes of his

mission. However, the novelty and vitality of his message and identity as a messenger is that Jesus himself is the “Good News.” He declares at the very beginning of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth when he applies to himself the words of Isaiah about the anointed One sent by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. Lk 4:14-21). Hence, John Paul II highlights that since the “Good News is Christ, there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing and being. His power, the secret of the effectiveness of his actions, lies in his total identification with the message he announces; he proclaims the Good News not just by what he says or does, but by what he is.”<sup>18</sup> We continue our discussion by portraying Church’s mission as the servant of kingdom.

##### 2. The Church as the Servant of the Kingdom

There are different ways of looking at the mission of the Church. John Paul II affirms that the Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the kingdom. The Church serves the kingdom by spreading the gospel values and guiding people to mature in their faith. Kunnumpuram substantiates that the mission of the Church is to establish the kingdom of God; in other words, it is to bring about the liberation of humanity. Consequently, the Church is at the service of humanity, and she has a ministerial role in the world. However, it is not only purely spiritual or other worldly undertaking; rather, it is also concerned with the welfare of human beings here on earth. He cautions, we must not reduce the mission of the Church into mere a humanitarian service but need to emphasize the religious dimension of the mission of humankind. Because it is concerned with the ultimate meaning and purpose of human life.<sup>19</sup> While carrying other activities such as dialogue, promotion of human dignity, commitment to justice and

peace, education and the care for the sick and abandoned, Church serves the kingdom by her intercession.

### 3. Commitment to Evangelization and Dialogue

Inter-religious dialogue is one of the most widely discussed and debated topics in the socio-religious circle today. *Redemptoris Missio* understands inter-religious dialogue as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment. It is not in opposition to the mission; indeed, it has special links with the mission and is one of its expressions.<sup>20</sup> In light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in inter-religious dialogue. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* warns that dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that “the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation”.<sup>21</sup> In dialogue, conviction and openness are held in balance, and the partners speak as religiously committed persons on subjects of common interest. The Christian missionary, while listening and sharing the religious experience with others, does not compromise with his or her Christian identity but continues to witness and proclaim the Gospel message in all circumstances. The dynamics of dialogue should lead Christians to listen and to understand that which other believers communicate to in order to profit from the gifts which God bestows so generously.<sup>22</sup> Kunnumpuram suggests that renouncing all sense of superiority, one can consider dialogue as a “sign of respect, as an act of love, as an expression of the search for the fullness of truth or as a means of fostering mutual understanding-in the concrete situation of India.”<sup>23</sup> The Church in India takes up seriously the task of inter-religious dialogue and collaboration with people of other faiths.

### c. *Ecclesia in Asia*

In the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, John Paul II reiterates the teachings of *Redemptoris Missio*. While he stresses the necessity of proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world, he strongly emphasises the urgency of inter-religious dialogue and the service of human promotion.<sup>24</sup> According to Kunnumpuram concerning the theological understanding of the Church’s mission, *Ecclesia in Asia* does not go beyond *Redemptoris Missio*.<sup>25</sup> However, this exhortation highlights practical ways to fulfil the mission in the concrete situation of Asia today. In the following, we narrow down our focus to three important concepts discussed in *Ecclesia in Asia*, namely, the centrality of the Holy Spirit, Word of God, and the gospel witness.

#### 1. Centrality of the Holy Spirit

In *Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II presents his vision for doing Christian mission in Asia. He gives strong affirmation to the need for a new drive for evangelizing in Asia and expressed a fervent hope that Asia will turn to Christ in the third millennium. He also emphasizes the centrality of the Holy Spirit and Word of God in presenting the mystery of Christ through the active participation in the liturgy. The Holy Spirit is the first manifestation of the love of the Triune God and is present in the world as its life-giving force. John Paul II explains, “Universal presence of the Holy Spirit, therefore, cannot serve as an excuse for failure to proclaim Jesus Christ explicitly as the one and only Saviour. On the contrary, the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from universal salvation in Jesus.”<sup>26</sup> It is the function of the Spirit to preserve the bond of communion between Christ and his Church, empower and

shape the Church to continue and to accomplish his mission as the seed of the kingdom of God as she looks eagerly for its final coming.<sup>27</sup> Her identity and mission are inseparable from the kingdom of God, which Jesus announced and inaugurated in all that he said and did, above all in his death and resurrection. The Spirit completes Jesus' mission with creative newness and diversity of charismas in fellowship and communion of communities.

## 2. Centrality of the Word of God

The Word of God, and a community's faith response to it are essentials for the effective mission of the Church. God makes Godself known to his children as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters His Word in the Holy Spirit. Christian communities have to be rooted in the experience of God which flows from a living faith and this will mould them as more authentic witnesses which will enable them to proclaim the fulfillment of God's kingdom in Jesus to others. In order to fulfill this task one needs to have attentive and faithful reading and contemplation of the Word of God.<sup>28</sup> *Dei Verbum* affirms that throughout the history of the Church people of God have always found strength in the Word of God, and in present time also the ecclesial community grows by hearing, celebrating and studying the Word of God.<sup>29</sup> Benedict XVI writes, "The Word, who from the beginning is with God and is God, reveals himself in the dialogue between the divine persons, and invites us to share in that love."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, created in the image and likeness of God who is love, humankind can understand the identity as children of God and members of His kingdom only in accepting the word of God and in docility to the work of the Holy Spirit.

## 3. Centrality of the Gospel Witness

In every case it is clear that there can be no true proclamation of the Gospel unless Christians offer the witness of lives in harmony with the message they preach. The Apostolic exhortation reminds: "The Church is called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power; by not seeking her own glory and material wealth; by using her resources to serve the poorest of the poor and by imitating Christ's own simplicity of life."<sup>31</sup> . The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary which is taking place in the Christian family, and in the ecclesial community. The Christian family and community of believers reveal a new way of living by striving to imitate Jesus of gospel. This way of life is the best possible way of being a missionary.<sup>32</sup> The people of today "put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories"<sup>33</sup> Missionary activities are not limited to the preaching but extend to the involvement of humanitarian movements of the society such as in the schools and hospitals, among the migrants, and tribals, and in the pursuit of justice and human rights.<sup>34</sup> Church in Asia has blessed with many missionaries who bore heroic witness to God's love among the peoples of the continent in the past. Their missionary spirit and zeal have become an inspiration for Christians in Asia to witness Jesus Christ and his Gospel.<sup>35</sup> We continue our discussion of the concept of salvation in the post-conciliar documents.

### *Salvation in the Post-Conciliar Documents*

Acts of the Apostles more concretely affirms: "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved"

(Acts 4:10:12). The incarnation of the Son of God united himself with every human being. Therefore, believers are obliged to hold the truth that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing the merits of the paschal mystery of Jesus.<sup>36</sup> With this in mind, in the following paragraphs we briefly analyze the concept of salvation and the salvific significance of other religious traditions in the light of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio* and in *Ecclesia in Asia*.

a. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on Salvation

Basing on the Scripture and tradition the Church is deeply aware of her duty to preach the good news of salvation to all including people of other religious traditions. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Paul VI highlights: neither respect and esteem for other religions nor the questions raised by people of other faiths prevent Church from the proclamation of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, the Church acknowledges that entire humanity has the right to know the mystery of Christ and his message. The Church respects and recognizes other religious traditions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They are in search of God and have a quest which is “incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart.”<sup>37</sup> They inherited an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts, rituals and customs by which they relate to ultimate reality. Therefore, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* affirms: other religions traditions are all impregnated with immeasurable ‘seeds of the Word’ and can represent a true ‘preparation for the Gospel’.<sup>38</sup> Acknowledging that the gospel message is not reserved to a small group but is destined for everyone, Church continues her mission to proclaim the good news of salvation to people of all time and all places.

b. *Redemptoris Missio* on Salvation

The universal salvific will of God and salvation in Christ is asserted throughout the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and people: “For there is one God, and there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human who gave himself as a ransom for all”, (1Tm 2:5-7; Heb 4:14-16). Therefore, no one can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. John Paul II points out that participated forms of mediation “acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ’s own mediation”.<sup>39</sup> And they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to him. The universality of salvation refers that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church rather salvation is offered to all, and it must be made concretely available to entire humanity.<sup>40</sup> However, as in the past, many people do not have opportunity to come to know Jesus Christ or accept his gospel. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by “virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation.”<sup>41</sup> This grace comes from the merit of Christ’s death and resurrection; and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. In order to attain salvation each person need to cooperate with this offer of salvation in Christ which is gratuitous gift from God the creator all creation.

c. *Ecclesia in Asia* on Salvation

Christians believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the one Saviour who accomplished the Father’s universal plan of salvation. As the definitive revelation of the mystery of the Father’s love for all, Jesus is indeed unique,

and “it is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history’s centre and goal.”<sup>42</sup> Risen from the dead, Jesus Christ is present to all and to the whole of creation in a new way. In him, values of all religious and cultural traditions, namely mercy and submission to the will of God, compassion and righteousness, non-violence and morality, filial piety and harmony with creation find their fullness and realization.<sup>43</sup> *Ecclesia in Asia* asserts: “Jesus is the one universal Mediator for the salvation of the world. Even for those who do not explicitly profess faith in him as the Saviour, salvation comes as a grace from Jesus Christ through the communication of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>44</sup> Jesus is the Good News for the men and women of every time and place in their search for the meaning of existence, purpose of life and for the truth of their own humanity.

In my readings of Kunnumpuram’s work entitled as *Ways of Salvation: The Salvific Meaning of Non-Christian Religions According to the Teaching of Vatican II*, and his other claims mentioned above his concerns for the people of other faith in terms of Jesus as the unique and universal saviour. His scholarly presentation of the theme in the light of the Second Vatican Council manifests his critical engagement with the teachings of pre-Vatican II and the writings of the fathers of the Church. He addresses the issues concerning the salvation outside the Church and necessity of the Church for salvation. Kunnumpuram understands the Church as the sacrament of unity.<sup>45</sup> For Kunnumpuram, genuine faith accepts Jesus Christ wherever it encounters him.

The theological vision of Kunnumpuram becomes very clear concerning the significance of the Church as a ‘sacrament of salvation’ amidst of religious pluralism. He is in

this sense a visionary who has foreseen the post-conciliar teachings on the theme while developing his theology. He calls for a decentralization of the Church, where the uniqueness of Christ and his good news of salvation are highlighted than the power of the Church and her heritage as an organized institution. Kunnumpuram speaks about people’s model Church that “The Gospel is proclaimed and the people responded to it positively. The Holy Spirit is present in each of the believers, the local community and the whole Church. Led by the Spirit, the local community shapes its ecclesial life in accordance with the socio-cultural situation of the people.”<sup>46</sup> In his writings, we see a blending of teachings of the second Vatican council and post-conciliar documents. When he speaks about the Church as people of God, he invites readers to look at the world and people of other faiths in a wide spectrum.

## Conclusion

We deduce certain concluding remarks from our discussion on the mission of the Church and other faiths in the light of post-conciliar documents and reflection on Kunnumpuram’s writings. Paul VI and John Paul II exhort people of Asia in general and of India, in particular, to proclaim the kingdom of God and engage with the world’s spiritual and temporal affairs. The *Evangelii Nuntiandi* reminds the importance of proclamation and witnessing life in the multi-religious context of Asia. John Paul II encourages people of India to dialogue with other faiths without compromising one’s own faith and tradition. The post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit, the centrality of the Word of God and its inevitability of witnessing life for the authentic missionary activity of the Church. In a similar



vein, Kunnumpuram's theology reveals the fact that his concerns are post-conciliar. While upholding the teachings of the council that the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation Kunnumpuram, calls for a decentralization of the Church, centring her vision not on herself but altogether on Christ. However, it is essential to understand the particular context of the other when we engage in dialogue with world religions. Any Holy approach in this context would not be acceptable. The claims mentioned above centring the presence of Christ and the salvation of people of other faiths may appear as mere arbitrary claims unless they are clarified to them. Therefore, it is the task of theologians to elaborate a rich and satisfactory theology remaining faithful to one's own faith and *magisterium* of the Church.

## Notes

1. Kurien Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation: The Salvific Meaning of Non-Christian Religions According to the Teaching of Vatican II* (Pune: Pontifical Athenaem, 1971), 93-94.
2. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 4 December, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 53 (1943), §13. §14. Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, 14.
3. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 4 December, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 53 (1943), §26.
4. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 6 November, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 92 (1999), §24. Kunnumpuram, *The Indian Church of the Future*, 47.
5. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §2.
6. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §3.
7. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §8. Antony, D'Cruz, *The Church and the Kingdom of God: Towards a Contextual*

*Ecclesiology for India*, 107. Kurien Kunnumpuram, "Towards a Theology of Ministries," in *Creative and Affirmative Action in Today's India*, ed. Alwyn D'Silva (Pune: National Vocation Service Center, 1984), 28-29.

8. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §13. Vadakkumpadan, Paul. *Evangelization Today: Understanding the Integral Concept of Evangelization in the Light of Contemporary Trends in the Theology of Mission* (Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1989), 135. Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, 16.
9. Joseph Puthenpurakal, *Evangelizing Mission* (Shillong: DBCIC, 2008), 95.
10. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §9.
11. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §14.
12. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §20. H. Staffner opines that the Church being aware of her mission that the instrument of God's self-communication to people regards the other faiths are not so much as rivals but rather as cultures which have to be purified and perfected by the Spirit. H. Staffner, "Mission Method According to Vatican II," *Indian Missiological Review* 8 (October-1986): 230.
13. M. M James H. Kroeger, "Recent Popes and Interreligious Dialogue," in *Interreligious Dialogue: Catholic Perspective*, ed. M. M James H. Kroeger (Davao City: Mission Studies Institute, 1990), 44-45. John Paul II, cautions Christians that the members of other religions are indeed not lacking the treasures of human spirituality but can make Christians ashamed being themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 4 March, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979), §6.
14. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §41.
15. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §22. Chethimattam states that it is the task of theologians to provide the common

- people a sense of moral and religious values and of meaning in their life emphasized by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. John B. Chethimattam, "Problems of an Indian Christian Theology: A Critique of Indian Theologizing" in *Theologizing in India*, ed. T. K. John, Gispert-Sauch and M. Amaladoss (Bangalore: TPI, 1978), 205.
16. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §§22&23. Staffner, "Mission Method According to Vatican II," 236.
  17. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §29. Michael Amaladoss, "Interreligious Dialogue 50 Years After Vatican II: Challenges and Opportunities," *VidyaJyoti* 79 (February-2015): 88. Pope Francis affirms that the same Spirit everywhere brings forth various forms of practical wisdom which help people to bear suffering and to live in greater peace and harmony." Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013), §254. Amaladoss, "Interreligious Dialogue," 97.
  18. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §13. Kurien Kunnumpuram, "Priests as Prophets of the Lord," in *The Dharma of Jesus: Interdisciplinary Essays in Memory of George Soares-Prahbhu*, ed. Francis X. D'Sa (Gujarath: Gujarath Sahitya Prakash, 1997), 248.
  19. Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, 29.
  20. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §52.
  21. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §3. Sebastian Painadath, "Dialectics between Spirituality and Religion," *Jeevadhara* 42 (2012): 351. Kurien Kunnumpuram, "The Church and Peace," in *World and Peace*, ed. Kurien Kunnumpuram (Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2007), 226.
  22. Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission," in *Interreligious Dialogue: Catholic Perspectives*, ed. M. M James H. Kroeger (Davao: Mission Studies Institute, 1990):5.

23. Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, 25.
24. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §§31&32. Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, 17.
25. Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, 17.
26. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §17. Pope Francis points out that the Holy Spirit enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to build up the Church. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §130.
27. Jonathan Tan Yun-Ka, "Approaches to Christian Mission in India," *Vidyajyoti* 67 (November-2003): 215.
28. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §23.
29. "Dei verbum," §2.
30. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 30 December (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2010), §6.
31. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §43.
32. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42.
33. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42.
34. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42.
35. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, §42.
36. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §6.
37. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, § 53.
38. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, § 53. "Gaudium et spes," §6, "Ad gentes," §11, "Lumen Gentium," §16,17.
39. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §5.
40. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §5.
41. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §5. In the perspective of Felix Wilfred, experience is the gateway to truth therefore the Church in India, cannot close itself on its own experience alone. Hence she has to be open to the new possibilities of "listening to the truth of God's Word and to move on

to the ever new experience of the salvific action of God.” Felix Wilfred, “The Problem of a Valid Starting-Point For Theologizing in India” in *Theologizing in India*, ed. T. K. John, Gispert-Sauch and M. Amaladoss (Bangalore: TPI, 1978), 142.

42. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, § 14. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, § 255.
43. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, § 14.
44. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, § 14.
45. Kurien Kunnumpuram, “The Church as the Sacrament of Unity,” in *The World as Sacrament: Interdisciplinary Bridge-Building of the Sacred and the Secular, Essays in Honour of Joseph Neuner on the Occasion of his 90th Birthday*, ed. Issac Padinjarekuttu, Jacob Parappally and Francis X. D’Sa (Pune: JDV, 1998), 149.
46. Kurien Kunnumpuram, “Inculturation and Ecclesiology,” *Indian Missiological Review* 19 (March 1997): 53. Kurien Kunnumpuram, “Thinking with the Church in the Context of the Second Vatican Council,” *Ignis Studies* 1 (June-1983): 11.

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## A Philosophical Reading of the Theology of Praxis

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the theology of praxis from a philosophical point of view. Taking inspiration from the works of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas, this paper highlights the richness in the understanding of praxis while drawing attention to its complexity. It affirms the importance of language, communication symbols and power structures that are inherent to the theology of praxis. Caution is made not to idealize certain notions like respect and benevolence—however noble they may be—without taking actual cognisance of the actual asymmetrical structure of power relation. An analysis of collective praxis both in terms of conflict and co-operation is done so as to invite the readers to the constant need to be open to new possibilities of appropriating the praxis of Jesus in changing times and contexts.

**Keyword:** Action, communication, language, practice, pragmatic semantics, symbolics