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Pune Journal of Religious Studies

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Befriending the Other



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BEFRIENDING THE OTHER

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Editorial: Befriending the Other

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion (JDV) has celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of its transfer from Kandy, Ceylon to Pune, India in 1955. At the time of transfer JDV was known as the Papal Athaneum, the academic wing of Papal Seminary. In 1994 the Vatican declared Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth and Papal Seminary to be thenceforth two institutions but still related to each other in friendly cooperation. On this auspicious occasion, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth is commemorating this event through various academic and cultural activities including this International Conference on the theme “Befriending the Other” on 24-28 November 2015. The papers in this special double issue of *Jnanadeepa* are selections from this International Conference.

Since the conference takes into account the religious and cultural pluralism of India, Asia and Africa, we want to focus on the living together in harmony. So from diverse theological, philosophical sociological, psychological and anthropological perspectives, we attempt at various means and modes of befriending the others, while preserving the identities (“other”) of the other.

Given the prevalence of terrorist violence,¹ cultural conflicts (“clash of civilizations”), religious rivalries and national struggle in our contemporary world (particularly in the Asian and African context), we are challenged to present

a world-view that engages people and bring them together. It is our Christian responsibility to bring different communities together, so that the diversity of the other as the other is reaffirmed. Such genuine encounter with the other fosters creativity and affirms one's own identity.

In this context the conference aims to encounter the actual situation of conflict and struggle and the consequent suffering that affects thousands of people. Based on these actual experiences of woundedness and pain, the conference explores the larger issues of identity, community and otherness, which are central to our understanding of differences and possible confrontation. This is followed by specific examples of actual living together, with a view to enlarge our horizon of understanding so that we can acknowledge, affirm and accept the other as individual and communities, who are different from (even sometimes opposed to) us.

So the conference is an invitation to genuine encounter between different cultures, communities and groups that fosters creative interaction and harmonious progress.

Some of the topics the Organising Committee proposed for deeper study and reflection are as follows:

Theological Perspectives

- Trinity And Perichoresis: Discovering the Fundamental Human Interrelatedness
- Christ and the Other: The Woman at the Well
- God as the *Ganz Andere* (Totally Other)
- Table Fellowship with the Other: Jesus Approach to the Marginalized
- The Trace of God and the Human Face
- Universalism and Inclusiveness in the Bible
- Boundary Making and Breaking an the Bible
- Is Not Christ the Only Saviour?

- Towards an All-Inclusive and Dialogical Church
- Encountering The Other Religions in Vatican II Documents
- “My Father Was a Wandering Aramaean” OT Perspectives on the Stranger
- Christian Fundamentalism Today: A Theological Perspective
- Fear of the Other and the Genesis of Original Sin
- Christ: The Otherness Of God/ Son as the Otherness of the Father

Religious Dimensions

- The other in Islam
- Judaism: Wanderer
- Hindu Understanding of Other
- The Other in the Jain Tradition
- The Other in the Sikh Tradition
- Washing the Feet of the Guests: Tribal Hospitality Towards the Other.
- The Pagans and the Gentiles: St Paul and The Early Christian Approach to the Other
- The Church’s Approach to the Other Religions: A Historical Evolution
- Quakers and the Treatment of the Other
- One In Many or Many In One? Ecumenical Efforts at Rediscovering Our Fractured Identity and Tradition
- Christian Fundamentalism And Challenge of ‘The Other Faiths’
- Significance of the Other in Church’s Understanding of Other Religions
- Starting with The Family: Befriending in The Domestic Churches

Philosophical Basis

- Oneself as the Other: The Other as Distinct from and Related to Me

- The Other as Constitutive of Me
- The Other as a Phenomenological Thou
- I-Thou Relationship Leading to the Acceptance of the Other
- Identity, Difference and Crisscrossing
- Dancing to Diversity: The Other as The Possibility of Me
- Ricoeur: History, Memory, Forgetting and Befriending
- Derrida: Unconditional Hospitality to The Other
- Levinas: Responsibility to the Other
- Jürgen Habermas and Pope Benedict: Communication and Consensus
- Every Insider as an Outsider Here or There
- Trace of God in the Face of the Other: Levinas

Moral Issues

- The Other: A Moral Dilemma or Opportunity
- Moral Dilemmas in Bioethics
- The Relational-Ethics to the Other
- Feminist Viewpoints
- The Widow and the Orphans: The Women as the Other
- The Valuable and Vulnerable Other: Women Perspectives on Diversity and Differences
- The Unsayable Atrocity on The Female Bodies: Objectifying the Other

Sociobiological/ Psychological Outlook

- Evolution of Altruism in the Animal Species
- Mirror Neuron: Neurological Appraisal of the Other as Other
- In-Group and Out-Group as Binaries in Identity Formation
- The Other: Psychological Perspectives
- Reconciliation as Recognizing the Other
- Desire: Meeting With and Parting From the Other

- Wounded Healers: Transformation through Self-Transformation
- Nomads (Gypsies) as Strangers of Today
- Socio-Economic and Political Angles
- The Poor Does Not Exist: The Economics of the Other as Disregarding Those Without the Buying Power
- The Poor and yhe Marginalized as the Other
- The Caste ss yhe Exclusion of the Other

Identity Formation and Nationalism

- War And Violence: The Wounded Self and the Wounded Other
- Manufacturing Violence: Economic And Political Straggles
- Boundaries And Thresholds: Erasing or Crossing
- The Subaltern Other: Voices from Below
- The Otherness: Addressing Issues of Racial, Class and Caste Divisions
- Refugees and The Migrants Today: The Other in Their Otherness
- The African Approach to the Other.
- The Japanese Understanding of the Other.
- Construction of yhe Other and The Politics of Identity.

Ecological Vision

- Essential Interconnectedness of Cosmos
- The Leaf that Smiles: Befriending Nature
- Human Uniqueness: Human vs Animals

Indian Perspectives

- Ambedkar and Gandhi: Befriending the Other Respectfully
- Sanskritisation: Appropriating the Symbolic Significance tf the Other
- Advaita and the Relation to the Other.
- Befriending the Other

- “An Eye For An Eye Makes The Whole World Blind.”
Gandhian Way of Befriending by Forgiving
- Forgiveness as Being The Essence of Relationship: A Study of the Christian Vision of Reconciliation
- Loving Your Enemies: A Christian Vision of Dealing With Violence
- Communal Conflicts: A Case Study at Befriending Two Communities
- Inter-Religious Dialogue Leading to Communal Harmony
- Dealing with The Opponents and Rivals: Psychological Approach to Inclusive Growth
- “*Live Together As Brothers Or Perish Together As Fools.*”
An Approach to Befriending the Other
- Pope Francis and the Other: A Pastoral Approach

Case Studies

- The Stockholm Syndrome: Real or Illusory?
- Sri-Lankan Tragedy: Need for Community Befriending
- Thomas Chakalalak: Converting the Kidnappers
- Graham Staines: Conversation and Conversion
- Peace and Reconciliation: The Irish Story
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission: South African Experiment
- Naxal Movement In India: Need For Ecological and Economic Befriending

JDV Specific Topics

- 60/123 Some Contributions of JDV to the Local Church: A Historical Overview
- Some Stalwarts of JDV: George Soares-Prabhu, George Lobo, Richard Desmet, Salvino Azzopardi, Etc.
- Inculturation and Indigenization: JDV’s Contribution to the Indian Church?
- JDV: The Future Vision

Given these different themes, we have been able to take up some of them. It is hoped that the insights drawn out of our modest living encounters will enhance our lives, making a significant contribution to the Church and Nation.²

So these collection of articles is a small step to foster “the culture of encounter” and promote life in its diversity and richness! May we work together to foster love, compassion and friendship among ourselves! In this connection it may be remembered that the JDV Family – Administration, Staff, Students, Co-workers and many volunteers – has made the diamond jubilee celebration a truly memorable one!

Further, it may be noted that *Jnanadeepa* has completed 20 years of its existence and the editorial team wants to thank the readers, contributors and well-wishers of the this journal. We have been able become what we are only because of you.³

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ

Editor

December 2016

Notes

1. For example the coordinated assault on Paris on the evening of November 13, 2015 that killed 129 people. It may be recalled that along with the world leaders Pope Francis explicitly addressed the Paris carnage, expressing his “deep sorrow for the terrorist attacks that bloodied France late on Friday, causing many casualties.” Along with offering his condolences to the victims and their families, Francis condemned the massacre as an “unspeakable affront to human dignity.”
2. Adapted from *Abstracts and Proceedings of the International Conference on “Befriending the Other,”* JDV, Pune, 2015
3. More events connected with the twenty years of *Jnanadeepa* are planned. It will be communicated to the readers in due course.



Inaugural Address Befriending the Other

His Grace Salvatore Pennacchio

Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, New Delhi

His Excellency, Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio, Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, provides a clear understanding of the theme in the context of the present religious, social and cultural scenario of Asia, in order to better understand the theme “Befriending the Other.” Following Pope Francis, he holds that Dialogue of life and heart is essential for love and communion. The followers of Christ are called to have the gentle and humble heart of their Master (Mt 11:29). “Interreligious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences. For all this, love of others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment.” Finally, he hopes that with the help of God’s Spirit who is always ready with surprises, we will befriend the human race. The second part of the article is the homily delivered by His Grace at the Inaugural Mass.

Keywords: Befriending, Asian characteristics, Pope Francis, dialogue, inculturation.

I am happy to participate in the International Conference on “*Befriending the Other*” conducted on the occasion of the completion of sixty years of the transfer of the Pontifical Athenaeum from Kandy to Pune. At the outset, I take this opportunity to wish every success to this great endeavor. I also take this opportunity to thank Rev. Dr. Selva Rathinam SJ, the president of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, and Rev. Dr. Kuruvilla

Pandikattu SJ, the Chief Organizer of the Jubilee Committee for inviting me to this Conference.

“Befriending the Other” is the theme of this International Conference. Befriending literally means to make friends or become friendly with, or act as a friend without keeping any barriers of what so ever. To befriend someone is to cause him or her, to be a friend. It may be harder to befriend people from the other side, or people having opposite ideologies. Mahatma Gandhi once said, *“It is easy enough to be friendly to one’s friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the essence of true religion.”* And Jesus exhorted his disciples and us today: *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you (...) If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?”* *“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful”* is the theme of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, announced by Pope Francis.

Before entering into a discussion I think it is better to try to have a clear understanding of the theme in the context of the present religious, social and cultural scenario of Asia.

1. Religious, Social and Cultural Realities in Asia

As we all know, Asia is the earth’s largest continent and is home to nearly two-thirds of the world’s population. The most striking feature of the continent is the variety of its peoples, cultures, religions, beliefs, traditions and languages. It is also the cradle of the world’s major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions of others embrace traditional or tribal religions. (*Ecclesia in Asia* no. 6).

At the same time the economic development in the Asian continent is really complex. Some Asian countries are highly developed, and others are developing. Some still find themselves

in abject poverty. In the process of development, materialism and secularization are also gaining ground, especially in urban areas. Organized forms of crimes, terrorism, abuse, and the exploitation of the weaker sections of society are also widespread (*Ecclesia in Asia* no. 7). The political panorama is tremendously complex, displaying an array of ideologies ranging from democratic forms of government to theocratic ones. Undemocratic regimes and atheistic ideologies are very much present. In some places Christians are not allowed to practice their faith freely and proclaim Jesus Christ to others and minorities are denied of their rights (*Ecclesia in Asia* no. 8).

Consequently, in effect, the Church's approach of "*befriending the other*" has a specific relevance in Asian context where there are so many tensions, divisions and conflicts, caused by ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, economic and religious differences. While keeping her teaching faithfully, the Church in Asia has to foster greater communion of mind and heart through close cooperation among different Countries. This is even vital to her evangelizing mission. She has to develop a healthy relationship with other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities, and with the followers of other religions.

Certainly, in a society where we live, there are cultural tensions, competing religious identities and diversities in the articulation of Christian faith. But in spite of all these there is a common ground on which the human society can build up its dreams and aspirations that is "love". We have all been created by God to his own image. God is our loving Father. This sensibly brings up the perception of universal brotherhood. Thus, befriending the other is not merely a philosophical dream but also a practical need of humankind desired by the Creator. It is the fulfillment of the fundamental commandment of Jesus

Christ that “love one another” (Jn 15:17). Being all created by God we are called to love everyone, even our enemies.

Holy Father Pope Francis is a man of friendship, dialogue, committed to the culture of encounter, who looks for the best in people and is not judgmental. He is a peacemaker who contributed significantly to the rapprochement between peoples, countries, beliefs and cultures.

During his recent visit to USA on 23rd September last, the Holy Father Pope Francis stated that we want “a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, one that safeguards individual rights and rejects every form of unjust discrimination,” but also respects the deeply held religious beliefs of citizens and the moral and ethical obligations that flow from them”.

Christians belonging to different Churches and ecclesial communities are no longer enemies or indifferent neighbors. Christian witness in a pluralistic world includes, befriending others, engaging in dialogue with people of different faith, religion and cultures (Acts 17:22-28). Christians are called to commit themselves to work with all people in mutual respect, promoting together justice, peace and common good. The purpose this International Conference is to help the Catholic Church in India to continue her dialogue with other Churches, religious faiths, various cultures, and individuals, while proclaiming the Word of God, and witnessing the joy of the Gospel.

As I have mentioned before, we are living in a period which is often characterized also by secularization, discrimination, religious fundamentalism and terrorism. In such an atmosphere it is not easy to realize befriend others. But, being Christians, it is our call to take positive steps to promote the pattern of befriending others. For this, I would like to suggest certain possible ways.

a. Dialogue is a way forward towards Befriending

Dialogue of life and heart is essential for love and communion. The followers of Christ are called to have the gentle and humble heart of their Master (Mt 11:29). “Interreligious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences. For all this, love of others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment” (*Ecclesia in Asia* no. 31).

Saint Pope John Paul II in his ecumenical Encyclical “*Ut Unum Sint*” describes the fruits of the dialogues as “*brotherhood rediscovered*”. Today, the “universal brotherhood” of the Church has become a firm ecumenical conviction, bearing in mind the situations of the past, communities which were once rivals are now in many cases helping one another. Places of worship are sometimes lent out.

Scholarships are offered for the training of ministers in the Communities most lacking in resources. Approaches are made to civil authorities on behalf of other Christians who are unjustly persecuted (*no.42*).

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance and the ecumenical dialogues are fostering a friendly atmosphere in the world. But, still several social and cultural factors separate the human race. There are frustrations and oppositions.

Dialogue involves both listening and responding. It is a seeking both to understand and to be understood. It is a readiness to put questions and to be questioned. True and frank dialogue shall be guided by authentic love and truth. It allows members of different faiths to get to know one another, to identify matters of faith and practice which they share and

points on which they differ and thus build up a communion. The easiest way to befriend someone, however, is just to smile and say “hello,” and to look at people of different faiths without prejudice, keeping however our own identity.

b. *Inculturation, a pathway to Befriend*

A culture is the result of the life and activity of a human group. The persons belonging to that group are shaped to a large extent by the culture in which they live. As persons and societies change, the culture changes with them. As a culture is transformed, so are persons and societies transformed. “From this perspective, it becomes clearer why evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. The Gospel and evangelization are certainly not identical with culture; they are independent of it. Yet the Kingdom of God comes to people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements from human cultures” (*Ecclesia in Asia* no. 21).

This engagement with cultures has always been part of the Church’s pilgrimage through history. But it has a special urgency today in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situations of Asia, where Christianity is still too often seen as a foreign religion. “In the process of encountering the world’s different cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them”. (*Ecclesia in Asia* no. 21).

“In every case inculturation must be guided by compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the faith of the universal Church, in full compliance with the Church’s Tradition and with a view to strengthening people’s faith.” (*Ecclesia in Asia* no. 22). Unity does not mean uniformity. On the contrary what we can think of is a unity in diversity and diversity in unity. We have to uphold a balanced position in this respect, while witnessing the full truth of the Gospel.

c. Caring and Sharing

A “culture of care” will make the way to befriending much easier. Pope Francis has spoken repeatedly of the need for a Christian identity that reaches out in relationship. In his first interview as Pope, he urged: “*The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity...*” Simplicity of life, deep faith and genuine love for all, especially the poor and the outcast, are luminous signs of the Gospel in action. Therefore, the Church shall also accompany those who are undergoing severe suffering, and persecution. She has to lend moral, spiritual and material support to them (*Ecclesia in Asia* no. 28). She has to promote and witness the quality of befriending because it is her way of life.

Last but not least, from the very outset the concept of befriending the other will continue to be an impulse and a gift of the Holy Spirit. As we embark upon the new period of time we need new vision of communion and friendship. But this does not mean inventing unrealistic dreamlands of the future. Patience is the little sister of Christian hope. Instead of staring at the impossible, and chafing against it, we have to live the already given and possible communion, and do what is possible today. By advancing in this way, step by step, we may hope that, with the help of God’s Spirit who is always ready with surprises, we will befriend the human race.

With these few words, in God’s name, I formally inaugurate this International Conference on “Befriending the Other”. May God bless us all!



Inaugural Homily Befriending the Other

His Grace Salvatore Pennacchio

Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, New Delhi

Readings: Jam 1: 27 -2:9 and Jn 15: 12-15

Dear Fr. Selva Rathinam, SJ, President of JDV, Reverend Fathers, Reverend Brothers, and all my Brothers and Sisters,

It is a matter of great joy and happiness that I am able to celebrate this Holy Mass, with you, on this auspicious occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the *Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth*. At the outset, let me express my hearty congratulations to all of you. As the representative of His Holiness Pope Francis, I impart to you loving greetings from the Holy Father. I shall also confer on you His Apostolic Blessings, at the end of the Holy Mass. As we celebrate this Jubilee Thanksgiving Eucharistic Liturgy, let us express our indebted gratitude to God for the various Graces, He has bestowed on *Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth* - on all its staff, students and well-wishers. I pray that the Lord might shower up on you his choicest blessings in the days and years to come.

1. Biblical References to the Jubilee Year Celebrations

In Leviticus 25: 8-12, 18, the Lord gave to the people of Israel the command to celebrate a *Jubilee Year*. Mentions

to the Jubilee Year are also found in Num 36:4; Neh 5:1-13; and Ezek 46:17. “Jubilee” literally denoted to trumpets and joyful celebration. The Jubilee Year, with its main focus on emancipation and restoration, was to be proclaimed by the blast of trumpets throughout the land. Slaves were to be set free. Property rights of land were returned and everyone got to go back home. The Jubilee Year thus, had brought jubilation and celebration everywhere and to all the people, especially to the under privileged, the poor and the slaves. ***“The Jubilee Law”*** further taught a merciful form of civil justice (De 15:1-18): “no one could remain very poor for long, and the rich were not punished, but rather blessed!” The most prominent promise of the Jubilee was that the Lord will provide safety for all his people (De 15:10,18). The Lord protects family, individual, and their freedom. Jubilee also demanded that one shall not use God’s Word for personal interest and to oppress people; instead righteousness and mercy towards others shall prevail always. (Lev 25:14-17).

Yes, the Lord wants to show mercy to his people and asks them to be merciful among themselves. Dear Friends, The ‘Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy’ starting from the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary on 8 December 2015 to the Feast of Christ the King on 20 November 2016 is a happy coincidence with your Diamond jubilee Celebrations. The Holy Year of Mercy will also be conducted in tune with the commands of the Lord about the Jubilee Year celebrations in Leviticus. Pope Francis writes about the Year of Mercy: “the celebration of the Holy Year to be for all believers a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God. It is indeed my wish that the Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible...” The Pope wants that, in this Holy Year of Mercy, everyone should “experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instils hope”. Dear Fathers and Brothers, the Lord gives you a clear directive, how you shall celebrate your Diamond Jubilee:- it

shall be for you a Jubilee year of remission of sins and pardon of failures focusing particularly on forgiveness and mercy. ***“It shall be holy to you”***. Again, in Lev 25: 12, the Lord reminded the people that they shall keep the Jubilee Year holy, and in v. 18, He gave them directions, how they shall keep it holy: *“you shall do my statutes, and keep my ordinances and perform them; so you will dwell in the land securely”*. Dear Fathers and Brothers, the Lord gives you another command, how you shall celebrate this Jubilee: it shall be holy to you; you shall, all the more, do God’s statutes, keep His ordinances and perform them.

2. The First Reading: James 1: 27-2:9

The verse 1 reads: “My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ”. He says: you shall not make “distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts” (v.4). The intention of James here, is to teach the people not to show discrimination to the poor. He asks: “has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?” (v. 5). He reminds them that “religion, that is pure and undefiled before God,” is this: “to visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (1: 27). The concluding verse of the reading is strongly worded: “if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (v. 9). James aims in this passage to narrow the gulf between the rich and the poor. If we look deep at the command of the Lord about the Jubilee Year Celebrations, in Leviticus 25, we understand the Lord wants more mercy to the poor and to the slaves in the Jubilee Year. The Jubilee Year characteristics such as - “slaves were to be set free”; “everyone got to go back home”; “no one could remain very poor for long” – all these concentrate that, in the Jubilee Year, the difference between the rich and the poor need to be diminished. Therefore, both the Command of the Lord about the Jubilee Year Celebrations

in Leviticus 25 and the reading from the Letter of James for this Diamond Jubilee Year Celebrations have something in common:- there shall be no partiality or discrimination among the people of God whether they are rich or poor. There shall be no barriers or distance among them.

There are innumerable teachings of the Church and pronouncements of the Popes on the role of the Church in helping the poor. You, as Professors and Seminarians are well aware of them. I shall refer here to the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In paragraph 188 he writes: “In this context, we can understand Jesus’ command to his disciples: ‘You yourselves give them something to eat!’ (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter”. Again, in paragraph 191 he notes: “In all places and circumstances, Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor.... Seeing their poverty, hearing their cries and knowing their sufferings, we are scandalized because we know that there is enough food for everyone and that hunger is the result of a poor distribution of goods and income”. Dear friends, you are going to be pastors. You make a promise to yourselves in this Jubilee Year that you shall not show any partiality or discrimination to any person because he or she is poor. Be on the side of the poor to diminish the gap between rich and the poor and to eliminate the distance between the members of the people of God. Pope Francis expects from you, as he writes in his *Letter* to the Consecrated Persons, dated 24 November 2014: “to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries”. He continues: “A whole world awaits you: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting

for the divine...Don't be closed in on yourselves, don't be stifled by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News". As the Apostolic Nuncio, I exhort you to translate these words of the Pope in the multifaceted Indian situations. You shall extend your service reaching out to the existential peripheries where the great majority of India: the poor, the downtrodden, the Dalit, the uneducated, the unemployed live. Proclaim to them the "Jubilee Year" as directed by the Lord in Leviticus; proclaim to them the "Jubilee Year of Mercy" as Pope Francis desires.

3. The Gospel Reading today: John 15: 12-15.

Jesus tells his disciples: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (v. 12). He continues: "You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends..." (v. 14-15). Jesus reminds his disciples that their relationship is not of "master and slaves" but of friends. There should not be any gap or distance between them. They are friends. Moreover, there shall be no partiality, no discrimination and no differences between his disciples. He commands them: "love one another as I have loved you". They should be Friends of Jesus and friends among themselves.

Dear Fathers and brothers, the Gospel today, gives you a Jubilee Year Message: **You shall be Jesus's friends; you shall be friends among yourselves and love one another as Jesus loves you.** Learn and practice to develop an intimate and friendly relationship with Jesus in accordance with his commandments. I know that you are trained for this in this Institution. I make here only a few references. In the Book of Wisdom 7: 7-14, we read about the Great King Solomon who is known for his wisdom. He prayed to God not for "scepters

and thrones but for the Spirit of Wisdom” (v. 8) and “to obtain friendship with God” (v. 14). Yes, prayer leads to a friendship with God. We all know that St. Theresa of Avila, whose Fifth Birth Centenary we celebrate this year, had established a deep friendship with God. Pope Francis commends about it in his Letter to Fr. Saverio Cannistra: Her prayer consists simply in “a relation of friendship ... with Him whom we know loves us”. Theresa of Avila herself says about prayer: “Prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God”. Again, she adds: “Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with God”. Dear Friends, there is no need to stress the importance of prayer in our life. You are well aware of it. The question to be asked intensively by all of you is: Does your prayer lead you beyond the prayer formulas, to “a relation of friendship,” a simple, warm and cordial “friendship with God”? If yes, let this Jubilee Celebrations intensify that friendship with God. If not, let this Jubilee Celebrations be a beginning for your deep “relation of friendship” with God.

Before I conclude, I thank the *Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth* for the magnificent service you are doing to the Indian Church through the formation of future priests. Once more, my hearty congratulatory best wishes for the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations. May God bless you with his choicest blessings through the intercession of Mary, Mother of God. Thank you.



Guest of Honour Address: On “Befriending the Other”

His Excellency Oswald Cardinal Gracias

Mumbai

Abstract: Since the hallmark of Christianity is the movement towards the other, the church is also a servant of the kingdom of god, following the footsteps of Jesus Christ himself who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The church serves the kingdom by establishing communities and founding new particular churches, and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness toward others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institution. The church serves the kingdom by separating throughout the world the ‘gospel values’ which are an expression of the kingdom and which help people to accept God’s plan. Then the Cardinal wishes that we reach out to the poor and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity!

Keywords: Social teachings, human dignity, Pope Francis, solidarity with the poor.

0. Introduction: The Meaning of the Other and Its Importance for Us Christians

The hallmark of Christianity is a movement from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. As Jesus was a man for others, the central challenge of Christianity is living for others. The church, in Christ, is a sacrament -- a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire

human race (*Lumen Gentium*, no.1). The church is also a servant of the kingdom of god, following the footsteps of Jesus Christ himself who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10.45). The church serves the kingdom by establishing communities and founding new particular churches, and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness toward others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institution. The church serves the kingdom by spreading throughout the world the ‘gospel values’ which are an expression of the kingdom and which help people to accept God’s plan.¹

One of the key achievements of the Second Vatican council was to give importance to the image of the church as the people of god. The church serves the people of god in its struggle for the liberation of the oppressed and in search for justice and peace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer defined the church as the communion that exists for others, he emphasized that the church “must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating but helping and serving”². As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* teaches us, collaboration among Christians in various areas of service to humankind is essential to the following of Christ.³ It affirms that “in economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of temperance, to moderate our attachment to the goods of this world: of the virtue of justice to preserve our neighbor’s rights and to render what is his or her due and of solidarity following the golden Rule and in keeping with the generosity of the Lord who ‘though He was rich yet for your sake became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich (2 Cor 8:9)’”⁴.

Redemptoris Missio succinctly states that “the Church’s mission derives not only from the Lord’s mandate but also from the profound demands of God’s life within us. Those

who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God. They should be ever mindful that “they owe their distinguished status not to their own merits but to Christ’s special grace; and if they fail to respond to this grace in thought, word and deed, not only will they not be served, they will be judged severely.”⁵

1. Scriptural Understanding of the Other

In 1987 at Xavier University in New Orleans, St. John Paul II stated that it is not enough to offer to the disadvantaged of the world crumbs of freedom, crumbs of oneself to reject introversion and to concentrate on the needs of others. For example, the parable of the rich man and the poor man is directed to the conscience of humanity (cf. Luke 16:19ff) and, today in particular, to the conscience of the developed nations and rich countries and rich people.⁶ The rich man was consumed in self-centered living and only cared about himself. He had no concern and compassion for the poor and hence he was condemned. Christ demands our concern and compassion on the poor and hence he was condemned. Christ demands our openness to the poor and the disadvantaged. Here, we recollect the words of St. John Paul II: “The human person lives in a community, in society. And with the community he shares hunger and thirst and sickness and malnutrition and misery and all the deficiencies that result there from. In his or her own person the human being is meant to experience the needs of others.”⁷ We need to inspire people to get involved in social concerns that will not only enlarge their horizons but will also challenge their lifestyles and encourage them to reach out to the marginalized and the weak of society.

St. John Paul II's Encyclical Letter, *Veritatis Splendour* clearly notes that "both the Old and the New Testaments explicitly affirm that without *love of neighbor*, made concrete in keeping the commandments, *genuine love of God* is not possible. St. John makes the point with extra ordinary forcefulness: "If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). The Evangelist echoes the moral preaching of Christ, expressed in a wonderful and unambiguous way in the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:30-37) and in His words about the final judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46).⁸

Jesus' Attitude to Others: The attitude of Jesus in the Gospels can be seen from his attitude, his behavior, his words and deeds. It clearly depicts a man totally for others.⁹ He was in solidarity with the least and the outcasts. He showed concern for suffering people by reaching out to them. *Veritatis Splendor* explains that "Jesus brings God's commandments to fulfillment, particularly the commandment of love of neighbor, by *interiorizing their demands and by bringing out their fullest meaning*. Love of neighbor springs from a *loving heart* which, precisely because it loves, is ready to live out the loftiest challenges. Jesus shows that the commandments must not be understood as a minimum limit not to be gone beyond, but rather as a path involving a moral and spiritual journey towards perfection, at the heart of which is love (cf. Col 3:14)."¹⁰

To live is to love. And living the Gospel of life means to live in love. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) invites us to reflect upon two very important questions, viz. Who is my neighbor? And Am I my brother's keeper? It reveals to us that everyone is our neighbor, especially the ones who are living on the fringes of society and all those who are

most in need (Mt 25:40). The Good Samaritan is anyone who has compassion, stops by and helps the suffering person, and truly gives himself, his very “I” to the “Other” person. Here we focus upon one of the key points of all Christian anthropology, viz, that man cannot find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.¹¹ In this regard, St. John Paul II remarked: “We must care for the other as person for whom God has made us responsible.” He insisted that when human life is involved the service of charity must be profoundly consistent as human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good.¹² For St. John Paul II, the parable of the Good Samaritan is Christ’s personal call for Christians to be in solidarity with all those who suffer. And the cross of Christ is the ultimate proof of his solidarity with human beings.¹³

In the New Testament passage on the healing of the Roman Centurion’s servant (Mt 8:5-3; Lk 7:1-10), we observe that the centurion, even though he was a gentile, had tremendous faith that Jesus would heal his servant. The Centurion cared for his servant and strongly believed that Jesus could heal him with his Word. He crossed racial barriers and risked his reputation by going to a Jew for help. Jesus was amazed at his faith. Our faith must be reflected in the life we lead and the values we live by. Our life has to be transformed by what we believe. So, the principal quality that our faith should have is love. In *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis remarked: “Christian faith in as much as it proclaims the truth of God’s total love and opens us to the power of that love, penetrates to the core of our human experience. Each of us comes to the light because of love, and each of us is called to love in order to remain in the light.”¹⁴ The Centurion cared so much for his servant that he humbled himself to ask the help of Jesus to heal him. Mother Teresa said that she saw the face of Jesus in the face of every sick and dying person she met. May our faith in God inspire us to reach out in love especially to our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

The incident of Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4: 4-26) teaches us the lesson that God loves each of us in spite of our sinful lives. No one loved her, not even herself. But Jesus befriended her. The Samaritan woman was considered an outcast by her own people was invited by Jesus to drink the water that he gives, water that gives eternal life. Christ's loving way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, transformed the woman and led her to become his disciple. She then went on to proclaim Christ to the inhabitants of Samaria, and they too received him with faith.¹⁵ May Christ's love for us inspire us to reach out to every single person in faith and love and doing so reveal to them the mercy of God.

2. The Church's Love and Concern for the Other Is Seen in Its Social Teachings

The Church's social teaching is a valid instrument of evangelization (Cf. *Centesimus Annus*, no. 54) since it places the human person and society in relationship with the light of the Gospel.¹⁶ "By means of her social doctrine, the shows her concern for human life in society, aware that the quality of social life, that is, of the relationship of justice and love that form the fabric of society- depends in a decisive manner on the protection and promotion of the human person, for whom every community comes into existence."¹⁷ *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* boldly affirms that "no legislation, no system of rules or negotiation will ever succeed in persuading men and people to live in unity, brotherhood and peace; no line of reasoning will ever be able to surpass the appeal of love. Only love can animate and shape social interaction, moving it towards peace in the context of a world that is ever more complex. In this perspective, love takes on the characteristic style of social and political charity. Social charity makes us love the common good, it makes us effectively seek the good of all people, considered not only as individuals

or private persons but also in the social dimension that unites them.”¹⁸

a. The Church's Concern for Human Work and the Working Class

According to St. John Paul, human work is the essential key to the whole social question. The Pope is keenly interested in work because he is interested in the human person. In the initial pages of the book of Genesis the Church finds the source of her conviction, that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth.¹⁹ The Biblical words; “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,” even though they do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world. Indeed, they show its very deepest essence. Man is the image of God partly through the mandate, received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth.²⁰ In carrying out this mandate, every human being reflects the very action of the Creator.²¹ Thus, we cannot understand work without understanding man, and since man was created by God, by seeing the original plan for man, we can get some insight into man's nature and purpose. In fact, human work has an ethical value of its own because of the fact that the one who is doing the work is a person. Hence, work is for the person and not the person for work.²² From all this, St. John Paul II draws out an important principle of Catholic Social Doctrine, a principle that has always been taught by the Church, viz, the principle of the priority of labour over capital. Without man and without work, things would not serve their purposes and be means to fulfill the commandment to subdue the earth.²³ To show his concern for the workers and their rights, St. Pope John Paul II defends four traditional rights of labour, viz, suitable employment for those who are capable of it, just remuneration for work done, the organization of the labour

process to respect the requirements of each person and his or her life and the right of workers to form unions.²⁴

b. Solidarity with others and Interdependence: Two Important Principles of the Church's Social Teaching

Today, more than ever the world needs solidarity as a solution to the deep seated economic and social problems. We all need to realize that we cannot live in isolation but rather in a society. In this context, Joseph Cardinal Hoffner states that the principle of the solidarity “rests on the existential reciprocal relationship and mutual involvement between the individual and society. On the other hand it denotes the moral responsibility (mutual liability) emanating from this essential condition. Hence, solidarity is both an ontological and ethical principle.”²⁵ According to Hoffner, the existence of world hunger is the greatest sign that solidarity is lacking in our world. He appeals to every nation to examine their economic and political policies in order to change those situations across frontiers so that all nations achieve economic and social progress and contribute to the welfare of all.²⁶

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* describes solidarity as a necessary principle and also as an obligation. It affirmed that “Solidarity is a direct requirement of human and supernatural brotherhood. The serious socio-economic problems which occur today cannot be solved unless new fronts of solidarity are created: solidarity of the poor among themselves, solidarity with the poor to which the rich are called and solidarity among the workers. Institutions and social organizations at different levels, as well as the state, must share in a general movement of solidarity. When the Church appeals for such solidarity, she is aware that she herself is concerned in a quite special way.”²⁷ It also stated that by virtue of the principle of solidarity, “man with his brothers is obliged to contribute to the common good of the society at all its levels.

Further, international solidarity is necessary not only in cases of extreme urgency but also to aid true development, to find concrete technical solutions to problems and to create a new mentality among our contemporaries.²⁸ Hence the Church's doctrine is opposed to all the forms of social and political individualism."²⁹

St John Paul II describes solidarity as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."³⁰ The good of each person is bound up with the good of the community. Each person must fulfill his responsibility to achieve the common good in the light of his abilities. For the Pope, this is the essence of solidarity. For the Christian, this requires a deep Christian Maturity in which the answer to the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a spontaneous 'yes'.

c. The Fact of Interdependence

Requiring the Response of Solidarity: St. John Paul II sees interdependence as a challenge having a very positive potential. "The conviction is growing of a radical interdependence and consequently of the need for a solidarity which will take up interdependence and transfer it to the moral plane."³¹ Donald Dorr states that "these words are the key to understand the word *solidarity* in the specific technical meaning the Pope is giving to it: solidarity is the correct moral response to the fact of interdependence."³² The fact of interdependence is thus a necessary condition for solidarity: interdependence must be transformed in to solidarity, which is based on the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all, and that the other person is to be seen as our neighbor.³³ Solidarity should make the more powerful feel responsible for those who are weak and be ready to share with them what they have. When this moral dimension is ignored, there arises instead an attitude of an overriding desire for profit and thirst for power, which

when established on an international level are expressed in different forms of imperialism and the division of the world into blocs.³⁴ This mutual independence is an essential ingredient of justice.

***d. The Church's Concern for Other Religions:
Ongoing Dialogue Is Essential***

Nostra Aetate, the declaration on the relationship of the church to Non-Christian religions is the shortest of the Second Vatican Council's documents. However, it was the first time a Council made a positive statement to Jews, Muslims and Hindus. The declaration is a *magna carta* for dialogue. It urged Christians to acknowledge, preserve and encourage, the spiritual values and moral truths of other religions together with their social life and culture.³⁵ It revolutionized the Catholic Church's relations not only with Judaism but also with Islam and Hinduism, the major world religions. It still continues to inspire us to be faithful to the spirit of dialogue in the church. What the church needs is effective dialogue with people of other religions, which is always possible on the basis of culture. A religion without dialogue has the potential danger of alienation. St. Pope John Paul II remarked, "Dialogue is a sign of the hope that religions of the world are becoming more aware of their shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family."³⁶ Since Vatican Council II, there have been important dialogue initiatives between Christians and Jews. St. John Paul II had emphasized that the Jews are our older brothers. We remember, a reflection on the Shoah, was the first universal document of the Catholic Church dedicated to remembering the particularity of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust and the evil of the *Shoah*. It was a milestone in the journey of reconciliation with the Jews. In India 80.5 % of the population is Hindu and 13.4 % is Muslim, efforts

of inter-religious dialogue continue, however, not without challenges and difficulties.

In 1989, the CBCI Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism brought out the '*Guidelines for Inter-religious Dialogue*', a unique document that explains dynamism of dialogue. The Commission elaborates also the attitudes for genuine dialogue. They are prayer, commitment to faith, willingness to change, truthfulness, honesty, humility, spirit of forgiveness, knowledge of the other and sense of justice.³⁷

Such dialogue is not only limited to religions. St. John Paul II also stated that "science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science idolatry and false absolutes. Each draws the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish."³⁸ Today, the need for an effective and constructive dialogue between modern science and religion is all the more important. We need to constantly search for creative expressions of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue in our Church institutions such as peace meals, sports for peace and seminars on common social issues including food, water, environment and healthcare.³⁹

e. The Church's Respect for the Freedom of the Other and Respect for Human Rights:

Blessed Pope Paul VI called the "Declaration on Religious Freedom," *Dignitatis Humane*, as one of the major texts of the Council.⁴⁰ It soon emerged as one of the most influential documents created by the Council. It recognized the human right to religious liberty. It advocated for the principle of religious liberty to be treated as a civil right and obligated governments to protect this right. The fact is the right to religious freedom has already been accepted and affirmed by the common consciousness of human kind."⁴¹ It is not only a civil and political right, but is "a cornerstone in the structure

of human rights and the most profound expression of the freedom of conscience.”⁴²

St. John Paul II repeatedly stated that the dignity of the human person is the pivot on which the entirety of Catholic social doctrine turns. He said that “religious freedom is an essential requirement of the dignity of every person, a cornerstone of the structure of human rights, and for this reason an irreplaceable factor in the good of individuals and of the whole society. The freedom of individuals and communities to profess and practice their religion is an essential requirement for peaceful coexistence.”⁴³ The teaching of the Second Vatican Council clearly states that religious freedom is inseparable from human rights. Hence, the Church’s demand for religious freedom is to be seen in the wider context of the church being a champion of all human rights, since all human rights belong to all people. By the time the Council passed the Declaration on Religious Freedom in December 1965, over a hundred countries including India had made provisions for this right in their respective laws. The Church has the duty to demand for the religious freedom of every person in every country.⁴⁴ In light of the continuing attacks on the dignity of the human person through rampant abortion, euthanasia and religious persecution, it is becoming all the more necessary to return to the text of *Dignitatis Humanae*.

The United Nation’s documents too indicate that this right to religious freedom is universal. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all the members of the human family. Article 18 states the right to Religious Freedom clearly. On 25 March 2011 the United Nations’ Human Rights Council has adopted a resolution recognizing freedom of religious belief and abandoning a longstanding concept of religious “defamation.” According to a recent survey by Pew Research Center, India is among the countries that have highest support

for religious freedom, with eight out of ten Indians believing that it is very important to have the freedom to practice their faith compared to a global median of 74 %.⁴⁵ It is one thing to desire religious freedom; it is another to experience it in day to day life. The journey to freedom of religion is long and arduous, but we must not give up. A process of Conscientization and dialogue are the key to change and transformation.

f. Befriending the Environment

According to the new research performed by an international team of researchers, human beings are “eating away at our own life support systems” at a rate unseen in the past 10,000 years by degrading land and freshwater systems, emitting greenhouse gasses and releasing vast amounts of agricultural chemicals into the environment. Out of nine worldwide processes that support life on Earth, four have exceeded “safe” levels, viz., human-driven climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land system change and the high level of phosphorus and nitrogen flowing into the oceans.⁴⁶ In the light of this environmental degradation, Pope Francis in his recent Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, is guiding the Church to watchfulness for an urgent, “sign of the times.” He is reminding us of the beauty of Creation and our Dignity as its stewards entrusted by the Creator to nurture and protect that creation for the sake of our whole human family and for generations to come. As the human family strives to recalibrate its relationship to the environment, the Church has an important role to play.

The earlier Popes too showed their concern for nature and care for the environment. In 1971 in his apostolic letter marking the 80th anniversary of the publication of *Rerum novarum*. Bl. Paul VI prophetically remarked: “the Christians must turn to these new perceptions in order to take on responsibility, together with the rest of men, for a destiny which from now on is shared by all.” The new perceptions indicated by the Pope are those of a “wide-ranging social problem that concerns the

entire human family” and were addressed in the paragraph entitled *The Environment*.⁴⁷ St. John Paul II was the first Pope to talk about the consequences of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs in his Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, stating that “one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos.”⁴⁸ At the end of the 1980s the Pope warned of using natural resources, some of which are not renewable, as if they were inexhaustible, and, furthermore in industrialization, he saw a risk of contaminating the environment and of the quality of life.⁴⁹

Each and every one of us needs to respect and protect the environment, so that through nature people can “contemplate the mystery of the greatness and love of God.” Also, according to the principle of justice, each of us has a moral responsibility to protect the natural order. The growing environmental crisis in the recent years is posing a great challenge to Asia. There is a greater awareness today that the goods of the earth cannot be used as it was unfortunately used in the past. Many countries, states and people are consuming the very earth on which our very livelihood depends. The growing phenomenon of climate change and natural disasters call into question our use of the earth’s resources. One of the biggest challenges in reducing poverty and environmental degradation is neither scientific nor technological, “but rather within our minds and hearts.”⁵⁰ Blessed Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* asserts that “the whole of creation is ordered in the first place towards its creator and the rationality of humans is directed not to using nature in a thoughtless way but to recognition of God’s plan and thus to the ‘prior God-given purpose’ of nature.”⁵¹

The ruthless exploitation of earth’s resources may benefit a few people but has adverse effects on the masses in Asia. The absolute thirst for profits over the dignity of the human

person and unbridled technological development divorced from integral human development are the root causes that are alienating us from our natural environment. In his 1900 World Day of Peace Message, Saint Pope John Paul II affirms that the ecological crisis is “a profound moral crisis of which the destruction of the environment is only one troubling aspect.”⁵² In this regard he urged that we must go to the heart of the ecological degradation. St John Paul II advocated an education in ecological responsibility because “we are all really responsible for all.”⁵³

g. Solidarity with the Poor

After stating that poor countries lack the economic means either to gain access to existing sources of non-renewable energy or to finance research into new alternatives, Pope Benedict XVI then urged the international community to find institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources of these poor countries. He also called for a worldwide redistribution of energy resources.⁵⁴ In his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, he expressed the hope that the international community and individual governments will succeed in countering harmful ways of treating the environment. The covenant between human beings and the environment should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.⁵⁵ Respect for nature and respect for human life are inextricably related. Pope Benedict XVI clearly stated that individuals in rich countries must change their life styles and their consumption with responsibility if the world's resources are to be protected. “The ecological crisis,” St. John Paul II stated, “reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity, especially in relations between the developing nations and those that are highly industrialized” (EC, no. 10). Only with sustainable development (which includes sustainable food, water and basic sanitation)⁵⁶ the developing nations curb the continuing

environmental degradation and avoid the destructive effects of the kind of development that has used natural resources irresponsibly. The ecological problem is closely connected to those who are poor and hence treated unjustly. According to St. Pope John Paul II, “the goods of the earth, which in the divine plan should be a common patrimony, often risk becoming the monopoly of a few who often spoil it and, sometimes destroy it, thereby creating a loss for all humanity.”⁵⁷ The option for the poor is rooted in the Gospel and in the Church’s social teaching. It awakens our conscience to the fact that the poor suffer most directly from environment decline and often have the least access to relief from their suffering. Justice is rooted in compassion for our own weakest members.⁵⁸

Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Laudato Si’* asks a very pertinent question, viz. “what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (*Laudato Si’*, No.160). At the general audience April 22 2015, the day on which *Earth Day* was celebrated, Pope Francis said: “I urge all to look at the world through the eyes of the creator: the Earth is an environment to protect and a garden to cultivate. May the relationship between man and nature not be driven by greed, to manipulate and exploit, but may the divine harmony between beings and creation be conserved in the logic of respect and care, so as to be placed at the service of brothers and sisters, of future generations as well.”

3. The Challenge of Peace Today in the Light of Terrorism

During the last few days the newspapers and journals are flooded with analysis and comments of the terrorist attacks that took place on 13 November in Paris. 129 innocent people have lost their lives and hundreds of others were wounded. Earlier, on 31 October, the downing of a Russian airliner in

Egypt's Sinai Peninsula killed all the 224 people on board. Unfortunately radical terrorism and increasing terrorist threats have been on the increase around the world. According to the Global Terrorism Index (edition of 2014) from the institute for Economics and Peace, the world has experienced 61 % increase in terrorist attacks in the last year.⁵⁹ About 17,958 people were killed in terrorist attacks last year, and of those deaths 82 % occurred in just 5 nations: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria.⁶⁰ The compendium of the Social Doctrine of the church boldly states that "terrorism is one of the most brutal forms of violence traumatizing the international community today: it sows hatred, death, and an urge for revenge and reprisal... The fight against terrorism presupposes the moral duty to help to create those conditions that will prevent it from arising in the future,"⁶¹ years ago. The challenge we are confronted with today is how we promote the common good of all and in particular the good of the other when the other violently attacks us with terror, suicide bombing and the like. We face the Christian challenge of loving one's enemies and recognizing the humanity of all those who want to destroy us. Here we recollect the words of Bl Pope Paul VI who stated: "if you want peace work for justice." The road to peace is a very long and difficult journey. Let us work together with people of all religions and cultures and search for long-term political, economic and social strategies that will result in the creation of a peaceful society. "The promotion of peace in the world is an integral part of the Church's mission of continuing Christ's work of redemption on earth."⁶²

4. Conclusion: The Teachings of Pope Francis on Befriending the Other

A few days after his election as Pope, Pope Francis set forth his vision in the clearest possible terms: "And how I would like a church that is poor and for the poor." (*E como Vorrei una chiesa povera e per i poveri*).⁶³ According to him focusing

on poverty and sacrificing for the poor are at the heart of the Gospel.⁶⁴ In his homily at Lampedusa, he lamented what he called the anesthesia of the heart: “We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion”- “suffering with” others; the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!⁶⁵ In explaining the need to reach out to the other, in *Evangelii Gaudium* he aptly remarked: “Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel.”⁶⁶ In his speech to the United States Congress he clearly tells its members that “the fight against poverty and hunger must be fought constantly and on many fronts.”⁶⁷

Misericordiae Vultus, the Papal Bull of Pope Francis, is a beautiful invitation to each one of us to contemplate on the mystery of mercy and to rediscover the joy that comes from the encounter with the tenderness of God’s mercy. It demonstrates to us how we are to relate to others. According to him, mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. Especially in this Holy Year of Mercy, he invites each of us to open our hearts to others, in a spirit of mercy. He emphasized: “We look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the World today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich.”⁶⁸

I would like to conclude my reflection today with the words of Pope Francis: “May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the kingdom of God is already present in our midst.” His response to the other, especially to those on the fringes of society is heartwarming.

He wrote: "Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!"⁶⁹

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9. St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 8 (and *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22) "For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin."
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Is Not Christ the Only Saviour?

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Abstract: In this article, the author, Bishop of Poona, holds that the significant pronouncements of the Christian faith emphatically enunciated in Dominus Iesus are compatible with a courageously positive and constructive approach to other Christians and other religions. He asks the fundamental question: Is Jesus the only Saviour? This leads to committed dialogue with other religions and traditions. Then he presents some important task for the theologians

Keywords: Dominus Iesus, Jesus Christ, theology, inculturation.

1. We Hold Some Truths as Being Essentials of the Christian Faith

The fundamental affirmations of the Christian faith emphatically enunciated in Dominus Iesus (DI) are compatible with a courageously positive and constructive approach to other Christians and other religions. In this article I want to outline some of the salient challenges that Dominus Iesus poses to the Indian theologians.

The Catholic Church teaches that she alone is the unique Church of Christ, and that all other religions, whether Christian or non-Christian, are sects. Pope Pius XII teaches in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis*: “For in one spirit, says the Apostle, ‘were we all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Gen-

tiles, whether bond or free.’ As therefore in the true Christian community there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can be only one faith.”

Dominus Iesus states emphatically. “The definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian faith as compared with that of belief in other religions, the inspired nature of the books of Sacred Scripture, the personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth, the unity of the economy of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit, the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific mediation of the Church, the inseparability - while recognizing the distinction - of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the Church, and the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church.” (DI 4). Knowing the definitive character of revelation we understand that, “Christ, is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation” (DI 5). Therefore any limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ is contrary to the Church’s faith (DI 6).

The Church had taught that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church. It is our faith that the divinity is in all its fullness in Jesus and this fullness is given to the Church, the Body of Christ. However, this does not mean that in our grasp of the faith and in living it out we cannot learn anything from these sources of the other religions. Certainly we can be enriched by them and particularly we Indians can be helped immensely in the process of the inculturation of the faith-life.

Vatican II admits, fundamentally, that non-Catholic Christians are members of the Mystical Body and not merely ordered to it. And so we need to understand that Christ does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, “Therefore, the sacred books of other religions,

which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers, receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain” (DI 8). It acknowledges the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation. “In contemporary theological reflection there often emerges an approach to Jesus of Nazareth that considers him a particular, finite, historical figure, who reveals the divine not in an exclusive way, but in a way complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures. The Infinite, the Absolute, the Ultimate Mystery of God would thus manifest itself to humanity in many ways and in many historical figures: Jesus of Nazareth would be one of these. More concretely, for some, Jesus would be one of the many faces which the Logos has assumed in the course of time to communicate with humanity in a salvific way.” (DI 9).

According to the Christian faith the divinity and unicity of the mediatory role of Christ are non-negotiables. However, this does not mean that we cannot be enriched by the other religions and their founders. We should be the first to recognize all that is good in them. “...an economy of the eternal Word that is valid also outside the Church and is unrelated to her, in addition to an economy of the incarnate Word. The first would have a greater universal value than the second, which is limited to Christians...” (DI 9).

2. Tasks Before Indian Theologians

The theologians are called to listen to Dominus Iesus. In the practice of dialogue between the Christian faith and other religious traditions, as well as in seeking to understand its theoretical basis more deeply, new questions arise that need to be addressed through pursuing new paths of research, advancing proposals, and suggesting ways of acting that call for attentive discernment. Without exaggeration we can say that religious pluralism is a great challenge facing the Church today in our country. We cannot deny the fact that Christianity

originated as minority movement and the early church is the classical example of it. Keeping this point in mind it is clear that the document, however, clearly admits that other religions can cooperate with the one universal mediation of Christ for salvation and thus they can participate in this one mediation of Christ (DI 14). In this sense *Gaudium et Spes* holds: "... theology today, in its reflection on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God's salvific plan, is invited to explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation" (GS 22). The second important point in connection with religious pluralism is the operative presence of the Holy Spirit in cultures and religions and God's saving grace in view of his universal salvific will and participated mediation in the process of salvation.

This is the task for Indian theologians since we in India are surrounded by people of other religions and cultures. The Indian Theologians have carried on their thinking on interreligious dialogue, inculturation and the value of Indian religions and people.

1. A lived experience of the Christian community as a miniscule minority encountering religious fervour and the sincerity and genuine goodness of the people have a healthy influence on Indian theological pursuit. 2. The message from all these experiences, however, is that with regard to the religions of the others, we have to guard against an overtly negative description because people are too sensitive and defensive.

I think it is the task of Indian theologians to ensure a more acceptable and less provocative communication of the Christocentric ecclesial faith. Such a mode of communication is the greater burden and challenge laid upon us in the light of *Dominus Iesu*. As we keep the memory of Jesus alive, we keep his ongoing presence. Jesus always thought of the Father and his needy brothers and sisters. He is inviting us to go beyond us to give priority to the other.



Jesus as the Man for Others

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Abstract: In this article, the Bishop (Emeritus) of Poona, traces Jesus as the man for others. Jesus exhorts us: “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren you do unto me “ (Mt 25:40). Here my love for Jesus should be the measure of my love for others. Thus Jesus demands what seems impossible. “Love one another as I have loved you “ (Jn 13:34). The yardstick now is the love Jesus has for us. Our love is too small in order for us to love as Jesus loved us. Jesus does not ask the impossible from us. We can fulfil this commandment only to the extent that we open ourselves to the love Jesus is waiting to pour into our hearts. Christianity means befriending the other, just as Jesus was a man for others.

Keywords: Other, Jesus, Christianity, Love, Unknown.

Jesus is called “A Man for Others”. It is evident from his life. He is the Son of the Father and truly became man for the salvation of humankind. He loved, lived and he died for others. Before his death he gave us the commandment of love. The Bible gives us the commandment of love in three stages: love of self, love of others and love of God.

1. Love for the Other and Befriending the Other

So the Bible says clearly: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Lev 19:18, Mt 19:19). The golden rule is, “Do to others as you would have them do to you (Lk 6:31). The love you have for yourself should be the criterion of the love you expect from others. As a man for others, Jesus raised the bar higher. “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren you do

unto me” (Mt 25:40). Here my love for Jesus should be the measure of my love for others. Finally Jesus demanded what seems impossible. “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). The yardstick now is the love Jesus has for us. Our love is too small in order for us to love as Jesus loved us. Jesus does not ask the impossible from us. We can fulfil this commandment only to the extent that we open ourselves to the love Jesus is waiting to pour into our hearts. Thus Jesus is a man for others and Christianity means befriending the other.

An illustration may help here. Dr. E. Stanley Jones, an American missionary in India, who knew Mahatma Gandhi well once asked him, “How can we make Christianity naturalized in India, not a foreign thing, identified with a foreign government and a foreign people, but a part of the natural life in India and contributing its power to India’s uplift?” Gandhiji’s response showed he was way ahead of his times. “First, I would suggest that all Christians, missionaries begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Second, practise it without adulterating it or toning it down. Third, emphasize love and make it your working force, for love is central in Christianity. Fourth, study the non-Christian religions more sympathetically to find the good that is within them, in order to have a more sympathetic approach to people.” Thus Gandhi expected from Christians nothing but love of the other and befriending the other.

2. Dialoguing with Others

Befriending the other is based on Jesus’ command to love. The opposite of love is not hate, but selfishness. Love is outward oriented. “What can I do for you? How can I make you happy? How can I serve you?” The opposite is selfishness. “What can you do for me? How can you make me happy? How can you serve me?” Jesus thought not of himself but only of others. It is salutary for those exercising authority to examine themselves whether they are befriending the other

or being selfish. “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many “ (Mk 10:45).

Such a befriending implies reaching out and encountering the others. Jesus also commissioned his disciples to go out and make disciples of all nations.(Mt.28:19). “The Church was sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all peoples and nations” (Vat II, ad gentes,10). It is not the Church as a whole but every disciple who has the duty to evangelize, to bring the Good News of The Father’s love and forgiveness, and our redemption through Jesus, to others. It is a great joy to have Jesus but a still greater joy to give Jesus to others. The typical illustration is Mother Mary, who did not keep Jesus to herself but gave him to the whole world.

Such spreading of the Gospel to others presupposes genuine dialogue. The Good News has to be spread by good methods and not by arrogance, force or denigrating other religions . In his very first encyclical Bl Pope Paul VI spoke on how the Church must carry out its mission in the contemporary world and spoke of dialogue. (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 65). Dialogue does not mean one-way traffic, the donor model. “I have something you don’t have. Listen to me”. But it means being open to what the other has to say and being ready to be enriched by the other. “By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God” (St. John Paul II in Chennai, 5th February 1986). For true dialogue, love of the other, including befriending the other, is indispensable.

From all this we may hold that to be a true disciple of Jesus and to carry on his mission every individual in the Church must imitate him and live for others. This calls for an openness to the unknown.

3. Openness to the Unknown

Unfortunately today, instead of imitating Jesus, we tend to seek comfort and security. Security for the most people lies in the maintenance mode. The unknown can cause apprehension but can also be a challenge. The unknown is present all through the Bible. Abraham, Joseph and Moses are typical cases. Abraham dared to go to the unknown land and believed in the unknown promise of God. Joseph believed in God, even when he was sold and imprisoned. Mose could only gaze at the promised land, which remained elusive to him. Further, Mary's question to the angel and conversion of Paul are illustrations of such openness to the unknown.

Further, we may say that for the religious believers, faith is the solution to the unknown. It is a leap in the dark. We may not know the future, but we know who holds the future. God is with us and he is in full control of our lives. Precisely therein lies our openness to the unknown and to the other. In the same way Jesus as the man for others was open to the unknown.

Thus the challenge before us is to be men for others, following Jesus, even in the unknown contexts and cultures. There we need to encounter others warmly, dialogue with them genuinely and discern together properly.

4. Conclusion

Jesus was truly a man for others. He challenges us his followers to encounter others and befriend them. This may call for prophetic commitment that may cost us very much.

Thus when we, following Jesus, become men and women for others, we need to be courageous enough to proclaim the message of life and to be ready to suffer, if needed!



Evangelization as Befriending and Building Relationships

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Abstract: In today's world, relationships in every aspect is collapsing. It is being measured in terms of money and production. The bold words of Pope Francis "Ours is a battered church. It is a church in a battlefield" assumes great importance and throws a great challenge to the whole church and to the entire human society. It is in the battlefield and when we are wounded and battered that even the helpless enemy becomes a friend and people begin to care for each other. That is the beginning of true evangelisation, where we begin to reach out to others and build bridges.

Keywords: Relationship, befriending, Pope Francis, poor, dignity of labour.

The most often heard and said words today are "I have no time," "I am busy, I shall get back to you". This applies to most people in every part of the world, in every walk of life. The race for success, the zest for excellence, the rush to outshine others and the cut throat competition that envelopes life in general, place people on a nonstop run. Parents have no time for children; husbands and wives have no time for each other, children have no time for parents and for their siblings. Priests and religious, men and women chose to minister to others too have been affected by this. They have no time for prayer, for the Word of God, for the community activities but

are affected by the standards set by the contemporary society. No one has the time to stop by and look at the wounded, the fallen, the defeated, the weak and the needy.

A father of three, recently was sharing with me his painful experience where the children look up at him only when they need money. In other words to many children the parents have become a portable ATM machine. Unfortunately, they were not made to realize that ATM will give money only if it is deposited earlier in the account! Relationships in every aspect is collapsing, it is being measured in terms of money and production. The bold words of Pope Francis “Ours is a battered church. It is a church in a battlefield” assumes great importance and throws a great challenge to the whole church and to the entire human society. It is in the battlefield and when we are wounded and battered that even the helpless enemy becomes a friend and people begin to care for each other.

Despite all that Jesus taught about His mission and the mission He left to us of being witnesses in words and deeds, and the renewed calls from the church to reach out to the people. Sadly, there are some in the church who confuse others through their opinions. They teach that we need not proclaim the Good News, we should not disturb others and so on. Even if many share such opinions, the Lord’s teachings cannot be altered. They are eternal. They are for all times and places, for all races and nations.

We call the Words of Jesus, the Good News. Every person has a right for the Good News. In this age where there is so much confusion, chaos, fear and exploitation, the need for the Good News is more than ever before. The daily reports that we get of the world matters convey to us more frightening, bad, shocking news than good news. Wars, communal clashes, missing planes, planes and trains blown up, rape, murder, robbery, bribery, unjust punishments, manipulated judicial judgments etc. haunt us making us wonder whether humanity itself

has been replaced by animality! These are but symptoms of a sick society. The absence of love, care, concern and willingness to share is the sickness. The society does not need preachers who are mere poachers feeding on the poor people, it does not need apothecary who have a remedy for everything but men and women who like the good Samaritan in the gospel, like Veronica who broke lines and wiped the face of the condemned Jesus and Mother Theresa in our own times can get down to the wounded, the aged, the orphan, the leper and all the marginalised and tell them not in words, but through courageous actions “I love you”. This language of relationship is understood by all even the most insensitive. In their teachings the three recent Popes tell us very clearly that “we cannot give what we do not have”.

By Evangelization I mean something much broader than the *Mission ad gentes* and the new evangelization. I feel, in many cases we have stooped far below in our relationships than the pagans or barbarians of old. Something worse than paganism and barbarianism has gripped our communities. While strongly believing in both the mission ad gentes and the new evangelization, I feel that we need to work on re-establishing the snapped ties.

1. In the Beginning

The Book of Genesis shows us an enviable life situation. Gen. 2: 15-25 presents a picture of perfect relationship. God, Man, woman and nature. God makes man in His own image, finds him happy with nature and everything in nature. But the loneliness he experiences impresses God and He provides man with the perfect companion, whom he welcomes saying “this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”! the book adds, “for this reason man leaves his Father and mother and becomes one with his wife”. The Lord walks in the garden in the cool of the evenings and man and woman who are such

a part of nature and experiencing such unbroken relationship with each other that even nakedness does not embarrass them.

When we talk about the establishment of God's kingdom, evangelization etc., what else can we mean than to establish this unbroken relationship between human beings, human beings and the whole of nature and all these leading to God, who is able to freely mingle with them? Just as Eve wanted to be wiser than God and live better than Him, fell to the vileness of the evil one, the desire to excel, to outdo others, outshine others, to have more degrees and possessions and positions blind most of us we fall victims to fanciful theories and pernicious invitations which may appeal to us in moments of thoughtless and in the absence of serious reflection. Once this begins, we make every effort to hide from God, from each other and from the society itself. We withdraw, mental, spiritual and physical ailments begin to haunt us and we push ourselves down into the valley of death from where a return is possible only if we become humble enough to admit our mistake and to restore broken relationships. Like our ancestor, most of us like that courage and humility and we indulge in a blame game where every one around, everything in nature and God himself gets blamed.

It is true that with the advancement of psychology and sciences, a lot of people are helped and a lot of healing process has been initiated and accomplished. At the same time, it is frustrating to hear many people finding flawed shelter under these very instruments of help. Many people these days fail to admit their sins and failures and weaknesses. They always find excuse for gross blunders and violations of natural laws of life and relationships and blame it on parents, on the circumstances when they were conceived, when they were in their mother's womb, their childhood and so on. Lack of responsibility should not be tagged as 'force of circumstances'! Jesus, in a number of instances made it very clear to His listeners that

we should not blame our ancestry but accept our own failures and reconnect ourselves with God and people.

Every page of the Old Testament presents us with instances of broken relationships and how they are restored. The history of Israel is one of a chain of such events. In other words, the breaking of relationships is not the issue but the refusal and failure to re-establish and reconnect. If every man and woman is humble and bold enough to say a bold “*mea culpa*” and do one’s part, there will be no more broken families, fragmented societies, misguided youth who pose great threats to families, lives and property. If the right relationship is established in society through the power of the Lord not through human manipulations, girls and women will be safe on our streets, the deserving will find jobs and helps, as the Prophet Isaiah said, “the lion and the kid will lie down together”.

2. In His Days

Jesus in His public ministry taught and worked a lot of miracles. In all these, never for once did he try to promote himself or to go against the society or its system. He used the harshest words possible against the rich and the powerful but never a word against the sick, the sinner and those marginalised by the society. He was bold enough to dine at the house of Levi and Zaccheus and say out loud “It is the sick who need the doctor not those who are well” and “I have come to call sinners”. He was bold enough to challenge those who brought the woman caught in adultery and to stand in her defence. He was not afraid to be seen alone with the Samaritan woman at the well and make the public declaration of the water of life. Much against all calculations, the Samaritan woman sees the new way and the entire village accept him not because she told them but they experienced his presence. A new bridge is built, a new community is won.

The marginalised had a special place in Jesus ministry. The woman who was healed of bleeding who was excluded from the society, Jesus making a hero out of the Samaritan who came to thank him from the ten lepers who were healed (Lk 17: 11-19), the transformation that came in the woman who was a sinner (Lk 7:36-50), the assurance to the woman who anointed his feet in the house Simon the Pharisee were all loud and clear points of the new manifesto he was presenting. “Go into the whole world ...” (Mk 16:15), Jesus still challenges us. But our lack of availability, our lack of preparedness, our fear, our shyness and above all our not wanting to be seen as disciples lead us to our hesitations, our new theories, our taking shelter behind the various explanations against proclamation and evangelization leave us lethargic, what the Book of Revelation calls “neither hot nor cold” (Rev 3:16).

3. The Disciples

We live in an age of elections, choices, selections, going for the best, setting goals and looking for the star. It is against this background, we find Jesus leaving his church to a bunch of fishermen, who today form one of the lowest strata of the human society especially in India. Economically and in many other aspects they are poor and unprepared for leadership. Jesus did not conduct a selection process or an election process. He just appointed Peter to lead the church. He called Saul of Tarsus the greatest enemy of the new way to be a greater missionary than even Peter. He inspired the doubting Thomas to travel the farthest all the way carrying his message.

Interestingly neither Peter nor Paul, neither Stephen nor any of the early apostles and church members were taught theology, philosophy, logic, psychology or any of the allied subjects. They had never heard of software and hardware, they had no classes in management, they had never been to forty days retreats and one year courses, but had just attended a few

talks but accompanied and lived with Jesus on his mission. That prepared them for their task. They had no fear, no shyness, no hesitation. They were able to stand up and ask the highest authorities of their days; “can we stop telling what we have seen and heard?” “It is not through our power but by the power of His name that this blind man stands before you healed”. They had seen and heard and the Lord and his message had become a part of their lives. No wonder Paul could say “woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel”. In his eternal ode to love in Corinthians he makes it clear that love surpasses all (1 Cor 13).

Coming down to the days after the apostolic days, we find convinced men and women who dared to stand for Jesus and establish the new order. Francis of Assisi was called to rebuild the church from the level of spiritual decadence it had fallen into. His was an immediate yes and embracing a life against the expectations even of his family. Ignatius Loyola and a host of others heard the inner call and had the emphatic answer YES. Like Peter and Paul, they have changed the world. In a time not very different from ours, a world turned topsy-turvy by the industrial revolution and the moral degradation and poverty which resulted from it, the number of families and youth that it adversely affected, a young Priest from Turin, who could have been bitter all his life because of the hostile situation he grew in, boldly came onto the streets, literally swimming against the current and became the father of the youth on the streets. Don Bosco who wanted to be a missionary in some distant land gave more missionaries to the church than he could ever have dreamt of. I am sure that the even the lowliest follower of Francis, Ignatius or Don Bosco and all the great saints who made a mark on the church are more qualified than them today. Leaving the so called Christian countries aside, in a multi religious country like India, the alumni organizations of these groups, consisting mainly of non Christians have been so active and have contributed a

lot to building a better society by being willing to reach out to the needy. This was possible only because, their educators built up a healthy rapport with them and inspired them. In spite of the mightier, better equipped and numerous institutions, the efficacy of these in transforming lives is obviously much less because of the lack of personal contact and inspiring presence among them by religiously motivated leaders among them. As I move around and meet some of the senior leaders in Arunachal Pradesh, who decades ago studied in Don Bosco School Dibrugarh, still speak about a certain Fr. Visentin. I have not known him. But they say, he never taught them in school, he was the Parish Priest always moving around in the villages but whenever he was back home, he spent a lot of time with the boys, playing with them, chatting with them and listening to them. The relationship he had established with them left indelible impressions on their minds.

To put all these into a nutshell, the Apostles never missed a chance to relate with people of all kinds so that their Lord would be known. Philip did not hesitate to go upto the Ethiopian's chariot and enter into a conversation. He could have left that stranger from a foreign land to himself. Paul never missed an opportunity to get in touch with new people, new groups, venturing even into the areopagus or public spaces.

4. In Our Own Days

Whatever be the conclusions drawn, the whole world is puzzled at the disappearance of the ill fated M 370, the Malaysian flight with full passengers, all because it had lost its connectivity. Hardly any one stops to think of the tragedies that take place daily on earth just because of the absence of proper connectivity. Connection to God, to nature, to family, and in other innumerable ways! In his *Laudato Si* and through his call for "the care for creation" Pope Francis places the need

for the connection at the centre of modern social, economic and ecclesiastical life.

St. John Paul II reached out to every land and nation. His was not a campaign but missionary journeys. The world youth days, mission congresses, reaching out to the poor and children without being shy or afraid, endeared him to the world. The church began to have a less worn out face. The charm that Pope Francis has brought to the world and the acceptance he has gained in the world is a clear proof that our world of broken relationships and broken lives is eager for repairs. Only the love and active presence of the Lord can make this happen. Only a deep love springing from the heart and inspired by the Lord can make us reach out to the others.

Our societies which were deeply family oriented have sadly begun to lose that characteristic. Our tribal societies that were very much community based have unfortunately become fragmented. Exploitation of all kinds abound in all the settings of life. In societies where orphans and uncared for old people were unheard of, these abound today. In communities where suicide was not known, it has become a common event. Places where houses had no doors have to have iron gates today. It is not an enemy from outside who have brought these evils into our midst, but our growing selfishness, our forgetfulness of God leading to ignoring human beings and abandoning relationships preferring gain or profit over them leads to these tragedies. Instead of multiplying counselling centres, speciality facilities and superstructures, it is time that we all embark on a journey along with Pope Francis to evangelise the world. It is not to preach but to live. It is not to give but share. It is not about showing the way but walking the way. We are not expected to give explanations or excuses, we are not called upon to give scientific and psychological solutions but prayer from the heart, that can give meaning to every situation both tragic and joyful.

Like Jesus, we need to be inventive enough to make every interaction of ours catechetical. The interactions of Jesus never sounded jarring to his listeners to viewers but appealed to the core of their heart. At the tomb of Lazarus he communicated the most important teaching of all “I am the resurrection and the life.....” Though he incurred the wrath of the Jewish authorities, all those who were present and many who heard of it became believers. The billions we spend on education, academic, technical, medical and to help the poor, the thousands of man hours that we spend on courses and events produce results that are no where in proportion to the effort and expense. Is it because the listeners are bad? Though not easy to admit, the only reason we can cite is that unlike Jesus who was on His father’s mission, we are not on a mission but on duty.

5. Reaching Out

Reaching out to the people in their own setting has been the greatest success of mission. In the Acts of the Apostles we hear of the people being scattered by the persecution. It helped the spread of the faith. They shared not their sad story to evoke pity in the listeners but shared the story of Jesus. They did not go as defeated people but as people who were scattered with a mission and a people whom the Lord would never fail.

When the Lord said, “I must go to the other villages too” or “there are other sheep that do not yet belong to the fold,” it was not just curiosity that he manifested but the zeal for his father and the urge to fulfil the mission he came to accomplish. His going to the houses of Peter’s mother in law, Levi, Zaccheus and the Samaritan village. These numerous visits he made always ended up with the people coming to the Father. If we put all the miles that the church men and women fly today, if we count all the miles that they drive, if we calculate all the money that they spent on fuel and the precious hours that they spent in social gatherings and community building exercises,

the figures will be staggering and ruthlessly scandalous when we look at the visits of Jesus, of the Apostles and of the missionaries of yester years. The standards we set in our institutions under the name of preparing people for life, all done in the name of the carpenter from Nazareth and the fisherman from Galilee whom the Lord entrusted with the “keys of the kingdom” and the power “to bind and loose on earth”...is often awe inspiring. It makes us wonder often if the boy Jesus were to seek admission in any of our Catholic schools today, he would get an admission. Joseph was the migrant worker, with no permanent address, phone number or email to give, Mary was a village girl and Jesus had never been to a play house or kindergarten. In the interview of the student and the parents both would be disqualified! How many Joseph’s and Jesus’s we must be turning away each year!

The first question asked by our forefathers was “am I my brother’s keeper”? When the Lord chided and questioned Adam and Eve, they only had excuses but no questions. For Cain, who initiated envy and murder, there was no answer but a counter question. Is this enveloping our minds and lives today? Like Cain, is our brother, sister and neighbour a threat to us, an obstacle on our path of self aggrandisement and self promotion?

I would like to conclude in the words of Archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Olinda and Recife in North East Brazil who through his talks and interventions created a slot for the church in the third world at Vatican II and let the idea of the church of the poor develop. “There is no need to talk, thinking is enough. During my vigil I try to recover unity with Christ. And with him I relive the meetings of the past day. I think for instance, about the mother who told me about the problems she has with her husband, with her children, and how hard she finds it to feed them. And, through this very real mother whom I know by name, I think about all the mothers throughout the

world throughout the ages: the poor ones, the rich ones, the happy ones, the unhappy ones. Or I think about the man I saw working in the street, emptying dustbins. I had caught his eye. He didn't dare offer me his hand. I virtually had to force him: Work isn't what soils our hands, friend. No hand was ever soiled by work. Self centeredness is what spoils them. This man, Francisco or Antonio as he may be, reminds me of working men throughout the world throughout the ages. Then I say to Christ our brother, 'Lord, two thousand years after your death injustices are growing worse and worse. Reviewing the day like this, I find time passes very quickly'.



Challenge to Discover Christ *within* Cultures

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Abstract: We need to discover Jesus Christ in the heart of human cultures. Though distinct from the reality of culture, Christ is not separate from it. Our contention is that Jesus Christ is not exclusively *above*, *against* or *of* the cultures. He is not *a paradox* in relation to cultures or *a transformer of the cultures* in the strict sense. He is *within* the cultures. No one can separate authentic human culture from him. So the relationship of Christ and culture is neither dualistic nor paradoxical. It is non-dualistic in the sense that Christ cannot be separated from culture even though it cannot be identified with him. Everything authentic in culture is Christic. Whatever is negative and dehumanizing, whether systems or structures of injustice, oppression and dehumanization whether it is social, religious, or political, is not authentically cultural. With him culture is already transformed. Therefore, the mission of those who believe in him is to discover the transformation he brought about in the culture by his becoming a part of it and to actualize it so that both humans and their world will become what they are called to become and find their destiny.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, Culture, Plurality, Incarnation, Non-dualistic Relationship, Docetism, Transformation,

Introduction

What has Christ to do with cultures? This was a question raised in a seminar on inculturation by a participant. Though

the question evoked a mixed reaction among the rest of the participants, the questioner was earnest in raising such a question. Obviously, some thought it was a naïve question. However, the questioner explained that whatever, he believed about Christ had nothing to do with culture. Jesus Christ was above all cultures. God chose to be born in history and so it had to be in one culture and among a particular group of people with their own traditions, social structures, ethnicity, religious belief-systems, attitudes, behaviour, life-style, food habits, and a way of social relationships and interactions. Of course, Jesus was born in a culture as all of us are. There is nothing more or nothing less to it. Each culture is unique and we need not bother about such trivial matters. If at all anything is needed, it is to liberate Jesus from the trapping of the Jewish culture so that he can remain universal as the Son of God. In fact, the dogmas and doctrines about him have done so. We need not inculturate him in any culture and relativise him. These were the main points of the explanation given by the one who thought that it is a futile exercise to discuss about Christ's relation to cultures. However, what the questioner himself failed to recognize was that even the term 'Christ' itself is a religio-cultural construct.

In this paper an attempt is made to 'see' Jesus Christ as a part of human culture whatever be its diversity of expressions, distinct from the reality of culture but not separate from it. Culture makes the inner world and world-view of a person in which s/he lives and finds her or his identity in the family, in the society with a language that helps the relationship with others through a system of symbols. Our contention is that Jesus Christ is not exclusively *above*, *against* or *of* the cultures. He is not *a paradox* in relation to cultures or a *transformer of the cultures* in the strict sense. He is *within* the cultures. No one can separate authentic human culture from him. With him culture is already transformed. Therefore, the mission of those who believe in him is to discover the transformation he

brought about in the culture by his becoming a part of it and to actualize it so that both humans and their world will become what they are called to become and find their destiny.

1. Christ's Relation to Cultures

In his book, *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr attempted to explain the relationship with Christ and Culture from the perspective of a Lutheran Theologian. In his approach he sees Christ in a double relationship. In his vertical relationship, Christ is in relation with his Father and his whole life is oriented towards him. Christ is primarily theocentric. At the same time in his horizontal relationship he is also anthropocentric. It is in this horizontal dimension of his relationship, culture plays a role. There is not much difference between culture and 'the world' mentioned in the New Testament. So what would be his relationship with cultures? Niebuhr suggests five ways of looking at the relationship between Christ and culture that are found in history. They are not mutually exclusive. In a way they are complimentary.

a. Christ against Culture

In its radical form the followers of this understanding of relationship between Christ and culture would argue that Christians should make a choice between Christ or culture. According to them both are incompatible. The culture stands for everything that is anti-Christ and anti-Christian. Therefore, there should not be any compromise with the culture one lives in. Those who subscribe to this view would find a basis for their argument in some passages in the NT. In the First Letter of John, the followers of Christ are exhorted to shun this world of lies and lust, murder and theft and all kinds of evil (I Jh 2:8-9, 11, 15,17; 3:8-11; 5: 4-5, 19). This negative attitude to towards everything in culture denies the possibility of anything good in culture. It is possible that those who see Christ as against culture have a disincarnated Christ in their faith-system and

they find that commitment to him means that it is necessary to disengage oneself from culture. Such an understanding in the final analysis is self-contradictory because culture is the way one is and thinks. One cannot dissociate even the most sublime faith in God from culture. What one can hold is to negate the values and attitudes that seem to be a part of the culture and would not be seen as compatible with one's belief in God revealed through Jesus Christ in a particular culture.

Christ *against* culture is the paradigm of radical following by desert fathers, ascetics and radical monastic orders. Even here an extreme denial of genuine culture is not envisaged. The allurements of the world and world as a principle opposed to God would be the world that is ungodly and not the world that manifests the presence of God. So too a culture that does not have any relation to the transcendence and has no relation to those values beyond the transitory and ephemeral would be the culture that is often seen as opposed to faith in Christ. Tertullian was the first one to develop a negative idea about culture in his books on *Apology* and on *Idolatry*. In Protestantism, there are sectarian groups like Mennonites and Quakers who developed a very negative attitude towards culture. They see that faith in Christ is incompatible with recognizing culture as a value.

The *countercultural movements* are often seen as falling into this paradigm of relationship between Christ and culture. But in fact, countercultural attitudes and movements do not fall into this category. It is not against culture as such but against a perversion of culture that creates oppressive structures and systems, dehumanizes humans and alienates humans from their authentic selves. Counter-culture is also culture albeit a culture opposed to the perversion of culture.

In the missionary enterprises of colonial time, the Asian religions and cultures were seen as opposed to Christian culture and values. Therefore, they were seen as opposed to

Christ. Christ *against* culture model was the force behind the legendary missionary zeal of hundreds of missionaries from the West. Here again Christ was seen as one who is against particular cultures which were considered as steeped in idolatry, superstition, ungodliness and under the power of Satan and not culture per se. Therefore, Christ *against* culture is an ambivalent model of relationship between Christ and cultures. On the one hand it cannot be against culture as such while it uses everything positive in the culture to articulate its own position and on the other hand it cannot deny the fact that God has become human in a culture and transformed it to be something different from what it was. At best it can be the affirmation of the dominion of Christ over everything and a rejection of everything in culture that is not Christic.

b. The Christ of Culture

This model of relationship between Christ and culture is seen as the opposite of Christ-against- culture. Christ is understood as the fulfillment of culture and so there is no conflict between Christ and culture. Culture can be interpreted through Christ and Christ can be interpreted through culture. This approach is often seen as accommodationism as the attempt here is to reconcile Christianity with divergent cultures and best in all cultures. In the early Church the Judaizers, the Gnostics and the Hellenists attempted to interpret Christ from their particular cultures and religious and philosophical perspectives.¹ Neibuhr sees in this model of relationship between Christ and culture an error equal to and opposite of the first position. In this understanding of concentration on the world Christ's relationship with the world is emphasized at the cost of Christ's transcendental or vertical relationship. Without emphasis on grace or after-life religion degenerates into legalistic 'self-reliant humanism' and idolatrous worship of humans and denigration of God.² This is considered by Lutheran theology as an accommodation of the world by

which both the horizontal relationship of humans with the world as well as the vertical relationship with God is distorted.

There are many who oppose this model of relationship between Christ and culture. They find that it would compromise with the Lordship of Christ when he is so much part of the culture. If Christ is of culture, then how would one explain the presence of sin, oppression, injustice, discrimination and all kinds of evil in all cultures? Therefore, this model would not be the right relation of Christ to culture. However, those who would hold the view “Christ of culture” find it the best way to express the right relationship of humans among themselves as well as the kingdom of God realized in the right relationship among humans as the children of God in this world. In the context of Asia the Christ of religions cannot be a relevant model of relationship between Christ and culture according to Aloysius Pieris.³ Christ of the culture is based on the fact that God became human and entered into human culture and became very much a part of it.

c. Christ above Culture

This model of relationship between Christ and culture too is based on his incarnation. Jesus Christ is both human and divine. As a human he is *of* the culture but as God he is *above* culture. The fact that Christ was God overtakes the human dimension of Christ and both cannot be equated. The emphasis is on the divine dimension of Christ. Therefore, though Christ is very much a part of the culture he is infinitely above culture. Justin, the Martyr and Clement of Alexandria could be considered the patristic representatives of this model. In the middle ages Thomas Aquinas and the Catholic theological tradition in general held this view of Christ’s relation to culture.⁴ This approach seems to synthesize the various opposing approaches. It is based on the incarnation of God in a particular culture. However, if this culture is elevated to a position of Christian culture and if it is made universal

it can lead to a cultural hegemony and it can stand against or even suppression of other cultures. In fact, there are many tragic instances of such approach to diverse cultures in history.

One of the other dangers of this approach is that it does not take the grace-filled world which was created and re-created by the incarnation of the Word seriously though it claims to do so. It is the consequence of a faith affirmation in Christ bordering on doceticism. Throughout the history of Christological development what the Church wanted to overcome was the heresy of docetics that Christ is not human but only appears to be so. As an offshoot of Gnosticism with its dualistic philosophy that matter is evil and spirit is good, true incarnation was thought to be impossible. So while Jesus Christ is truly divine he cannot be truly human. Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus fought such heresy and later in the council of Chalcedon (CE 451) affirmed the Church's faith that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human. However, even today it is difficult for many Christians to believe that Jesus was truly human like anyone of them. It is easy to believe that he is God. In this context, Christ *above* culture would appear to many as Christ has nothing to do with any culture. Such an image of Christ, disengaged from any culture make him universal and people of any culture could relate with him as the transcendent God. So the fears expressed by those who are not in favour of this approach that the traditional synthesis achieved by this model does not take into consideration all that is evil and sinful in cultures, become unfounded. Christ can be thought of truly above all cultures. Though it seems to be a synthesis, in effect, in this model Christ has nothing to do with the cultures.

d. Christ and Culture

Beginning with Paul there is a certain dualistic understanding in the relationship between Christ and culture. In fact, in this model it is not a relationship between Christ and culture but

how a believer relates herself or himself with Christ and culture. The relationship with Christ is permanent, everlasting and grace-filled while with the world it is temporal, transitory and filled with God's wrath and severity. This relationship is expressed by Paul as our relation to the "earthly tent" and "a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternally in heavens" (2 Cor 5:1-2). Augustine would develop this theme further contrasting the earthly city with the heavenly city or the city of God. In Luther's view there are two kingdoms, namely, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. The first one is of grace and mercy and the second one is of God's wrath and severity. The Christian existence is between these two kingdoms till the end when there would be only one kingdom that is the kingdom of God.

The dualistic understanding of Christ and culture has its consequences for Christian commitment to transform this world. It recognizes the evils in the culture. Sin pervades culture, injustice, dehumanization, discrimination, oppression, exploitation, greed and violence rule cultures and societies. New cultures are created with all kinds of negative values that would further destroy the life of humans and the nature. Still a Christian can live a life without any commitment to this world and take a position of isolating oneself from this world and believe that s/he can remain uncontaminated by this world with the grace of God. Laws, regulations, duties etc., can be understood as necessary evils one has to bear with for a short time. As everything in this world is transitory one need not make any commitment to this world or its destiny.

The dualistic model of relationship between Christ and culture devalues the meaning of God's creation as something good enough that God freely chose it to be a part of God himself through incarnation or hominization. Dualistic attitude to Christ and culture makes Christ as the one who is above, separated and isolated from culture and negates the value of

culture as something good and as an inalienable dimension of being human. Any dualism between absolute and relative, infinite and finite, God and world, Christ and culture negates the possibility of God becoming human and thus denies this basic Christian belief.

e. Christ Transforming Culture

This model of relationship between Christ and culture claims to be based on the participation of the Logos in creation as well as in the incarnation. God created everything through his Word and it is the same Word, the Son who became human and redeemed the world. Therefore, the Logos transformed the world (Jn 3:16-18). It is said that in the sacramental vision of John the ordinary things are transformed into symbols that would be instruments of God's presence in this world as in the case of the sacrament of the Eucharist and baptism.⁵

In this model it is admitted that the Word became a part of the world but his function to transform the world would be as if it were from outside of the world. He does not seem to enter into the reality of the world, its cultures and history. Certainly, in this model Christ transforms and re-orientes cultures through his sanctifying and redeeming presence. According to Augustine, though originally everything that God created was good, it was vitiated, corrupted, lost and dead by sin. Therefore, Christ heals and renews what was perverted by sin. Since God is at work in creation and history, culture and institutions of culture have a positive value but it needs to be constantly converted to the Kingdom of God.

All these models of Christ's relation to culture emphasize one or other aspects of this relationship. If they are seen as mutually exclusive it would not do justice to the biblical understanding of God's involvement in our history. Though culture is built on nature, if that nature is viewed completely in a negative light any culture that evolves from the nature

of humans will also be something completely perverted and evil. Christ cannot relate with that culture. A very negative anthropology would give only a superficial recognition of even what is good and positive in any culture. But if we take the biblical witness seriously, we can see that culture is an extension of life of humans as humans in the givenness of a particular place with its accumulation of human experiences preserved, transmitted and lived in history. It is the 'world' of humans in which they live, move and have their being in their historical existence. It is through the cultural paradigms they relate with one another and even with the Ultimate Reality whom they call God or by any name, knowing fully well that this Ultimate is beyond name and form. So as humans cannot be separated from the culture in which they are born and have grown, the Word became human also cannot be separated from culture.

2. Christ *within* Cultures

If culture is the sum total of everything that gives meaning to a person's existence in history or if it is broadly described as *a way of life*⁶ as Michael Amaladoss expresses it, human beings cannot be separated from it. It is through culture that one finds her/his fundamental identification in relation to a family, to a society, to a language, to an ethnic group, to a religion etc. Though one may be able to make abstractions about human nature, a human person can be thought of only in a net-work of relationships. It is in a conscious and free relationship with other human persons and with the reality of the world and the Ultimate Source of everything that one finds one's identity as a human person. In a way it is culture that mediates relationship and qualifies relationships. Authentic culture is everything that gives meaning to one's existence as a human person. For a great majority of humans religion provides a meaning system in which one can discover her/his beginning and end or origin and ultimate destiny. No wonder

then, sociologists and anthropologists include religion in their definition of culture. If culture is such an all encompassing dimension of humans to be human then it must be assumed by the Word that everything authentic and true in it must become Christic.

If what we mean by culture is everything that makes human life to unfold itself as humans intended by God, Christ can never be against, above and paradoxical to culture. Christ is then really *of* culture or *within* the reality of culture. What is authentic in the culture is Christic. It is Christ who is the beginning and end, the alpha and the omega of authentic culture. Humans are the ones who develop culture with the evolution of their self-understanding as humans or pervert it to a dehumanizing one depending on how they use or misuse their freedom. Humans transform culture either for better or for worse. Authentic culture continues to evolve in history at different places and different times according to the self-understanding of humans as humans. Multiculturalism, migration, shared knowledge etc. open up ways of new self-understanding and development of humans and consequently cultures will also develop progressively. Christ is *within* cultures because it is in and through him culture will progress not for its own sake but to make humans to evolve to the “full stature of Christ” as Paul puts it. Humans become “mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). From the perspective of Christian faith, to become human like Christ is the goal of human existence. It is in authentic culture humans can reach this destiny. So Christ is not only an exemplar for the development of culture but it is Christ’s power working through his Spirit that gives dynamism to the evolution of culture as well as the standard to judge the authenticity of a culture.

In this sense, Christ is really of culture. But not in the way Niebuhr and others with a selective understanding of

culture perceive it. Christ's presence in the culture should not be seen as related only to a specific culture. This selective application of Christ's presence in the culture of one's choice limiting Christ to that particular culture is to make an idol of Christ. This was the problem of Judaizers or Gnostics. It would also be a problem if Christ is reduced exclusively to be a Brahmin Christ or a Dalit Christ or a Tribal Christ. Christ *within* the culture means that it is Christ who is the inner dimension of everything that is humanizing in every culture but not of anything that is divisive, discriminatory, and exploitative and in fact, dehumanizing in any culture. The specificity and uniqueness of any culture is not to be seen in its opposition to the other cultures but in its capacity to promote the development of humans opening up new vistas for the enhancement of human capacity to become more and more human and its possibility to relate with other cultures.

a. Christ and Culture: Non-dualistic Relationship

If we take incarnation and resurrection of Christ seriously we have to admit that by God's entering into history and by God's involvement in the movement of the world to its final destiny, Christ has assumed everything that is human except that which negates the unfolding of humans as humans. According to Origen whatever is to be redeemed must be assumed. God assumes human nature and culture. God's relation to human history and culture would be different from what it was before the incarnation. However, God was not far from everything human according to the Fathers of the Church. For Irenaeus God created everything with his two hands, namely, Logos and Pneuma, the Word and the Spirit. God has created everything for perfection and therefore there is an inner dynamism in all humans and the entire creation to reach its God-intended perfection. The Incarnation itself is for the purpose of leading creation to its perfection which will be finally 'recapitulated' by Christ and will be returned

to the Father. Athanasius would develop the theology of Logos present in the creation as distinct from creation but not separated from it. "In one sense indeed, He was not far from it before; no part of creation had ever been without Him who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us."⁷ Further, he says, "You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honored, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so is it with the King of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against humankind have been foiled and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be."⁸ By incarnation God's relation to the world is revealed as non-dualistic. The Word, though distinct from the world is not separate from the world. As human, the Word assumed everything that makes human as human. Therefore it is also the assumption of culture which cannot be separated from the reality of being human. Certainly, the cultural dimension of his humanity was expressed in a definite and historical Jewish culture. Culture cannot be separated from its expression. By being a part of the Jewish culture Christ is related to every culture. Being in a "single house" as Athanasius would affirm, Christ affects every house. By being in one culture Christ is present in every culture. He is the heart of every culture that provides the 'world' for every human to relate with everyone and everything in such a way that s/he evolves into an authentic human being.

b. Negation of Culture and Christ

A question can be raised about the presence of evil and sin, ungodliness and inhuman values in every culture. What about the culture of greed, war and violence? How can Christ be

related to these so called cultures of inhumanity and cruelty? How can one justify the perverse presence of discrimination in the name of caste, class, gender, ethnicity etc.? Is it not the absence of Christ one finds in such human attitudes and behaviour? Is it not a naïve understanding of culture to see Christ within the cultures when we look at only what is true, good and beautiful in cultures and ignore the cruel aspects of culture?

It must be admitted that in all cultures there are systems and structures of injustice, oppression and inhumanity. There are humans in cultures who develop attitudes and create systems and structures in order to amass wealth, power and position at the cost of other humans. They would go to any extent of dehumanizing themselves to achieve their evil ends. No culture is free from such persons who become a law unto themselves by alienating themselves from God who is the ultimate source of everything, from their own true selves, from other humans and nature. Everybody and everything become a means for them to exploit to reach their goals. Blinded by their own greed and selfishness they would not be able to see the road to destruction they are treading on and the suffering they cause to God, other humans and the world. Therefore, perverse behaviour of humans by misusing their freedom cannot be considered as culture. In every culture we find such humans who misuse their freedom and negate culture and Christ. The term culture cannot be used for any expression of humans' inhumanity to humans through personal agenda, systems or structures that destroy humans or thwart the innate dynamism of humans to evolve to the fullness of humanity.

c. Discovering Christ within Cultures

The Logos theology of John and the theology of the Cosmic Christ in Paul affirm that the reality of Christ encompasses everything that is human and cosmic. If everything is created in him, through him and for him and everything is glorified

through his resurrection, Christ's presence in all cultures through his Spirit needs to be constantly discovered by the believer. Therefore, it must be with reverence one must delve deep into one's own culture as well as enter into the depths of cultures other than one's own. If God has become human in order to reveal what humans are and what they can become according to God's plan for humans, then the humanizing forces of cultures must be discovered and promoted. This is possible only through genuine dialogue among people of different cultures sharing their riches so that the further evolving of humans are made possible through integration of them in their lives.

If anything authentically human is Christic, discovering the humanizing elements in every culture is, in fact, discovering that dimension of Christ hidden from those who had no previous experience of that particular culture. Thus authentic culture becomes a means of revelation not only of God's diverse presence but also the possibilities of humans to unfold themselves. The riches of every culture thus reveal the goodness of God that gifted such a variety of gifts through humans for humans to become what they are called to become. Christ has already transformed culture. It is the mission of the disciple to discover the transformation that Christ has brought about through his presence in the culture and proclaim it so that it becomes a challenge to humans to accept it for their transformation as better human beings.

It is only through a contemplative attitude towards cultures one will be able to discover the presence of Christ within the cultures. As humans and their culture are in a non-dualistic relationship, Christ too is in a non-dualistic relationship with cultures. What is authentic in all cultures is a manifestation of his person because there is nothing that is humanizing outside the reality of Christ. Precisely, because of his presence in the culture everything that is dehumanizing and everything that

is a perversion of authentic culture must be prophetically denounced. Those structures and systems that dehumanize humans or individual attitudes, behaviour or misuse of power and positions that hinder authentic human relationship need to be opposed with the strength of human spirit for the sake of Christ and culture. In truth, authentic culture would express the presence of Christ and bring people to live in harmony, peace and communion. Thus culture becomes the temple of God. It needs true freedom, openness and an attitude of reverence to discover him in culture and a plurality of its expressions.

Conclusion

A narrow vision of Christ and culture would find both Christ and culture as opposed to each other or Christ above cultures. Culture is permeated by the presence of Christ as everything is created in him and through him and for him. So the relationship of Christ and culture is neither dualistic nor paradoxical. It is non-dualistic in the sense that Christ cannot be separated from culture even though it cannot be identified with him. Everything authentic in culture is Christic. Whatever is negative and dehumanizing, whether systems or structures of injustice, oppression and dehumanization whether it is social, religious, or political, is not authentically cultural. They cannot be considered as elements of culture but as a misuse of freedom by humans who alienate themselves from their ultimate source of life, themselves, others and their world. This has to be prophetically denounced. Christ is *within* the culture and through the dynamic power of his Spirit makes culture as means to cultivate human spirit to move to higher levels of being human and thus become the glory of God. God's plan for humans begun at creation through his Word and further deepened by incarnation and transformed through resurrection becomes expressed in varied ways through all authentic elements of culture. Therefore, authentic

culture becomes a sacrament of Christic presence and means of communion among humans.

Notes

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3. Aloysius Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, Virginia Fabella (Ed), Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1980, p. 75.
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6. Michael Amaladoss, *Making Harmony: Living in a Pluralist World*, Delhi:ISPCK, 2003, p. 63. See also Michael Amaladoss, *Beyond Inculturation. Can the Many be One?* Delhi, ISPCK, 1998.
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Befriending the Other & Another: Trinities & Trilogue

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Abstract: This paper carries the conversations between the ‘I-Thou’ or ‘I-Other’ a step further by introducing a ‘Third’ therein. We randomly use clichés like: “Two is company, three is a crowd.” Beginning to differ, the author hypothesizes that, “Two is comfort, three is either community or conflict.” Beginning with examples of family life and cinema, and acknowledging contributions of thinkers like Homi Bhabha and Martin Buber who’ve reflected upon ‘threeness’ or ‘thirdness’ as hybridity or some Absolute Being, respectively, the paper is more specifically theological. Noting that many of the world’s religions have Trinitarian conceptions of the Divine, the paper reflects upon the Christian Trinity—Father, Son, Spirit—as a model of communion and community. With insights from eminent theologians, and also from Pope Francis’s insights on “The Trinity and the Relationship between Creatures,” in his encyclical entitled ‘*Laudato Si*’, it strives to show how the Christian Trinity inspires us to comprehend and commune with ‘threeness’ not only among human beings, but with God-Others-Nature, which ‘is’ the heart of reality. Finally, it proposes that all peoples of goodwill embark upon a path of ‘trilogue’—transcending dialogue, which could be the meeting ground of all those cooperatively working for a better world.

Keywords: I-Thou; Thirdness; Dialogue; Trilogue; God; Trinity; Community;

Introduction: Befriending ‘An-other’

Human beings are relational beings. At birth, a baby is the most helpless of creatures who gradually grows into ‘being human’ in and through its relationships with other human beings. Being-in-relationship shapes our humanity; for, the ‘other’ is indispensable in building a stable and mature sense of the ‘self’.¹ In technical terms, such relationships have been studied as an ‘I-Thou’ category.² Indeed, the study of the dynamics of ‘otherness’ or ‘alterity’ in the fields of philosophy, theology, sociology and psychology has led to much theorizing on the complexities of relationship. Moreover, the JDV Diamond Jubilee seminar’s theme ‘Befriending the Other’ is yet another instance of delving deeper into the subject.

While accepting that the ‘I-Thou’ primordial relationship is of great significance, this paper argues for a tridimensional view of reality and discusses its possibilities in the field of theology. In other words, I attempt to take our conversations a step further by introducing a ‘third’ in the dynamics between the ‘I-Thou’ or ‘I-Other’. The ‘third’, I hold, engenders situations of cooperation and communion, on the one hand, as well as conflict and crises, on the other. This is best seen in the Christian paradigm of the Triune God, which holds together one-ness and three-ness in perfect harmony. I begin with mundane, everyday ideas of two-ness and three-ness, and then transport the discussion to the transcendental terrain.

1. Negotiating the ‘Third’ in Everyday Encounters, in the Arts, and Academy

“Two is company, three is a crowd” is a cliché which most people hold to be true. Simply stated, most people think that a relationship of two people—for example, between husband and wife, or two friends or two parties in a contract—ensures smooth functioning. Bring in a third party and there’s bound to be some friction or open conflicts, so goes the reasoning. While

there is some truth in such logic, an exclusive relationship of two persons need not necessarily be an ideal one in terms of values or ultimate goals which human beings normally strive for. For instance, a person who relates to another in any form of relationship (friendly, contractual, business, spousal, etc.) could be ‘befriending the other’ simply for selfish, self-seeking and utilitarian purposes rather than for love, selfless giving, sacrifice and in order to ensure the other’s growth and welfare. Such relationships can be verified as genuine if it opens out to a so-called ‘third’.

Based on the aforementioned reasoning, I hold that: “Two is comfort, but three is either community [if negotiated skillfully] or conflict [if mishandled].” Introduce a ‘third’ into any twosome, and one is likely to realize whether or not one’s other-centeredness and ‘befriending’ is genuine or not. Let us discuss some instances of this. Take the case of a married couple that enjoys marital bliss for many years. The attention and energy of each spouse is entirely and exclusively directed towards the ‘other’. However, the birth of a child could initially be a source of great joy, but could also lead to conflict; because now, besides giving time and attention to each other, the couple must care for the child. There is the possibility of either spouse giving so much of attention to the child so as to neglect the ‘other’ spouse, leading to resentment and conflict. Or, it could also happen that the husband and wife are so lost in loving each other so as to neglect the child. Seen from anyone’s viewpoint—i.e., father or mother or child—it is easier to relate only to just one ‘other’ rather than to relate to two others at the same time. Indeed, it’s not easy to include a ‘third’. Yet, it is only when the love of two opens out to a ‘third’ that true love is tested and ‘company’ (that can often be self-seeking comfort, at best, or selfish utilitarianism, at worst) blossoms into what I would call ‘the first moment of community’ with the possibility of either communion (positive) or conflict (negative).

In the fields of drama and cinema, too, we have many instances of the conflict that arises from the proverbial “I-You and s/he” triangular relationship. In Indian cinema—be it in Bollywood, Kollywood or Tollywood—one recurrent theme is the ‘*Hum-Tuum-Whoh*’ [I-You-s/he] when a ‘third’ enters into a twosome friendship and creates heartache or heartbreak for one or the other of the friends. This ‘third’ turns what seemed like heaven into hell. Interestingly, Sartre’s famous axiom, “Hell is other people” comes from his play ‘No Exit’ wherein three unknown and unrelated persons are locked together in a room with no possibility of exit or escape.³ As the play progresses, each one of the three realizes how detestable the company of the ‘other’ is and how each of them unwittingly becomes ‘hell’ for the other two: a good example of ‘three is conflict’!

We can also think of the theorizing that has been going on in academic circles. For instance, thinkers like Homi K. Bhabha have developed terms like ‘Third Space’,⁴ which refers to a *hybridity*—an ‘in-between’ that is syncretistic and characterized by negation and silence. This space is that of an apophatic ‘undecidability’ in the realm of cultural description.⁵ Such a position can be reached by a dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, the third term being a syncretic *hybrid* of the first two. Likewise, the philosopher Martin Buber whose conception of the ‘*I-Thou*’ was extremely influential in existential philosophy reflects upon ‘*threeness*’ or ‘*thirdness*’ in terms of human relationships opening out to a transcendental Third.⁶ In all these cases we see that the ‘third’ has given rise to a new situation which calls for added caution and consideration. Let us now move on to the field of religion and theology.

2. Trinities in Global Religious Consciousness

A phenomenology of religion reveals that many of the world's religions have Trinitarian conceptions of the Divine: (a) Christianity believes that Jesus revealed God as Triune or Trinity; (b) Classical Hinduism has conceptions of *Trimurti* (Brahma-Vishnu-Siva) and *Saccidānanda*; (c) Buddhism understands Buddha as being *Trikāya* (*dharmakāya-nirmanakāya-sambhogakāya*); (d) Zoroastrianism has the trio of Zurvan, the mighty god of time, and his two sons, Ahriman (active force) and Ormazd (passive force) and so on. Furthermore, the Babylonian triad of Anu, Bel and Ea and the Egyptian triad of the Father, Son and Ka-mutef give added credence to the belief that the 'three' is significant as an archetype of divinity or religious consciousness.

Apart from a phenomenology of religions, Carl G. Jung, the founder of analytical psychology hypothesizes that triads are archetypes in the history of religions that provide religious communities pregnant possibilities to discuss divinity. With the help of many examples, he shows how the number 'three' is significant, worldwide, when imaging or conceiving of deity. Without going into details of the many trinities conceived of and worshipped in the world's religions, let us reflect more closely on how we can think of the Christian Trinity as a model or paradigm of communion and community.

3. The Development of Trinitarian Theology for Life in Community

It is not uncommon in Christian circles nowadays to speak about the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—as a 'communion of persons'. Many theologians have been reflecting upon this idea of 'trinitarian communion of persons' in many parts of the world, including India. Theological thinking in this realm is more popularly called 'social trinitarianism'. While the term 'social trinitarianism' is fairly

new, the origins of such person/communitarian-oriented theologizing goes far back to the early centuries of Christianity. The earliest proponents of the social analogy were the 4th century Cappadocian Fathers who likened Father, Son and Spirit to three human persons.⁷ The social analogy reappeared in a new avatar in the 12th century with Richard of St. Victor's trinitarianism based on interpersonal love. However, the 19th century Russian Orthodox theologian Nikolai Fedorov's (1829-1903) oft-quoted axiom: "The Trinity is our social programme," most clearly sums up the thinking in this sphere.

Today, eminent proponents of social trinitarianism are Joseph A. Bracken,⁸ Leonardo Boff,⁹ and Jürgen Moltmann,¹⁰ among others. In India, Geevarghese Mar Osthathios initially used the analogy of the nuclear family to explain the Trinity and the consequent demands of establishing a classless society.¹¹ Though his approach to the Indian situation of inequality and injustice incorporates Marxian insights, the society he envisages is more Gandhian since he sees *sarvodaya* (development of all) as the ideal of classless society.¹² In a later work, Geevarghese develops his trinitarian theology in terms of a 'Sharing God' by using traditional concepts like *koinonia* and *agape*, borrowing from Moltmann and Boff, and incorporating insights from Scripture and Tradition.¹³

Based on my own experiences with the *adivasis* (tribals) of south Gujarat, I earlier attempted to evolve a social paradigm of Trinity by using insights from the tribal worldview.¹⁴ In line with Rahner's "from the economic to the immanent trinity" principle, I argued that doctrine on the Trinity arose and developed not as abstract metaphysical principles about God descending *from above*, but as a process of reflection on communitarian experiences emerging *from below*. The first Christian believers' experiences of calling God *Abba*-Father in prayer, and the power they received from the Holy Spirit, were not only expressed in the creedal confessions of

scripture, but also in their ritual and liturgical celebrations now focused upon Jesus Christ. In Jesus' person and life, the early Christian community tangibly experienced the love of Jesus-Father-Spirit, expressed it in word (Jn 3:16; Rom 8:38-39) and emulated it in their everyday living (Acts 2:42-7; 4:32-37). Their focus was on love, service, caring, sharing, sacrifice, solidarity and communion with God and with one another.

Common to early trinitarian confessions is the aspect of their relevance for communion and community life. This new life was possible only through their 'experience of salvation'¹⁵ in the Holy Spirit and in Jesus who taught them that God is *Abba*,¹⁶ Father—intimate, mother-like, and approachable (Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:15-16). This relationship of nearness and intimacy animated their own teaching and liturgy (*leitourgia*), as well as their community life (*koinonia*) overflowing into service (*diakonia*). Thus, from earliest times, the trinitarian focus was always soteriological and practical, namely, stressing God's salvation *in practice* of liturgy, sacraments and everyday life, rather than seeking precise articulation in theory or in dogmas.

It is important to note that the trinitarian theology or 'God-talk' that emerged early in the Christian Tradition was developed through analogical thinking and articulated in analogical language;¹⁷ for, "we have no choice whatever but to speak of God in terms derived from our experience of creaturely reality—that is, by analogy."¹⁸ Thus, since the parables, analogies and images that Jesus used for talking about God were drawn from the human person and from the communitarian nature of love. Christ's first disciples and later theologians would speak about God from what they experienced, read and reflected upon the life, love and liberation that Jesus came to bring.¹⁹ Unfortunately, in the later development of trinitarian doctrine, the aspect of love, sharing and true relationship was eclipsed by terms and concepts

consonant with the popular philosophies of the times. This often led to aberrations and heresies.

The aberrations and heresies that arose in the Christian Tradition in trinitarian thinking were outcome of steering the trinitarian debate either excessively towards the pole of oneness or towards that of threeness. In the Patristic theology of the East, for instance, the idea prevailed that the one God is God the Father, and that the Son and the Spirit share with him his divine life. Though based on Scripture, this conception led to subordinationist ideas that culminated in the Arian controversy. By contrast, the West conceived of God as the one divine substance comprising Father, Son and Holy Spirit, often losing sight of the distinction and giving rise to modalist tendencies. Consequently, while modalism and monarchianism so stressed the divine unity thereby eclipsing the distinction between the divine persons, subordinationism and tritheism erred by dividing the Godhead into three different beings unequal in rank or entirely separate from each other. One might hold that while the West reflected on the unity, only then to include threeness, the East reversed this: it began with the three different beings (*hypostaseis*) and attempted to understand their unity. Although this East-West typology should not be exaggerated, it prompts us to stay away from theological terminology that arose in bygone contexts, which are very different from those of our day, and to reinterpret the Trinity using the language of person, relationship, community and communion.

4. The Christian Trinity as Triune Being-in-Communion

In countries of the East, and especially in India, although we see a gradual growth of individualism, the family-clan-community holds precedence over the individual. Relationships are given great importance in social life. One's

personhood is defined in and shaped by one's relationship with one's family-clan-community. However, there is a difference between saying 'human persons are relational' and 'God is relational'. In the former case, we are referring to the *capacity* or *potentiality* to enter into relationships and thereby to develop 'personality', which is the sum total of the moral, attitudinal and behavioural qualities one imbibes and possesses. Here, the more and better relationships that one '*has*', the more and better are one's chances of actualizing one's personhood into a balanced personality.²⁰ In this sense, when we speak of anyone being relational, we mean that one *has* relationships or is relational in a secondary sense. But, when we say 'God is relational' and speak of 'person' in God, we assert that being relational is the very *essence* or *nature* of God.²¹ Thus, while we *have* relations, God *is* the relations that God has.²² Or, for God, 'to be' and 'to be in relation' is one and the same thing.

As compared to Western, modern and postmodern societies that foster independence and individualism to a large extent, communities in India that are bound together by relations of interdependence, sharing, caring and community-spirit are more likely to resonate with the image of a God-in-communion. In these communities, while the primacy of the community is stressed over the individual, it does not mean that the individual is unimportant, for there is also respect for the life of all members. This is not exactly so when we speak about the Trinity since, in the Triune God, 'person' and 'community' coincide. This is well expressed by Barry who writes:²³

God is perfect community. The three persons are so united with one another that they share everything in common; the only difference between them is their mutual relationships to one another. Hence, in the community that is God there can be no disunity, no separation, and no fear.

The multiplicity of three persons does not in any way imply a division of the divine nature, since the three divine persons coinhere; and, the entirety of divine nature is in each of them.

To conclude our discussion, we can affirm: “God’s being is communion”²⁴ or God is personal *Being-in-Communion*, meaning, God eternally exists as a ‘communion of persons’. In other words, God does not exist as some substance or as some abstract principle but as a relationship of persons.²⁵ Each member of the Trinity “is a person, a distinct person, but scarcely an *individual* or *separate* person. For in the divine life there is no isolation, no insulation, no secretiveness, no fear of being transparent to another.”²⁶ Thus, ‘person’ becomes a primary ontological category, and the ‘being-in-communion’ of divine persons becomes a model and a challenge for the being of human community, and for every Christian community, in particular.

5. Pope Francis’s Insights into Trinitarian Relationship and Community

One of the world’s religious leaders who is immensely influential for his moral integrity, spiritual insights and social teachings is Pope Francis. His recent reflections on: “The Trinity and the Relationship between Creatures,” in his Encyclical Letter ‘*Laudato Si*’ shows us how the Christian Trinity could inspire us to comprehend and commune with ‘threeness’ not only among human beings, but with God-Others-Nature, which is at the heart of everyone and everything that exists.²⁷ In other words, Pope Francis takes our discussion deeper by embracing not only all of humankind, but also the whole of God’s created universe. He writes:²⁸

The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards

other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.

6. Social Trinitarianism Fructifying into Trilogue

Our conceiving of the Christian Trinity as a ‘communion of persons’ and a model for community building leads us to theologize on what could be practical consequences of such a conception. For purposes of brevity, I merely suggest one: namely, as Christians, we are called and challenged to embark upon a path of ‘*trilogue*’. Whether in general terms,²⁹ or as literary form,³⁰ or in a more technical sense as used in the academy or by the disciplines,³¹ ‘dialogue’ refers to an exchange between two subjects or groups/communities, most commonly identified by the binary *I-Thou*, or *Self-Other*. Even if, at times, more than two persons/parties are involved in this exchange, the ‘more-than-two’ factor is again either identified as *Thou-Other* or simply as *Plural* or *Many*. In other words, ‘*Thirdness*’, if one might call it that, is not accorded special attention. Barring Bhabha and Buber, whom we mentioned above, and who explain ‘*thirdspace*’ or ‘*Third*’ as *hybridity* or some Absolute, respectively, Henri Lefebvre proposes triadic analysis as an effective way to encounter reality. He writes:³²

Triadic analysis distinguishes itself from dual analysis just as much as from banal analysis. It doesn’t lead to a synthesis in accordance with the Hegelian schema

... [it] links three terms that it leaves distinct, without fusing them in a synthesis (which would be the third term).

Thus, while the aim of dialogue normally seems to be some Hegelian synthesis or consensus,³³ *trilogue* maintains a *three-one tension* and *always* holds together reality within a *thirdspace*, so to say. Further elaboration from the field of music, might clarify the concept of *trilogue* more.

A 'trilogy' is a combination of *three* dramas, literary works, musical compositions or dance movements *closely related* into a *single* theme. The important words are: (a) three, (b) closely related, and (c) single. One can also think of three *distinct things* like: (a) a piece of wood called 'violin', (b) a length of wire called 'string' and (c) some hairs from a horse's tail drawn into a 'violin bow'. When an accomplished violinist draws the bow over violin strings, the ensuing music is nothing like wood, wire or a horse's tail, but while the audience enjoys the melodious music (One), it can point out where the violin's wood is, what the string does, and how a horse's tail makes good bows (Three). Note that there is *tension (conflict)* in this triad, for, if the violinist were to release the tautness of the strings, or the tension in the bow, he would be unable to make music. Though the word '*trilogue*' has been used before,³⁴ we need to stress three points that distinguish it from mere dialogue, as follows.

First, reality is never black or white, and our opinions are never simply right or wrong, but there is always a 'third' or a 'both-and' way to think, to relate, and to act in any encounter among human beings. In any situation, *trilogue* neither looks at reality as one-dimensional nor two-dimensional, but as tri-dimensional. Concretely, by looking at reality in its trinitarian complexity, and in seeking solutions with the 'other' and 'another' (persons, events, situations, ideologies, disciplines, etc.), we will be able to resolve our socio-politico-religious

concerns animated by deep faith that God—called by any and every name—is at the heart of any ‘befriending’.

Second, although we seek perfect community and ultimate communion in all our relationships, while we live here on earth, we will have to face tensions and struggles. Although there is no tension and conflict in the Triune God, God has revealed Godself in Jesus as a self-emptying Being. In theological terms we can say that God is a Kenotic (self-emptying) Being. There is perfect self-giving among the Three Persons, which was revealed to us in the Incarnation: Word made flesh, Jesus. Thus, those who believe in the Trinity and seek to be triloguers must undergo kenotic sacrifice in order to achieve *plerosis* (fullness) of life. Amaladoss writes:³⁵

This fullness is not given, but to be achieved (Eph 1:3-14). In this perspective, we are aware of our own limitedness on the one hand, which makes us open to and receptive of others. On the other hand, we are impelled to dialogue [trilogue]³⁶ with others so that through mutual interpenetration we can converge toward unity and reconciliation, purifying in the process what is merely human as limitation and sin, in ourselves and others.

Kenosis is the outcome of love. If one genuinely loves the ‘other’ and ‘another’ one will surely be ready to go beyond one’s narrow interests and viewpoints in order to embrace the other(s).

Third, in a globalizing world, there are rapid flows of ideas, information, money, markets, skills and personnel. Sadly, while the rich and powerful manipulate and monopolize the world’s resources, the big bulk of the world’s poor get poorer and weaker every day. Trilogue must therefore be undertaken with an option for the poorest of poor in consonance with God’s option for the poor. While ‘befriending the other’, the triloguer must always keep the poorest of poor as ‘another’ and ask as Mahatma Gandhi would:³⁷

Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will s/he gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away.

7. Conclusion: Towards Interfaith Trilogue

The Trinity is not just deity to be worshipped ‘up there’ but a God who has taken flesh in our midst and shown us what it means to ‘befriend the other’. Apart from an ‘I-Thou’ way of relating to the ‘other’ triadic analysis and trilogue inspires us to go beyond polarities and dualities and incorporate a triadic approach to life. In the meeting of religions, today, trinitarian trilogue will seek to bridge the apparent tension between the ‘prophetic religions’ or the ‘word religions’ (like Judaism and Islam) with a strong focus on the One, and the ‘mystic-cosmic religions’ (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism) accommodative of the Many. Even beyond religions, trilogue is accommodative of those who claim to be atheistic or agnostic. Genuine, triune conversations of this type, I think, will enable and empower us to more concertedly work for a better church, better India, better world.

Notes

1. Existential philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig are noted for their philosophies of relationship. See Michael Barnes, *Traces of the Other: Three Philosophers & Inter-faith Dialogue* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2000), 20-22, 50-53.
2. See, for instance, Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed., trans. R.G. Smith (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 15-17, who explains the *I-Thou* as the primary word of relation.

3. See Jean Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Random House, 1955).
4. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 38.
5. Ibid., 127-138.
6. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 26, considers human relationship as a spiritual act opening out to eternity.
7. The Cappadocian Fathers are Basil the Great (330–379), who was bishop of Caesarea; Basil's younger brother Gregory of Nyssa (c.332–395), who was bishop of Nyssa; and a close friend, Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389), who became Patriarch of Constantinople. The Cappadocian Fathers advanced the development of early Christian theology, especially the doctrine of the Trinity.
8. Joseph A. Bracken, "The Holy Trinity as a Community of Divine Persons – I & II," *The Heythrop Journal* 15/2, 3 (April-July 1974): 166-182, 257-270,
9. Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988) and *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000).
10. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
11. See Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, *Theology of a Classless Society* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1980).
12. Ibid., 132-133.
13. See Geevarghese, *Sharing God and a Sharing World* (Delhi: ISPCK & Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithy, 1995).
14. See my *God of Our Soil: Towards Subaltern Trinitarian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK & VIEWS, 2010).
15. See Gordon D. Fee, "Paul and the Trinity: The Experience of Christ and the Spirit for Paul's Understanding of God," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. S.T. Davies et al., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 49-72, for details. In brief, Fee argues that Paul has an 'economic

trinitarian' idea of God, and perhaps an 'ontological trinitarian' one, as well, although its philosophical and theological nuances are unclear to theologians. On p.52, he stresses that Pauline trinitarianism emerges out of Paul's 'experience' of 'salvation'.

16. See Luis M. Bermecjo, *Abba, My Dad!* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003), for a good scriptural and systematic exposition of God as *Abba* of Jesus and *Abba* of all human beings.
17. Theological language is always metaphorical, symbolic and analogical. Though 'analogy' imputes 'likeness' it also always implies 'unlikeness'; hence, never exhausts the truth contained in *reality-in-itself*
18. William Hasker, "Tri-unity," *Journal of Religion* 50/1 (1974): 1-32, develops this thesis. The quote is from p. 2; see also John A. Thurmer, "The Analogy of the Trinity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34/6 (1981): 509-515.
19. See, for e.g., how Augustine [354-430] used the analogy of love to explain the Trinity: the Father being 'lover' (*amans*), the Son being the 'beloved' (*quod amatur*) and the Spirit being the mutual love (*amor*) passing between the Father and the Son, proceeding from both, and uniting the three divine 'persons'. See his *De Trinitate*, Book IX, especially ch.8, for this point. See also J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 276-279, and Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder, 1970), 232-234, for details on Augustine's analogies.
20. See Harriet A. Harris, "Should We Say that Personhood is Relational?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51/1 (1998): 214-35, for an insightful analysis of the questions of 'person', 'personhood' and 'relation'.
21. See E. Schillebeeckx and B. Iersel, eds., "A Personal God?" *Concilium* (1977), for aspects of God as person.
22. See Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 32.
23. William A. Barry, *Paying Attention to God* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1990), 72.

24. See also Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974), 98, who writes: "God's life is indeed Communion; Being is essentially Communion." Hence, he coins the word *samsat*, meaning, 'being-with' for the divine existence.
25. See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 40-49, who stresses the relational and personal aspects of the Triune God.
26. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (April 1989): 50.
27. See Pope Francis's Encyclical Letter '*Laudato Si*', nos. 238-240.
28. See *Laudato Si*', no. 240.
29. 'Dialogue' (Greek, *dialogos*, meaning 'through word') commonly refers to a conversation carried on between two or more persons or to a verbal interchange of thought between them.
30. As literary form it is "a carefully organized exposition, by means of invented conversation, or contrasting philosophical or intellectual attitudes." See *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Dialogue."
31. See, for instance, Sundar Sarukkai, "The 'Other' in Anthropology and Philosophy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 32 (June 14, 1997): 1406-1409
32. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 12.
33. One will immediately think of Hegel's 'synthesis' and John Rawls's 'overlapping consensus', respectively. While not excluding them, *spatial trialectic* transcends these two concepts.
34. For example, Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 217-218, writes: "The conscientization of religious inclusivity is the beginning of *trilogue*. If all human beings began with the first family on earth, and all religions are part of their cultural heritage, then everyone and every religion is connected to every other just as a great river

is connected to many streams. In *trilogue*, many religions are in one religion and one religion is in many religions, because every religion bears the image of the Trinity.” This definition appears to mean ‘inclusiveness’. I develop *trilogue* differently.

35. Michael Amaladoss, “Syncretism and Kenosis: Hermeneutical Reflections in the Indian Context,” in *The Agitated Mind of God: The Theology of Kosuke Koyama*, ed. D. T. Irvin and A. E. Arkinade (New York: Orbis, 1996), 67.
36. While Amaladoss uses the word *dialogue* I hold that this is more in the nature of *trilogue*.
37. Mahatma Gandhi, *Last Phase*, vol. II (1958), 65.

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Raimon Panikkar's Diatopical Hermeneutics: Meister Eckhart's World of Holistic Thinking and the Bhagavadgītā's Experience of the World of Wholeness

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Abstract: The phenomena of interreligious and intercultural dialogue as well as of inculturation and interculturalisation, so relevant in our context, have to do with understanding religions and cultures other than our own. Most of our efforts in this domain have got stuck here because beyond prayer meetings and even studies of other faith-traditions we have been unable to promote deeper mutual understanding. It is here that Raimon Panikkar's diatopical hermeneutics have relevance. The aim of this paper is to discover a relationship between two different and differing and even mutually contradictory cosmovisions.

In this article, the author wants to show that Meister Eckhart's *World of Holistic Thinking* and the Bhagavadgītā's *Experience of the World of Wholeness* are functional equivalences, i. e., we have argued that the Bhagavadgītā's specific *Experience of the World* and Meister Eckhart's *holistic thinking* of Reality have the potentiality of disclosing a systemic relationship if followed through. What we have done is tried to show *how to go about it*. On the face of it one would not have dreamt of relating these two utterly different worlds but for Panikkar's discovery of the principle of homeomor-

phic equivalents and their application in the context of his diatopical hermeneutics.

Keywords: Cosmotheandrist, Bhagavadgītā, homeomorphic equivalents, Meister Eckhard, Raimundo Panikkar

0. Diatopical Hermeneutics is about Relating Meaningfully Different Cultures and Religions

Today's interreligious and intercultural dialogue is high on good-will and open attitude, and low on how to go about it. Without good-will one can do nothing; and equally without knowing how to go about it we are unable to proceed. Good-will alone cannot make dialogue fruitful, in much the same way that method alone cannot fructify dialogue. Good-will brings people together and it is method that guides their procedure. Without good-will religions and cultures cannot come together but without some common understanding of procedure it would be difficult for work to progress.

The phenomena of interreligious and intercultural dialogue as well as of inculturation and interculturalization have to do with understanding religions and cultures other than our own. Most of our efforts in this domain have got stuck here because beyond prayer meetings and even studies of other faith-traditions we have been unable to promote deeper mutual understanding. It is here that Raimon Panikkar's diatopical hermeneutics have relevance. The aim of the following reflections is to discover a relationship between two different and differing and even mutually contradictory cosmovisions. However the search is neither arbitrary nor a wild goose chase. This version of hermeneutics is built on an analogy of proportionality. It can be put simply like this: The significance that Ishvara, for instance, has to believers in the Bhagavadgītā is similar to the significance that Allah has to believers in Islam. Similarly the significance that Christ has to believing Christians is similar to the significance that Jahweh has to believing Jews. This is not the same as saying Ishvara is the same as or identical with

Allah, or Christ is the same as or identical with Jahweh. The focus of such an exercise in diatopical hermeneutics is neither Ishvara nor Allah nor Christ nor Jahweh but the *significance* they enjoy among their followers.

Now how is this supposed to contribute to understanding between different cosmovisions? Aren't these simply parallel lines? In our exposition we are taking for granted that one of the cosmovisions is that of the *believer* who is doing the exercise. This implies that as a believer she knows first-hand or even has experienced the significance of the Mystery of her own faith-tradition. In that case she will be in a position to understand and perhaps even empathise with the position of her dialogue partner. Thus, we who love our parents know what it means to lose them; from that experience we empathise with others when they lose their parents. In an exercise of diatopical hermeneutics falling back on one's own experience is of the essence; otherwise it will become at best an intellectual game or at worst remain an abstract exercise.

More specifically I illustrate this the Bhagavadgītā's world of wholeness and Meister Eckhart's world of holistic thinking. On the face of it the one world does not appear to have anything to do with the other. Diatopical hermeneutics provokes us to think out ways and means of discovering relationships where none seem to exist. This requires familiarity with both the traditions we are trying to relate. I employ the expression "familiarity" intentionally. Familiarity has to do with family and contains the hint of a family relationship. I leave the question "What kind of relationship?" open here with the suggestion that it should exclude *polarization* but at connote *polarity*. Polarity *needs* an Other. A good example is that of the north and south poles where one cannot be without the other!

1. Diatopical Hermeneutics Requires Homeomorphic Equivalences

Gradually our world is coming to the realization that the spiritual treasures of humanity can be shared by all. Here Raimon Panikkar's *homeomorphic* (popularly called functional) *equivalences* could show us the way of going about fruitfully with cultural and religious differences. Panikkar's sophisticated method, *diatopical hermeneutics*, deals with "human *topoi*, 'places' of understanding and self-understanding... which have not developed their patterns of intelligibility or their basic assumptions out of a common historical tradition or through mutual influence".¹

When, for example, we take avatāra and incarnation then it is not just the single words or concepts that we take up as homeomorphic equivalents but their universes of meaning as well. Panikkar's does not identify avatāra with incarnation and vice versa. For what avatāra signifies in the world of the Hindu Traditions is equivalent to what incarnation signifies in the world of the Christian Traditions. Thus what Krishna signifies in the Krishna traditions is equivalent to what Jesus signifies in the Jesus traditions. In this way each tradition learns a bit the significance of the other traditions.

This of course is only the theory aspect of diatopical hermeneutics. But this comment is not to be interpreted negatively. We need theory to venture out into the unknown and to try out new ways of getting acquainted with the unknown. In what follows we shall attempt to work out the practical side of diatopical hermeneutics. To do this we shall take up two traditions: The Bhagavadgītā from the Hindu Traditions because generally speaking it remains undisputed and it is well known also outside the world of the Hindu Faith; and Meister Eckhart, who compared the Gītā is a relatively unknown Christian mystic from the Christian Tradition (c. 1260 – c. 1328). The contrast could not be greater. But the

choice is deliberate. Is it possible to make a connection across such a vast difference? This is the challenge we have chosen to face here. I am formulating the homeomorphic equivalents thus: The Bhagavadgītā Experience of Wholeness and Meister Eckhart's Holistic Thinking of Reality. When juxtaposing these homeomorphic equivalents I shall make use of smaller paraphrases of both of which I shall place above the columns.

2. The Bhagavadgītā Experience of Wholeness

For the Gītā the experience of wholeness has to do with perceiving reality as it is. It consists of the dimensions of change, non-change and the depth-dimension. This is a harmonious continuum wherein one dimension dovetails into the other. Clearly this kind of wholeness is anything but uniformity as it does not exclude diversity and multiplicity like the levels of change and non-change on the larger background of an unchanging spiritual Infinite Mystery called Krishna or Vāsudeva.

The fact that I am calling this Mystery wholeness should not cause surprise that it speaks the I-Thou language of a personal God like in the Bible. Elsewhere I have argued in detail that the I-Thou language of the Gītā is employed heuristically as its Divine Mystery is more in the nature of a Cosmo-Theos rather than an Anthro-po-Theos.² The revelation is *cosmic*, the major symbol here being the Cosmos and not Krishna. Whatever revelation is made is not by the man Krishna nor as a man Krishna but through the Divine Presence Krishna in the Cosmos, in the cosmic elements, not in historical events. This is not said negatively but descriptively. Revelation is always a subject of faith through the mediation of history in the western christian tradition and through the mediation of the Cosmos in the Gītā tradition. Accordingly I have called the Divine Mystery Anthro-po-Theos in the former case and

and Cosmo-Theos in the latter case. Neither better nor worse but different.

However in the faith-world of the Gītā human beings are incapable of perceiving reality as it is because of *rāgadveṣa*, that is, deep-seated likes and dislikes which misguide human beings in every way. Because of their Ego (Ahamkāra) they are rendered blind to the depth-dimension (their Ātmā, the principle of wholeness). The Ahamkāra binds, whereas the Ātmā liberates one from the negative effects of likes and dislikes in the areas of the understanding, the mind and the senses. At this point the quitesence of the Gītā revelation comes into sharp focus and is expressed through the threefold Yoga of Cosmic Service (Karmayoga), of Communion with the Divine Mystery in the Cosmos (Bhaktiyoga) and of In-Sight into the nature of the Cosmos (Jñānayoga).³

Karmayoga when performed selflessly and for the welfare of all is authentic action because it is cosmic action for *lokasangraha*, no more selfish action. In an age that is gradually becoming ecologically more conscious its relevance should be obvious. Bhaktiyoga leads to the realization that it is not a collection of objects, that it is a living reality, inviting us to participate in its life because we have emerged from it and that we shall return to it and that if we discover its personal and transpersonal dimensions we shall be rewarded with corresponding discoveries also in our Communion with the Cosmos. Christians are used to equating higher life mostly with human life; that the Universe could be a living reality does not resonate in our consciousness. Bhaktiyoga acquaints us with Divine Presence at work in the Universe. Finally Jñānayoga enables insight into the real nature of the Universe. The Universe is the Body of the Supreme Mystery, states Chapter Eleven of the Gītā.

When we speak of the Gītā's experience of Wholeness we are in fact speaking of the Highest Mystery; that is the Gītā's

unique way of speaking of the Divine, more specifically of Divine Presence which is the taste in the waters, brilliance in the sun and the moon, wisdom in the wise, strength in the strong, the beginning, the middle, and the end of all being, and the Ātmā, the principle of Wholeness, established in heart of all beings!

3. Meister Eckhart's Holistic Thinking about Reality

Ours is an intercultural age in a global world. We can no more live secluded in our own world, affected as we are on all sides by other cultures in the form of intercultural eateries, entertainment, films, plays, literature, fashion and even intercultural philosophy and hermeneutics to say nothing about the ubiquitous presence of science and its derivatives in our life and world. Modern science is a product of a culture that is a double-edged sword and is receiving easy, free and uncritical access every where.

But whereas plundering of our treasures has taken place in colonial times, sharing of our mutual treasures is an important aspect of the human race which has not played the role it should have played in human history. We are talking of mutual sharing. We could begin with our spiritual treasures which unlike material treasures has the unique characteristic of increasing, not decreasing, when shared.

While agreeing to this idea of sharing, still one might question in this context the wisdom of resuscitating this obscure Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart of the 13th-14th century who escaped censure by the Catholic Church merely due to the accident of his death. To us Indians he might appear obscure. Two years ago I was invited to a huge international conference in Munich by the International Meister Eckhart Society. On the agenda was a section called Meister Eckhart - Interreligious Perspective. I understood the significance of this title only when I heard a delegation of Muslim scholars

speaking on Eckhart's influence on their traditions already in his life time. That is, Eckhart was not obscure then; and he is not obscure now judging from the number of publications that are appearing. Eckhart's interpretation of Christianity is finding even today more resonance than ever.

Meister Eckhart's thinking has been called holistic because he argues that the reality of God's unity stands out as an eternal and unlimited giving of his own being/existence to creatures, a giving that is in fact a gifting that neither oppresses nor lets them down.⁴ This is basic to Eckhart's argument about God's unity and the unity of reality are not two different things. Eckhart's thinking, one could call it, vision is about unity. The existence of creatures does not militate against the unity of God.

Unlike human giving which is accidental God's giving, according to Meister Eckhart, belongs to God's very nature. "God's Being consists mainly therein not to be alone or to be for himself alone but to communicate himself fully and exclusively."⁵ Divine self-communication is of the essence; hence it is not half and half but complete self-communication. Furthermore: "Because of God's plenitude God is free from power-claims, and keeps back nothing for himself of what he has and is."⁶ Eckhart's God is a God of plenitude who in his self-communication empties himself totally. Plenitude and *kenosis* go together! "At the same time because of this he makes it possible for everyone to have their own proper being and gives them support and the ability to open up."⁷

Such a God has to be a perfectly loving personal Trinitarian unity. "To speak of [God's] unity is to remove all borders [which is brought about by] perspectives, that is, it reveals that the understanding of [God's] being is not like that of a thing. This is the same as being and relationship".⁸

Such an understanding of “[God’s] unity could be interpreted as absolute Openness towards others. In that case dialogical relation and difference would no more stand directly opposite to the concept of unity”.⁹ A concept of unity like this leads to an understanding of God that goes beyond the traditional trinitarian understanding of God.

“All creatures,” says Eckhart, “are a pure nothing. I do not say, they are worthless or they merely exist: they are pure nothing. What has no being, that is nothing. Now all creatures have no being, because their being depends on God’s existence.”¹⁰ It is a mystic who sees things as they are that is speaking here. “For Eckhart the concept of creatureliness implies that no creature is *mere* creature but lives without ceasing [to be] already from the fact that it-is-in-God.”¹¹

For Meister Eckhart, reality as we experience it, is “manifold, partial and multidimensional.” So too are all our statements and truths. But: “They all aim at one common reality that makes them possible in the first place, the reality of God. This, Meister Eckhart calls Unity, because it transcends all perspectives.”¹² Again, it is the mystic that is speaking, drawing our attention to the one common dynamic at work in every single being, a dynamic which leads to the one centre of the inner unity of all reality. This is the centre of all meaning that creatures seek everywhere and in every being.

As an aside but more relevantly, Eckhart’s bold and unique understanding of Christianity could give a filip to Indian/Asian efforts to interpret the Christian Message in the context of the Asian Religions employing languages of Asian cultures.

It is an astonishing fact (at least in the context of western theology) that Meister Eckhart does not speak of or make use of the redemptive value of the sufferings and passion of Jesus Christ, thus ignoring Paul’s injunction of preaching the crucified Christ alone. My reflections on the Hindu

Cosmovision have led me to the conclusion that suffering does not have any salvific significance there. Hence however much Hindus may admire the suffering Christ he can not save them from Punarjanma, re-birth – which in the last analysis is the goal of all Hindu yearning.

4. Homeomorphic Equivalences between Meister Eckhart's *World of Holistic Thinking* and the Bhagavadgītā's *Experience of the World of Wholeness*

Table 1. Eckhart's World of Holistic Thinking — The Bhagavadgītā's Experience of the World of Wholeness

God allows time to flow out from the eternal duration, that is from eternity itself or directly from the now of eternity so that time and eternity appear similar to that which mutually touches and enters into the other. Thus time flows always out of eternity.¹³

For God is the one who does not divide/separate but unites what is divided/separated.¹⁴

Therefore it is appropriately said, that God has created not *from* the originary foundation [Urgrund] but *in* the originary foundation. For what was in the beginning and whose end is the beginning, originates always, will be born always and is born always.¹⁵

Eightfold divided is my Nature - thus: earth, eater, fire and air, space, mind, and also soul, and the ego. This is the lower: but other than this I have a higher Nature; this too must you know. [And this is Nature] developed into life by which this world is kept in being. To all beings these [two Natures] are [as] a womb; be very sure of this. Of this whole universe the origin and the dissolution too am I. Higher than I there is nothing whatsoever: on Me this universe is strung like clustered pearls upon a thread.¹⁶

By Me, Unmanifest in form, all this universe was spun: in Me subsist all beings, I do not subsist in them. And [yet] contingent beings do not subsist in Me, - behold my sovereign activity: my Self sustains [all] beings. It does not subsist in them; It causes them to be-and-grow. As in [wide] space subsists the mighty wind blowing [at will] ever and everywhere, so do all contingent beings subsist in Me: so must you understand it. All contingent beings pour into material Nature which is mine when a world-aeon comes to an end; and then again when [another] aeon starts, I emanate them forth. Subduing my own material Nature ever again I emanate this whole host of beings, - powerless [themselves], from Nature comes the power.¹⁷

Time (symbol for the non-eternal) flows from the Eternal (Symbol for God). The Eternal unites the disparate non-eternal. *In* and not *from* the originary foundation God created, says Eckhart. On the other hand, the Bhagavadgītā states that all beings are “in Me,” the Absolute.

*Table 2. Eckhart's World of Holistic Thinking:
The Bhagavadgītā's Experience of the World of Wholeness*

<p>I state truly that this Light (called the soul) is not satisfied being unified with the fruitful bosom of divine Nature. Yes, I shall say something which sounds more astonishing: I state standing in the truth, in the eternal truth and in the truth that always remains truth that it is not enough for the same Light [to be] at the simple, still standing Divine Being, that neither gives nor takes: rather it wants to know whence this Being comes; it wants to look inside the simple foundation, in the still desert, in the by-no-means-Differentiation (die nie Unterschiedenheit), neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit; in the very interiority, where no one is at home, there only is it enough for that Light, und therein is it more interior than in itself; for this foundation (Grund) is a simple stillness, which in itself is immoveable; however all things are moved by this immoveability and all those receive Life who live reasonably in themselves.¹⁸</p>	<p>None knows from whence I came, - not the gods' celestial hosts nor yet the mighty seers: for I am the beginning of the gods [themselves] as of the mighty seers and all in every way. Whoso shall know Me as unborn, beginningless, great Lord of [all] the world, shall never know delusion among men, from every evil freed. Intellect, wisdom, freedom from delusion, long-suffering, truth, restraint, tranquillity, pleasure and pain, coming to be and passing away, fear and fearlessness as well, refusal to do harm, equanimity, content, austerity, open-handedness, fame and infamy, - [such are] the dispositions of contingent beings, and from Me in all their diversity they arise. The seven mighty seers of old, likewise the Manus four, sharing in my mode of being, were born [the children] of [my] mind; from them [arose] these creatures in the world. Whoso should know this my far-flung power and how I use it [whoso should know these] as they really are, is [truly] integrated; and this his integration can never be undone. Herein there is no doubt. The source of all am I; from Me all things proceed: this knowing, wise men commune with Me in love, full filled with warm affection.¹⁹</p>
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Meister Eckhart's expressions are striking: "unites what is separated/divided," "unified," "that it is not enough for this same light to be with the simple, still Divine Being," "it wants to see into the simple ground, in the still desert, in the never-undifferentiatedness of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," "because this foundation is a simple stillness". On its side the Bhagavadgītā stresses that the material aspect of the universe re-presents the lower nature and the spiritual aspect the higher nature of the Absolute Mystery (Krishna): These do not need to be unified because they are organic parts of whole Body of Krishna.

Meister Eckhart: Sermo 28:

[But] in everything that is [only] created - as I have said - there is no truth. [However] there is something, that is above the created being of the soul, and [something] on which createdness touches, which [indeed] is nothing; [...] It is something akin to the Divine Mode, it is in itself, [and] has nothing in common [with others...]. It is a stranger and a desert and is more nameless than it has a name, and is more unknown than it is known. Could you destroy yourself only for a moment, yes, I say, even for less than a moment, then you would have as yours all that which is in itself. As long as you somehow observe yourself or something, you know just how little what God is as your mouth knows what colour is and my eye knows what taste is: that's how little you know what God is. (Pr. 96):
That is why the Soul never has enough when it does not reach there where the perfection of all creatures is undivided and without difference.

The Bhagavadgītā 5:15f & 5:17-19

He takes not on the good and evil works of anyone at all, - [that] all pervading lord. By ignorance is wisdom overspread; thereby are creatures fooled.

But some there are whose ignorance of self by wisdom is destroyed. Their wisdom, like the sun, illumines that [all-] highest. 5:15f

Souls [bent on] that, selves [bent on] that, with that their sin and that their aspiration, they stride [along the path] from which there is no return [all] taints by wisdom washed away. [These] wise ones see the selfsame thing in a Brahman wise and courteous as in a widow or an elephant, nay as in a dog or outcaste.

While yet in this world they have overcome [the process of] emanation [and decay], for their minds are stilled in that-which-is-ever-the-same is Brahman: therefore in Brahman [stilled] they stand.

5:17-19

Eckhart: Man knows so little what God is, [in much the same way that] the mouth knows what colour is. The goal of the Soul is to reach there where the perfection of all creatures is undivided and without difference. Clearly this is a pointer to unity, to a unified reality. The Bhagavadgītā: With those whose ignorance was cleared away by knowledge of the Self, [this knowledge] allows them to see the Highest that is like the Sun. This leads to equanimity and equanimity is the path to the Highest (Brahman). Clearly this is a pointer to wholeness/integrity.

Table 3. Creatures: A pure Nothing — I would cause Chaos

<p>All creatures are a pure nothing. I am not saying that they are less worth or they are something: they are a pure nothing. What has no being, that is nothing. All creatures have no being, because their being depends on God's presence.²⁰</p>	<p><i>For if I were not tirelessly to busy Myself with works, then would men everywhere follow in my footsteps. If I were not to do my work, these worlds would fall to ruin, and I should be a worker of confusion, destroying these [my] creatures.²¹</i></p>
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Creatures do not have their own being, they merely participate in God's Being. That is why Eckhart is consequent when he speaks of Unity, since there is only one Being, that is, God's Being. This is different in the Bhagavadgītā: The totality of all entities finds itself in the Highest Mystery. This totality is able to act because the Total Mystery is active in the first place. Would this Mystery cease to act, so too would the totality of all entities be unable to act.

Table 4. Divine Unity of Being — Divine Integration of Totality

No [single] vessel can hold two kinds of liquids. If wine is to be contained then water has to be perforce thrown out: the vessel has to be empty and single. Therefore: you must take up Divine joy and God so that you perforce throw out creatures.²²

*Where two have to become one, there one has to lose its being. It is like that when God and the Soul have to become one, the Soul has to lose its being and life.*²³

*From anger comes bewilderment, from bewilderment wandering of the mind, from wandering of the mind, destruction of the soul: once the soul is destroyed the man is lost. But he who roves among the objects of sense, his senses subdued to self and disjoined from passion and hate, and who is self-possessed [himself], draws nigh to calm serenity. And from him thus becalmed, all sorrows flee away: for once his thoughts are calmed, his soul stands firmly [in its ground].*²⁴

As the waters flow into the sea, full filled, whose ground remains unmoved, so all desires flow into [the heart of] man: and such a man wins peace - not the desirer of desires. The man who puts away all desires and roams around from longing freed, who does not think, 'This I am'. or 'This is mine', draws near to peace.²⁵

Since neither water nor Soul have their own [private] being, Eckhart's argument is based on everyday life. Self-emptying, *kenosis* is the presupposition for being filled up by God, says Eckhart. The Bhagavadgītā however speaks differently: Being freed from passion, hate, etc leads to peace. Both these are spiritual paths. The former leads to Divine Being/Unity of Being, the latter to Divine Totality/Integration.

Table 5. God's Unity is guaranteed by God's Uniqueness -
God's Wholeness is guaranteed by the indestructibility of the
Divine

<p>...note that the One is higher, earlier and simpler than the Good and stands nearer to Being and God or corresponding <i>much more to the name one Being with the Being itself[...]</i> Due to that God is overly rich because of the fact that he is one. For he is the First and the Highest because of the fact that he is one.²⁶</p> <p>Would one take away being from all creature of this whole world which God give, then they would remain a pure nothing, bleak, worthless and odious.²⁷</p>	<p>Yes, indestructible [alone] is That -know this- by which this whole universe was spun: no one can bring destruction on That which does not pass away. Finite, they say, are these [our] bodies [indwelt] by an eternal embodied [self],-[for this self is] indestructible, incommensurable. Fights then, scion of Bharata.²⁸</p>
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Eckhart: God's unity is thematic here because of a unique reason, namely, because of the uniqueness of his Being. "For he is the First and the Highest because of the fact that he is one." Entities do not disturb God's Unity because they do not have being. The Bhagavadgītā: The plurality of mortal bodies and of immortal Souls also do not militate against the ontological integrity of the Divine, because they are "part" of the Divine integrity.

Table 6. The One [climbs down] into everything...and unites what is separated - The brilliance in the moon, in the fire...know that it is mine

<p><i>That is why the One climbs down into everything and in every single thing and [still] remains always the One and unites what is separated.</i></p> <p>²⁹</p>	<p><i>The splendour centred in the sun which bathes the whole world in light, [the splendour] in the moon and fire,- know that it [all] is mine. [Thus] too I penetrate the earth and so sustain [all] beings with my strength; becoming [the moon-plant] Soma, I, the very sap [of life], cause all healing herbs to grow. Becoming the [digestive] fire in [the bodies of] all men I dwell in the body of all that breathes; conjoined with the inward and out breaths I digest the fourfold food. I make my dwelling in the hearts of all: from Me stem memory, wisdom, the dispelling [of doubt]. Through all the Vedas it is I who should be known, for the maker of the Vedas' end am I, and I the Vedas know.³⁰</i></p>
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Again we encounter here the thematisation of Unity and Integrity. The task of unity consists in unifying what is separated and that of integrity in the fact of indwelling of the Divine “I” in every single “part” so that every single part develops its specific identity.

Table 7. God's Being consists essentially in his complete self-communication - I have no yearning for the fruits of my actions

<p>Pr. 9, DW I, S. 149,?-12; Übersetzung S. 463:)</p> <p>God is the one who is the most communicative. No thing communicates of its own. For all creatures are not of themselves. Whatever they communicate, they have it from another. Also they do not give themselves. The sun gives its light but it remains at its place. Fire does give heat but [still] remains fire. God communicates what is his, because he exists by himself; what he is, and in all the gifts he gives he first gives himself. He gives himself as God as he is in all his gifts in as much as is possible for the one who would like to receive him.³¹</p> <p>RdU, <i>Von der wâren pênitencie und sæligem lebene</i>:</p> <p>Many people think, they have to do great works externally like fasting, going barefoot, etc. which one call works of penance. However the true and best penance consists in that one turns away totally and completely from all that is not God or Divine in oneself and in creatures and turns to one's loving God completely and perfectly[...]."</p>	<p>In the three worlds there is nothing that I need do, nor anything unattained that I need to gain, yet work [is the element] in which I move.³²</p> <p>Bear Me in mind, love Me and worship Me, sacrifice, prostrate yourself to Me, so you will come to Me, I promise you truly, for you are dear to Me. Give up all things of law, turn to Me your only refuge, [for] I will deliver you from all evils, have no care.³³</p>
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Eckhart: God is the most communicative of all. He does this in all his gifts. His unity with all his creatures operates and manifests itself in his gifts. What brings us closer to Him is not *human deeds* but giving up all that is not God's in our

lives. The Bhagavadgītā: Though God has nothing to achieve or attain he works out of love for his creatures.

4. Conclusion

Our thesis in this paper has been: Meister Eckhart's *World of Holistic Thinking* and the Bhagavadgītā's *Experience of the World of Wholeness* are functional equivalences, i. e., we have argued that the Bhagavadgītā's specific *Experience of the World* and Meister Eckhart's *holistic thinking* of Reality have the potentiality of disclosing a systemic relationship if followed through. What we have done is tried to show *how to go about it*. On the face of it one would not have dreamt of relating these two utterly different worlds but for Panikkar's discovery of the principle of homeomorphic equivalents and their application in the context of his diatopical hermeneutics.

Homeomorphic equivalents are not just any kind of equivalents. They are neither arbitrary nor figments of the imagination. They show an ontological grounding in Reality. Different cosmovisions express this differently. But the three dimensions of Reality (i.e. the Human, the Cosmic and the Divine)³⁴ are our meeting-points (however we may perceive and express them). "Everything is related to everything but without monistic identity and dualistic separation."³⁵ The cosmotheandric nature of Reality manifests itself in expressions which in course of time are discovered to be homeomorphic equivalents.

Notes

1. Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics (New York: The Paulist Press, 1979). 9.
2. See F. X. D'Sa, "Zur Eigenart des Bhagavadgītā-Theismus," in: W. Strolz/S. Ueda (Hrsg.), *Offenbarung als Heilserfahrung im Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus*. Schriften zur großen Ökumene Bd. 8 (Herder: Freiburg, 1982), 97-126.

3. For a somewhat more detailed exposition see F. X. D'Sa, "The Yogi as a Contemplative in Action," in: *Studies in Formative Spirituality. The Journal of Spiritual Formation* XI:3 (Nov. 1990), 289-302.
4. Christine Büchner, *Die Transformation des Einheitsdenkens Meister Eckharts bei Heinrich Seuse und Johannes Tauler*. Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch Beihefte, Heft 1 (Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2007), 25. In the following cited as *Die Transformation*. My translation.
5. Christine Büchner, *Die Transformation*, 25.
6. Christine Büchner, *Die Transformation*, 25.
7. Christine Büchner, *Die Transformation*, 25.
8. Büchner, *Gottes Kreatur* - "ein reines Nichts?," 24-25. Einheit Gottes als Ermöglichung von Geschöpflichkeit und Persönlichkeit im Werk Meister Eckharts (Innsbruck/Wien:Tyrolia, 2005), 24-25. In the following cited as *Gottes Kreatur*. My translation.
9. Büchner, *Gottes Kreatur* - "ein reines Nichts?," 24-25.
10. Büchner, *Die Transformation*, 9.
11. Christine Büchner, *Gottes Kreatur* - "ein reines Nichts"?
12. Büchner, *Die Transformation*, 20.
13. In Ioh. n. 216, LW III, S. 181,15-182,1: *deus iubet tempus descendere immediate ab ipso aevo, quod est aeternitatis ipsa vel nunc aeternitatis, ut tempus et aeternitas sint quasi quaedam continua et contigua sibimet mutuo, ut scilicet semper ab aeterno tempus ab aevo fluxerit*. The original quotations from Meister Eckhart's works have been supplied by the publishers of a lengthier contribution in German I made at an international Congress on Meister Eckhart in Munich, Germany in 2014 which is forthcoming. The translations into English are by me. The present article is an independent piece. For the abbreviations for Meister Eckhart's works see Christine Büchner, *Die Transformation*, 119-121. See note 4 above.
14. In Ioh. n. 267, LW III, S. 222,8: *Deus enim, utpote unus, nihil dividit, sed divisa unit*.

15. Prol. gen. n. 17f. (Rec. L), LW I,2, S. 25,8-22 (Rec. CT, Lw I, S. 162,2-163,1): *Propter quod siganter (significanter CT) non dicitur (ait CT) a principio, sed in principio deum creasse [...]. Quod enim est in principio et cuius finis principium, semper oritur, semper nascitur, semper natum est.*
16. Bhagavadgītā 7:4-7. All translations from the Bhagavadgītā are from R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad- Gītā* (London/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.)
17. Bhagavadgītā 9:4-8.
18. Meister Eckhart, Sermo 48 from Sermones et Lectiones super Ecclesiastici c.
19. Bhagavadgītā 10:2-8.
20. Pr. 4, DW I, S. 69,8-70,3: *Alle crêatûren sint ein lûter niht. Ich spriche niht, daz sie kleine sîn oder iht sîn: sie sint ein lûter niht. Swaz niht wesens enhât, daz enist niht. Alle crêatûren hânt kein wesen, wan ir wesen swebet an der gegenwerticheit gotes.*
21. The Bhagavadgītā 3:23f.
22. BgT, DW V, S. 28,3-6. Vgl. Auch RdU, DW V, S. 269,5-7; Pr. 80, DW III, S. 386,5-387,2; Pr. 103, DW IV, 1, S. 487,113-119: *kein vaz enmac zweierleie trank in im gehabt. Sol ez wîn haben, man muoz von nôt wazzer ûzgiezen; daz vaz muoz blôz und îtel warden. Dar umbe, soltû götliche vröude und got nemen, dû muost von nôt die crêatûren ûzgiezen.*
23. Pr. 65, DW III, S. 101,8-10: *Swâ zwei ein suln warden, dâ muoz daz eine sîn wesen verliesen. Alsô ist: und sol got und diu sêle éin warden, sô muoz diu sêle ir wesen und ir leben verliesen.*
24. Bhagavadgītā 2:64-68.
25. Bhagavadgītā 2:70f.
26. Sermo 29 n. 299, LW, S. 266,4-8; Übersetzung ebd.: [...] *nota... (lat. Text wird noch von den Hg. ergänzt).*
27. BgT, DW V, S. 50,19f.; Übersetzung S.491: *Benæme man allen crêatûren aller dirre werlt daz wesen, daz got gibet, sô bliben sie blôz niht, ungenæme, unwert und hezzeclich.*
28. Bhagavadgītā 2:17f.

29. Sermo 29 n. 299, LW IV, S. 266,8f.; Übersetzung ebd.: *unum descendit in omnia et singula, manens semper unum et divisa uniens.*
30. Bhagavadgītā 15:12-15.
31. *Got ist daz aller gemeineste. Kein dinc gemeinet sich von dem sînen, wan alle crêatûren von in selber niht ensint. Swaz sie gemeinent, daz hânt sie von einem andern. Sie gebent sich ouch niht selben. Diu sunne givet irn schîn und blîbet doch dâ stânde, daz viur givet sîne hitze und blîbet doch viur; aber got gemeinet daz sîne, wan er von im selber ist, daz er ist, und in allen den gâben, die er givet, sô givet er sich selben ie zem êrsten. Er givet sich got, als er ist in allen sînen gâben, als verre als ez an im ist, der in enpfâhen möhte*
32. Bhagavadgītā 3:22f.
33. Bhagavadgītā 18:65-66.
34. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience. Emerging Religious Consciousness.* S. Eastham (Ed) (New York: Orbis, 1993).
35. Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being.* The Gifford Lectures (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 404.

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Building Solidarity through Reconciliation

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Abstract: Reconciliation is an important dimension of “Befriending the other.” The recent missiological literature emphasizes “Mission as loving relationship”. If we look at Mission as the proper loving human relationship that enriches and empowers every one, then reconciliation is an essential component of this process. For we live in a divided world, causing and suffering from various forms of divisions. In this paper we shall look first at the world of division, then see the attempts at reconciliation in various cultures and religions, and then look at the essentials of this process of reconciliation and the areas that need reconciliation, and finally relate reconciliation to mission as relation and to “Befriending the other”.

First the author looks at some forms of divisions existing in the world due to various causes; the tendency to divide the States in India, the conflicts between two groups in the same country, for example, in Ireland, Iraq and Rwanda. Then the author examines some of the attempts at unification and reconciliation in various African cultures, as an example of such attempts, in religions and finally in the Catholic Church. The Church has the sacrament of Reconciliation precisely for reconciling the erring members to the community.

The author examines the main theme of what happens in reconciliation. The basic truth behind the process is that each understands the other side from his/her point of view. Reconciliation can happen only when one understands the other from his/her point of view.

Following Jesus' wall-breaking ministry, we must recognize that in the past our mission work has often caused divisions by taking some people out of their groups to be Christians. The Churches have to recognize that their mission is not primarily geared towards increasing the number of members, but being a channel of the working of the Spirit gathering all people into one family of God, into the Kingdom of God, irrespective of their religions, cultures, gender and races.

Keywords: Reconciliation; Kingdom of God, solidarity; justice, unification.

Reconciliation is an important dimension of “Befriending the other,” the theme of the Diamond Jubilee of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth. Besides, the recent missiological literature emphasizes “Mission as loving relationship”.

When we understand “Mission as relationship,” the proper loving human relationship that enriches and empowers every one, then reconciliation is an essential element or component of this process. For we live in a divided world, causing and suffering from various forms of divisions. In this paper I shall look first at the world of division, then see the attempts at reconciliation in various cultures and religions, and then look at the essentials of this process of reconciliation and the areas that need reconciliation, and finally relate reconciliation to mission as relation and to “Befriending the other.”

1. A Divided World

Our world is characterized by many forms of conflicts and divisions. There are divisions between cultures, nations, peoples and religions. There are divisions at the personal, national and international levels. Today one notices more and more divisions taking place in the world, especially due to growing religious fundamentalism in different parts of the world. Exclusivist and triumphalist claims by any one religion also lead to divisions and conflicts. Terrorism is also another factor that causes divisions among peoples and nations. The

bloody conflicts in Rwanda between two tribes caused the murder of over 100,000 people in a short period of time; the Serbian trouble too is basically between two groups of the same country where people had lived in amity for centuries suddenly turned violent. One knows about the violence in Ireland between two Christian groups and the thousands who lost their lives. In Israel the on-going clash between the Israelites and the Palestinians has resulted in the loss of thousands of lives; only too recently did more than 650,000 people died in Iraq due to the war imposed on them by the Americans. In Iraq conflict continues between two Islamic groups: the Sunnis and the Shiites. In Sudan, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Lebanon and other places the daily death counts are increasing. In almost no part of the world can we find today people living in total peace and harmony with one another.

In our own country we notice moves to divide the States. Only recently have Uttaranchal, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand been formed; now just recently the government has created a Telengana State by dividing Andhra; there are demands for a Bodo Land, Goorkha Land and so on. In the North Eastern States there are also movements towards division and separation. There the clash between the military and the freedom struggle outfits continues unabated. There are the Naxalite movements in the Southern States and also in Bihar, MP and Jharkhand. The Churches too experience divisive factors: new Pentecostal splinter groups carry away many followers from mainline Churches, causing opposition and antagonism. In some parts of India this is becoming a serious concern for the churches.

2. Efforts at Unification

While moves to divide are alive, there are also efforts for reconciliation. People instinctively feel that division is not helpful for humans, and hence the move towards reconciliation

and harmony is also natural. All cultures and religions have ways of reconciling people to the community; sanctions and rewards are ways used by different groups. National and international groups try ways of Reconciliation; South Africa had set up a Truth Commission for the explicit purpose of Reconciliation after the Apartheid was dismantled. That has certainly helped to move people from mutual suspicion and hatred to some sort of harmonious existence. In recent times, East and West Germany were unified; North and South Korea are also trying to unify; there are similar movements in every part of the world. In the Churches too Ecumenical movements, though not as strong as in the post Vatican II period, are alive. Some recent rapprochement efforts have been made between the Orthodox and Catholics.

Religions see sin as a divisive factor and have worked out ways of reconciliation. The New Testament is quite familiar with this phenomenon: the gospel of Matthew takes up the issue explicitly in chapter eighteen. Matthew suggests mutual correction, the community involvement in correcting one erring member and finally excommunication (18.15ff). The Catholic Church, for example, has the possibility of private individual confessions to reconcile the erring members back to the community. The Orthodox too follows a similar pattern. Similar customs are found also in various tribal societies, and cultural groups. Ways of reconciliation in various tribes of Africa are well known. I may mention just a few.

Among the *Luo* people there takes place a dialogue among elders from both sides; they communicate the decision to the offended parties; they kill an animal; its blood is sprinkled on the two parties; they share a meal and drink beer from the same pot with straws; pour libation for the ancestors; herbs are used for sprinkling both parties; they dance and shake hands; women break the news to all those not involved.

In Zambia the *Bemba* tribe follows a similar custom. Both parties assemble and relax; no one may speak about the matter until the leader announces the time for discussion; in major or minor cases, dialogue comes first; a leader and a few witnesses or observers are present; after reaching a conclusion, the parties embrace each other and shake hands and finally they share a meal.

The *Luhya* community in Kenya: after discussion, the elders hold a calabash filled with water; both the sides wash hands, shake hands and share peace with the whole group; both drink a medicinal drink from the same calabash; a chicken is cut and the gizzard is shared by the disputing parties; and finally there is a meal together.

In general the offended and offender meet with their people to know their feelings and mood; both parties send their messengers to the other side to decide on the date for reconciliation and about the things to be provided by both the parties (white bull, goat and brewed beer); on the fixed day both the parties, their representatives and elders assemble; the two parties are questioned as to what happened; all comment; the offended and offender accept the verdict of the group; they shake hands; both parties are involved in the slaughtering of an animal; they are the first to eat the meat together; the elders sprinkle the animal's blood on both the parties; they eat from the same dish; after these they agree the matter discussed is not to be revealed to anybody. The assembly is officially dissolved. Similar patterns are followed by various tribal groups in India too.

3. The Process of Reconciliation

While these and similar efforts are worthwhile and often bear fruit, what is it that ultimately happens in reconciliation between two persons or two groups? The basic truth behind

the process is that each understands the other side from his/her point of view. I shall describe this process at some length. Reconciliation can happen only when one understands the other from his/her point of view. One needs to look at what the other is looking at, i.e., understand the other as s/he understands self when s/he does something. It is often said: you must accept/understand the other as s/he accepts/understands herself. This is impossible as we do not know how the other accepts herself. Hence I have added: 'when s/he does something', for we know from our own experience that when we do something, we have a justifiable reason for doing it, and so, we see ourselves as blameless, even if the action may be wrong. My contention is that we do not act primarily and intentionally against another just for the sake of being against the other, or just for doing harm to the other. I do not say that all our actions are done with an explicit justification. In merely thoughtless, instinctual and impulsive actions and mob behaviour, one does not have an explicit justification before acting. However if confronted or opposed, we defend the action as justifiable, as was clear in the case of the Mosque demolition, attack on Iraq and the like. (Actions of psychologically abnormal persons are a class by themselves).

People can easily remember the times when *someone has hurt them*; they can also remember the times when *someone claims to have been hurt by them*. But no one owns up that s/he has done something *in order to hurt* another, *just to cause harm* to another without any advantage for oneself. "I did not do it purposely," or "I did it in order to teach him/her a lesson, to prevent further harm" or "I did it as retaliation". Just to do evil to the other is not the *primary and explicit intention of the person*. We may be conditioned by prejudice, past experiences, fears, the need to protect ourselves, self-interest, and the urge to prevent future harm, profit, ignorance, partial

or wrong information, mistaken identity, wrong judgement and the like. In whatever we do, we normally see only what is good for ourselves, or for the group, and other aspects are ignored. If any harm is foreseen, it is justified as called for by the situation. Later on we may become aware of the unconscious motives and may even apologize for the harm done as if it were done purposely. One may do something very harmful from an unconscious need to protect oneself, without seeing the harm done to the other. And because of our conditioning, we may see only one aspect, namely, what appears good and so we defend our action as justifiable and blameless.

This happens not only in individual, interpersonal situations, but also in general. Caiaphas held that he was serving the cause of religion by killing Jesus. “You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (Jn 11.50). President Bush was convinced that it was his duty in the cause of fighting terrorism to bomb and destroy Iraq. When terrorists kill innocent people, they seem to argue that it is the only way for them to bring pressure on the Government or to get what they want and thus justifying their brutal behaviour. I do not say that because the doer has a justifiable reason, the action is right and good; the action can be quite wrong, as in the above examples. Here I am not talking about the morality of the action, but about our approach to bring about reconciliation between people, the attitude with which we ought to live, the way we need to look at the other person if we want to be reconciled to people. That means a person is not equated with what s/he does, as our normal interactions imply, but we see the person as good, even when his/her action is wrong and is opposed.

Such an attitude of understanding the other is what leads to forgiveness without which there cannot be true reconciliation. Understanding the other as s/he understands self is forgiveness. Forgiveness, it seems to me, is the same as unconditional love. For many years I have helped people to forgive one another referring to the example of Jesus praying for His enemies. These days there are many books and seminars dealing with 'healing of memories'. After years of reflection and by analysing many incidents I have come to realise that if one had not misunderstood, misjudged the other, there would be nothing to forgive, no memory to heal. If a person acts with a justifiable reason, even when wrong, that person is not against me and is not to be blamed. To forgive is not to allow the action of the other to affect my relation to him/her. It is like the sun that would not turn away from your windows just because you have closed them and put thick curtains across. True forgiveness means that my attitude to the person remains unchanged, even when I oppose his/her action and demand reparation for the material harm done. The material harm done cannot be repaired by forgiveness, which rectifies only the personal relationship.

I agree that the word forgiveness may be meaningful in certain situations, for example, a mother forgiving the murderer of her son or daughter, even if the murder was done in a moment of passion, anger, revenge and self defence. Even in such situations, understanding makes a great difference.

This means, in other words, we must avoid judgement of the other person, even when we oppose the action of the other. When you listen to people talking about others, you realise that they pass many judgements as 'truths': "I know s/he is like that," implying a value judgement. Jesus said: "Do not judge" (Matt 7.1). Seeing the other as the other sees him/herself in what s/he does is "not to judge" the other. In judging another, one imposes on the other one's own criteria of what is right

and wrong, and thus claims superiority over the other, one looks at the event from one's own point of view and refuses to see it from the other's point of view. This creates a wall between the two. Whenever we judge another, we are wrong, for we can see only the external action, while the person's intention and interpretation is known only to that person. By not judging, I do not mean that I approve of the action, or that it is right. There are actions which are wrong and need to be opposed. What I mean is that the person is not judged and blamed; my attitude to the person remains unchanged. If one starts with the assumption that, right or wrong, the person has a justifiable reason for what s/he does, and is not against me intentionally, then there will be no misjudgement against the person and no hurt feelings, even when I have to oppose the action. Jesus seems to do precisely this when He tells the woman caught in adultery: "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (Jn 8.11).

One often hears, "I forgive, but I can't forget". Here it is not just a matter of memory. The judgement against the other remains and it interferes with the proper relationship between two persons. I suggest that instead of trying to "heal memories" we should eliminate the bad memory caused by the wrong judgement of the other. There is nothing to heal: we must see that we have been wrong in our judgement of the other's motive. If we were in the same position and under the same conditionings as the other person, we would have acted in the same way. I have come across hundreds of cases when a hurt person honestly tried to understand the 'offender' from his/her point of view, the problem ceased. For as I said earlier, no one is doing harm to the other intentionally, just for doing harm (Have you done it anytime?). This compassionate understanding has to be cultivated through a lot of awareness, so that interpreting the other favourably becomes a sort of second nature. True love (forgiveness) is capable of transcending all

sorrow, breaking down all barriers that separate and disunite and bring about true harmony.

Though what I have said above is useful primarily for interpersonal relationships, the approach is valid also for groups. Hence salvation for societies in conflict is reconciliation and forgiveness.

Even if one holds, for arguments sake, that one does harm intentionally, what has happened is happened; nothing can be done about it by anyone; the only reasonable thing in that situation is to forgive, as Mrs Staines did. If one does not forgive, then she or he suffers, and uselessly carries along a dead weight. The presumed “wrong doer” does not even know that the other is suffering, as s/he had not intended offending the other. If on the other hand, one responds to that situation with understanding/forgiveness, then the person is free of the past. The only sensible thing to do about a past event is to forgive. Here most people seem to fail and hold on to past hurts which are caused by their own misunderstanding. Hence in conclusion, we must forgive everyone from our heart unconditionally, and bring about reconciliation between people.

Once I was visiting a family in Nairobi. Roland, his mother and his two small children (3 and 5) were there. I was told that Isabel, the children’s mother, had run away with a married man; they spoke at length about how wicked she was and so on. When I asked them if I could contact Isabel, they strongly dissuaded me, telling me that she had abused so many priests who had tried to contact her. However at my insistence they gave me a contact number. I called the number and left her a message; she called me back immediately. I began by saying: “Isabel, I believe you have had a hard time which forced you to take such a drastic step of leaving your children; I would be happy to meet you”. Soon after her office

hours she came over. She narrated her side of the story; most of the incidents were the ones told me by Roland. I agreed that given her way of seeing things, how much she was hurt. Then I explained to her how Roland would have seen those incidents; then she saw the point and said, “Now it is too late; if this was done in the beginning I would have gone back to him”. Roland saw everything from his point of view, he had his interpretation; Isabel from hers, she had her interpretation. They said they “loved” one another, but not in reality, they failed to understand the other from the other’s point of view. The priests, who contacted her earlier, saw everything from Roland’s point of view alone – hence she opposed them.

Another example is of sister Bertha. During a retreat she said that she could not pray as something was deeply disturbing her. She had this distraction for the last five years or so, and had discussed it with many counsellors, had made four or five retreats. She shared her story. She was very angry with her Mother General and her team for dismissing her sister from the congregation. She spoke for a long time about her pain, hurt and anger. As Bertha works in the office of the General, it was a daily hell for her. When she finished I asked: “Are you saying that they sent her away without any reason?” “they made no investigation, but believed all that was said against her?” “they knew the accusations were false and yet threw her out?” to all these and a couple of other questions, she answered “No”. I asked her: “Then what are you complaining about? They did all they reasonably could and acted the way they thought best for the congregation; you would have done the same if you were in their position”. Then Bertha saw and it changed her; she could thank God during the mass that day that she was free from five years of suffering. She had suffered for five years because she refused to understand the others from their point of view; she had misjudged them, and so was against them and she suffered immensely.

What I have said above is useful primarily for interpersonal relationships; it can also be useful in relations between groups, peoples and nations. Our mission is to enable people to come to proper relationship; hence the importance of reconciliation in mission cannot be over emphasised.

4. Reconciliation with Justice

True reconciliation cannot happen without justice. Various Governments have set up Commissions of reconciliation in order to help the process of reconciliation. In India, the North East is an area that needs a lot of reconciliation; the conflict between the Military and the people is becoming worse daily. The Military will have to recognize the rightful grievances of the people; the militants will have to see that ultimately violence is not an answer to any problem. In the North East often missionaries are accused of instigating violence and sectarian divisions. Though there is often no truth in this accusation, what is important is that we ought to actively contribute towards a process of reconciliation between the various groups.

Another area in which Christians can be actively involved is to bring reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims. We are affected by both, yet we can stand sort of “above” the factions and mediate a process of reconciliation, help both the groups to accept the mistakes of the past without being defensive about the past; there is no denying that mistakes have been made by every side. The prejudices, the conquering mentality and fear that affected the relationships in the past need not be carried over into the present day. Similarly, in the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, for example, reconciliation cannot happen until the wrongs done to the Palestinians are recognized, corrected and justice is done to them. The olive trees in Palestine were planted by Palestinians many years before the Jews established settlements in the

area; when the Jews marked roads “for Jews only,” and took control of the springs and closed off the area with checkpoints the Palestinians have been wronged. They will need to want to have a future in which the Jews and Arabs will be able to harvest olives together without fear. They have to look to a future in which Jews will not have extra privileges. Earlier, when talking about understanding, I said that by not judging I do not mean that I approve of the action of the other; the wrong done to the Palestinians has to be acknowledged and rectified. People will have to want peace and want to be reconciled. Our mission is to help to bring about such attitudinal changes in people, so that, people giving up their hatred for one another, come to understand the other and see that it is better for all if they live in harmony. A future based on the recognition that, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts it: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”.

We do not need more inquiry committees; we need truth and reconciliation committees, like those established in South Africa and other countries that chose the way of conciliation, of requesting forgiveness for the past and attempting to build a better and more just future. St John Paul II had shown that asking forgiveness also leads to reconciliation and proper relationship. He had the courage to acknowledge that injustice had been done to Galileo and other scientists, and the Pope asked forgiveness for such injustices. However, the Pope has not acknowledged that the Church had made mistakes in the past, but very ingenuously said: “Another painful chapter of history to which the sons and daughters of the Church must return with a spirit of repentance is that of the acquiescence given, especially in certain centuries to intolerance and even to the use of violence in the service of the Church” (John Paul II 1994, in Fiedler 1998: 50). Many more areas are there that need an apology: the dealings with heretics and schismatics,

“witches,” sorcerers, crusades, the Inquisition, the suppression of free thoughts and expression, like in the case of the Modernists, theologians like Tissa Balasuriya of Sri Lanka, Boff, Curran, Dupuis and many others. The Church has also to revise its self understanding of itself as the only guardian of Truth and the assumed authority from Christ to suppress any opinion contrary to theirs. An honest acknowledgement that mistakes have been committed in the past will help heal more wounds than all these beating around the bush will do. Justice, however, must not be set against forgiveness, as the case of the good thief also shows. Even after forgiving him, Jesus does not free him from the cross, that is, from the punishment that the wrongdoer himself considered “just”. Thus, we must forgive everyone interiorly while we demand that justice be done. Pope Francis has done right when recently he asked forgiveness for the crimes against children committed by clerics during many years. He has also asked for forgiveness when he visited Bolivia, though in the US he did not ask forgiveness from the original inhabitants of the country for the harm done to them by the invading Europeans.

5. Reconciliation at the Service of Mission as Proper Loving Relationship

Following Jesus’ wall-breaking ministry, we must recognize that our work as evangelizers is to help to build solidarity among people, to bring people together, to enable them to live in harmony. In the past our mission work has often caused divisions by taking some people out of their groups to be Christians. There is an element of truth in what Jesus says that he has come to cause divisions (Lk 12.52ff). Even when this happens, namely, some in a group or family decide to become Christian, and others are opposed to it, our efforts would be to help people understand each other’s point of view and respect each other’s stand and allow each one to follow his/her conscience and path. A proper relation can be preserved

even when such divisions are inevitable. Another aspect is to recognize that a difference of opinion need not necessarily lead to antagonism and opposition, if each side approaches the situation through understanding of the other side, which leads to reconciliation, even when each one follows a different path in religion, politics or in personal matters. The Churches have to recognize that their mission is not primarily geared towards increasing the number of members, but being a channel of the working of the Spirit gathering all people into one family of God, into the Kingdom of God, irrespective of their religions, cultures, gender and races.

In order to move in this direction, obviously there is need of a rethinking about the understanding of mission itself, which earlier was understood primarily in terms of Church expansion and numerical growth of the church. While this may still be valid this cannot be the primary understanding of mission. Mission has to be, following the wall breaking ministry of Jesus, geared to building human communities of love, fellowship, justice and mutual respect for each other's rights. Here humans and their concerns come first; they take primacy of place in our mission efforts. Our mission will be to join hands with all those who are concerned about human well being, freedom, justice and respect for human rights, not minority rights, but human rights of all. If we follow what was mentioned earlier about understanding the other from his/her point of view that will enable us to be mediators of reconciliation between peoples and groups. I mentioned above some of the ways people use in their search for Reconciliation; in every region and culture people have various 'local' ways of handling conflicts and bringing about reconciliation; we will have to familiarize ourselves with these and make use of them for our mission; if we start with people's own ways, then they are more open to it, than if we import something from outside.

For the theme of JDV's Diamond Jubilee Celebration and Conference, namely "Befriending the Other," reconciliation is an important dimension; in every relationship conflicts and misunderstandings are bound to arise; but if one has the spirit of reconciliation as we have developed it earlier through understanding the other, there will be no situation which leads to break up of a relationship; people can continue as friends and contribute to building up of communities of love, fellowship and cooperation.

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Pre-Christian Inter-Personal Values Practised by Africans as a Means of Befriending Others: Cultural-Religious Contexts

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Abstract: This article is an attempt to bring into light the African religious cultural values used to befriend others in the society. The historical account of missionaries about Africa shows that before Christianity the indigenous were pagans in a strict sense. That means the idea of a supreme and personal God did not exist in the African continent. However, various researches have proved the contrary. It is undeniable truths that even prior to Christianity Africans were profoundly religious. They had traditional religion which exerted big influence upon manners of living. Kofi Busia in his book *Africa in Search for Democracy* noted that “Africans’ cultural heritage is intensely and pervasively religious and that in traditional African communities; it was not possible to distinguish between religious and non-religious areas of life.”¹

This religion is rooted in the ethos and belief system of people; and developed experientially as a response for their questions concerning the world and daily life situations. It dominates human life and

set up a specific tone in his relationship with nature and his fellow people through values observed. The work aims at seeing the convergences of these values to Christianity and how they created congeniality in the society.

Keywords: African theology, culture, cultural values, hospitality, greeting rituals, solidarity.

Introduction

The historical account of missionaries about Africa shows that before Christianity the indigenous were pagans in a strict sense. That means the idea of a supreme and personal God did not exist in the African continent. However, various researches have proved the contrary. It is undeniable truth that even prior to Christianity Africans were profoundly religious. They had traditional religions which exerted big influence upon manners of living. Kofi Busia in his book *Africa in Search for Democracy* noted that “Africans’ cultural heritage is intensely and pervasively religious and that in traditional African communities; it was not possible to distinguish between religious and non-religious areas of life.”²

This religion developed experientially as a response for their questions concerning the world and daily life situations. Religion provided them with important answers and authentic interpretation of the physical world. Distinct from Christian religion, African Tribal Religions (ATR) developed out of *experiential encounter* with the vastness, complexity and orderliness of the universe. One of the elements found in the five proofs of existence of God by St. Thomas Aquinas. Nothing could impart the possibility of a Supreme Being more on the minds of African ancestors than the large sea, the rising and setting sun, the rains, the high blue sky and the big high mountains. It was a natural religion rooted in the ethos and belief system of a people. It dominates human life and set up a specific tone in his relationship with nature and his fellow man. These twenty pages intend to analyse some of the values practiced by Africans as a means of befriending others. Although they exercised them not on the basis of Christianity, but they later proved to be the essential values of Christianity.

1. Semantic Description of Terms

a. Culture

Culture is the totality of a people's way of life which differs from tribe to tribe or nation to nation. It is the characteristic of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts.³ All are interwoven to form their very life. It is therefore very difficult to draw a clear-cut line of demarcation between where their ethical life ends and where their religious life begins.

A culture is a social system that shares a set of common values, in which such values permit social expectations and collective understandings of the good, beautiful, constructive, etc. Culture shapes the way we see the world. Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.⁴

b. Religion

Indian theologian Nigel Kumar defines religion as a human activity in response to God's activity in the context of God's reconciliation of humanity to himself. Religion is a combination of a religious view of the world and religious actions in the world all directed in honour of God.⁵

No single definition can be ascribed to the word religion due to its diversity. Many people considered religion as an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, practice and worship that centre on one supreme God or the deity value that provide groups of men with solution to the question of ultimate meaning.⁶

Religion is also considered to be "collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Religion is not only a necessary but a very significant part of our lives. Most people would find it very difficult to live without religion or spirituality. Most religions shared wholly or partially some characteristics which include: belief in God or deity, a doctrine of salvation, a code of conduct or ethics, the usage of sacred stories, rituals or religious acts and ceremonies.

We cannot exclude the word religion from culture since religion is defined as a collection of cultural systems.

c. Inter-personality

Generally inter-personality means relating to or involving relations between people. It is the way people interact in the society. In the context of this paper it refers to the ways in which Africans associate themselves to each other and in the society. African cultural worldview is such that no one lives by himself or herself; every person belongs to one another in the community.⁷ A good human relationship based on inter-personal communication has always been emphasized in the African Community. Biko observed:—

Ours has always been a man-centred society. Westerners in many occasions have been surprised at the capacity we have for talking to each other not for the sake of arriving at a particular conclusion but merely to enjoy the communication for its own sake. But the discussions must respect individuals' sentiments; hence conversations that may cause misgivings are avoided. Intimacy is a term not exclusive for particular friends but applying to a whole group of people who find themselves together whether through work or residential requirements⁸

d. Values

The word “value” comes from a Latin word ‘*valere*’ means be strong, be well; be of value, and be of worth. Values are principles, standards or qualities that an individual or group of people hold in high regard. These values guide the way we live our lives and the decisions we make. A value may be defined as something that we hold dear, those things/qualities which we consider to be of worth.⁹ It also refers to an ethical precept on which we base our behavior. Values are shaped by the culture in which we live and by our experiences. However, there are values that are held high by most cultures. These include fairness and justice, compassion and charity, duties and rights, survival of human species and human well-being.

Values can be related to the norms of culture but they are more worldwide and abstract than norms. Norms provide rules for be-

havior in specific situations, while values identify what should be judged as good or evil. While norms are standards, patterns, rules and guides of expected behavior, values are abstract concepts of what is important and worthwhile. Flying the national flag on a holiday is a norm, but it reflects the value of patriotism. Wearing dark costume and appearing solemn are normative behaviors to manifest respect at a funeral. Different cultures reflect values differently and to different levels of emphasis.

Values are set of personal or social principles, standards, concepts, beliefs and ideas that can be used to make everyday decisions. Hospers easily distinguishes three senses of ‘value’ namely as “a liking or preference, that which promotes a goal (end) independently of one’s liking or preference” and ‘that which has value or worth in itself without reference to any end.’¹⁰

2. The Principal Cultural Values within Which Africans Befriend Others

Human cultural values in the world differ significantly despite some similarities they may share. Some of the reasons which lie behind this is the geographical setting and racial differences. This automatically leads us to talk about European cultural values, Asian cultural values, African cultural values etc. Different scholars proved that most people’s cultural values take their essence from manifold elements; such as ethics, religion, politics, economics, esthetics, etc. You can agree with me that one’s personality constitutes part of his/her culture. Cultural values can be defined as commonly held standards of what is acceptable or unacceptable, important or unimportant, right or wrong, workable or unworkable in a community or society.¹¹ It is implicitly in the definition that cultural values are meant for the common good of a society.

Africans’ cultural values have been discredited by many (especially missionaries) as completely flabby and uncivilized one. So, more to the point of evangelization, uprooting Africans’ culture and imposition of European ones had been a second project of missionaries. This negative attitude affected and deprived Africans of their identity. Up to now majority of Africans are not at home with their cultures. There is always a struggle to become like Europeans. But is it an actual fact that African culture is useless and uncivilized?

The late president of Tanzania Julius Kambarage Nyerere once remarked “Of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that we had no indigenous culture of our own, or that what we did have was worthless or something of which we should be ashamed, instead of being a source of pride.¹² Our point here is to unveil the truth that, besides the defects found in African culture, (which may also be in other cultures) there are also positive values in African society which had great impacts to Christian religion.

African values are found in various categories such as Moral values, Religious values, Economic values, Political values, Aesthetic value and Social values. Nevertheless, social values seem to be fundamentally the cardinal. African values are humanistic in the sense that they take human person prior, central and end-point in techno-development valuations and engagements.¹³

Therefore we would focus precisely on how these values played a considerable role on befriending others. African values were based on the so called policy of “live-and let –live” that presupposed inter-personal and intercommunity relationship realized in the interaction between individuals of the same community and different communities. Values which nurtured this life setting were the following: hospitality, solidarity/mutual assistance, respect, exchange of greetings, reconciliation and forgiveness. Let us analyse each individually.

a. Hospitality

For Africans ‘To be’ is to be related. The term humanity in Africa is not just an anthropological term; it is also a moral term when it comes to considering the relations between members of the human species. If we are human, we are (must be) brothers, in a comprehensive sense of the word ‘brother.’ So any human person has the right to be recognised by everyone and the society at large. The phrase ‘All men are equal’ is used to instill in Africans’ mind the spirit of brotherhood and friendship in their daily life.

The Akan people in Ghana summarize the idea of hospitality with the proverb “honam mu nninhanoa” that means humanity has no boundary. Literary is that:

In human flesh there is no edge of cultivation—no boundary. The maxim can be interpreted as meaning that ‘all humankind is one species’, thus, that ‘Humanity has no boundary.’ When the farmer cultivates his land, he does it up to a limit, an edge where he has to stop; otherwise he would trespass on another farmer’s land. There is, thus, a limit to the area of cultivation of land. But the maxim invites us to realise, it is not so in the cultivation of the friendship and fellowship of human beings; the boundaries of that form of cultivation are limitless. For, humanity is of one kind; all humankind is one species, with shared basic values, feelings, hopes, and desires.¹⁴

Though Africans are divided into different tribes, they consider humanity as universal value that constitutes one human family which surpasses the ethnic boundary. Hospitality or generosity is therefore extended to all people regardless of race, culture or religion. Mbiti shed more light on this by saying “It is held to be a moral evil to deny hospitality even to a stranger. Therefore, when people travel they may stop anywhere for the night and receive hospitality in that homestead. They should not be molested unless of course they abuse the hospitality they have received”¹⁵

This generosity is exercised in every aspect of life. For instance, in Africa one does not need to inform a person whom s/he is planning to visit that one will eat or not. It is in the Africans’ tradition that a visitor should never leave without eating something from his/her hosts. Due to this tradition, an African woman will always make sure she prepares enough food for the family and little surplus for whoever may come. Women who cook food without a surplus can sometimes be considered as greedy or selfish.

African culture forbids one to ask a visitor whether s/he wants something to eat. It is considered bad manners. When a visitor arrives after a warm welcome, is served with any edible thing then the decision to eat or not is left upon him. Refusal is the rare case. If s/he took something before his/her coming s/he takes a small amount as a sign of appreciation. Asking a visitor if s/he likes something is translated as not having the will to give and the answer one is expecting to get if such a question is asked is always negative. In

this context therefore, an African is sure of food and accommodation among his/her fellow Africans.

Sharing is encouraged no matter how little the food is; keeping a prey for one's own family when the catch is big enough for the extended family was considered as violation of customs and it has to be vehemently reproached. Afolayan Funso compares greedy people with a lion saying "to be generous in heart is to be human, to take food only for oneself reduces one to be the level of the animals, just like lions take food only for themselves. Only the light-hearted and those whose bellies are like bags without openings think only of their appetite and of meeting their own needs at all cost."¹⁶

The late President Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere once said "One of the achievements of our African society was the universal hospitality on which members of the community and others could rely."¹⁷ Several writers, including European travellers to Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, have also remarked upon these virtues as practiced in African social and moral life. Briton who spent about three decades in Central Africa from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the early part of the twentieth century made the following observation, "Hospitality is one of the most sacred and an ancient custom of Bantu land, and is found *everywhere*. A native will give his best house and his evening meal to a guest, without the slightest thought that he is doing anything *extraordinary*."¹⁸ It is even believed that mistreating or refraining from generosity to a stranger can lead to misfortunes or a curse on that family.

Encouragement of hospitality in people's lives is expressed by the maxim "human being is more beautiful than gold."¹⁹ That the goodness/value of man cannot be compared by anything else; and that he is a being which has to be enjoyed in spite of any defects one may have. According to Ifeanyi Menkiti, a beautiful object is enjoyed for its own sake, not for the sake of anything else. Therefore, human being is to be enjoyed for his or her own sake; and to enjoy a human being for his/her own sake means you should appreciate his value as a human being and demonstrate that appreciation by showing compassion and hospitality. It means to be open to the interests and welfare of others and to feel it a moral duty to offer help where it is needed; it also means to recognise the other person as a fellow individual whose worth as a human being is equal to yours and with whom you undoubtedly share basic values, ideals, and sentiments.²⁰

However, African hospitality is dispensed in moderation and in prudence. This is demonstrated by the Akan proverb that cautions on foolish dispensation of hospitality saying ‘Visitor is a visitor for several days, and then put the person to work.’²¹ It agrees with the Swahili proverb which says that ‘A visitor is a guest for two days, on the third day, put him or her to work (by giving him or her a hoe)’²². These proverbs imply that a person is not a visitor forever. At one stage he or she will be accepted as one of us who now needs to work like the rest of us in various forms to promote the economic well-being of the hosting family, the entire community and justly earn his livelihood.

A few malicious people who pretend to be visitors with bad intention have resulted the diminishing of Africans’ generosity. Besides that, it is crucial to highlight the fact that such attitudes are changing very slowly in our modern day Africa due to the fact that supply in proportion to the people in our modern world is less. Surely, one cannot afford to cook so much food that used to be cooked for the entire extended family and beyond. Growth of population has resulted into scarcity of land which do not produce enough food for the family. Additionally, the change of attitude that is weakening our hospitality can also be attributed to the mushrooming of commercial places like hotels, restaurants, bars and lodgings which have replaced the many social gatherings for refreshment purposes such as local beer drinking sessions that used to be there.²³

b. Greetings

In African setting, the exchange of greetings symbolizes one’s acknowledgement to the dignity and value of the other person. It is inconceivable for two people to meet on the way or anywhere else without greeting each other. Saying hellow to whoever you come across is an impression of a well formed person (though this may not be absolute).

Although this practice binds every member in the society, “when two people meet, the younger one usually starts off the greeting session giving the other the same title that he or she would give to his/her parent or elder of the same group”.²⁴ Greeting is accompanied with some gestures such as shaking hands and half genuflecting, stopping if one was walking; standing if one was sitting; or kneeling depending on the culture and tradition of that particular tribe. Elder

people greet those in authority by taking off their hat while shaking their hands regardless of their age.

At times exchange of greetings serves as starting point of dialogue and conversation. It is an art cherished in African relations. In African scenery questions like: did you sleep well? How are your children? Or how is your family form part of greetings and are asked in *bonafide*. Extension of greeting to that extent lies on the fact that Africans freely discuss and express their problems. You may wonder where do they get time to extend greetings in that way. This is possible because majority of Africans go to their place of work on foot (can be to school, farm areas, market etc). If those who meet are taking the same direction they can discuss a lot of things before they depart one another. It is highly important to note that Africans believe that he who discusses his affairs with others hardly runs into difficulties or makes mistakes in the execution of his plans.

Africans, particularly Tanzanians, believe that to greet a person is to wish him/her well, it shows that you value him/her and it is a sign of recognising him as a person and not as an object. Passing somebody silently is a sign of hatred, enmity or disrespect. Certainly, there should be something incongruous or abnormal. If one passes silently s/he can immediately be asked “what have I done to you that you pass me like a stone”? It is a fundamental question which solicits a concrete response from the interlocutor or counterpart.

c. Solidarity and Communality

Akan people have a proverb which goes: “It is the human being that counts; I call upon gold, it answers not; I call upon cloth, it answers not; it is the human being that counts.”²⁵ This adage insists the uniqueness of human being among the created beings. No matter how rich one is, solidarity and mutual assistance takes precedence in the sphere of social life. We may have everything but still we need each other in life. Life is more than richness and what counts in our lives is good relationships.

Relationship between individuals recognizes their worth as human beings and not only what they possess or what can they do for each other. Nevertheless, these can come as secondary considerations, in terms of reciprocity and in terms of inter-personal relationship. People help one another without demanding immediate

or an exact equivalent remuneration.²⁶ Everyone is mindful that each person has something to contribute to his welfare, some time and somehow. Another Hausa proverb illustrates this point clearly. It says: “Friendship with the ferryman right from the dry season means that when the rains come, you will be the first to cross”. This proverb emphasizes constancy in friendship. In it, the worth of the ferryman, as a human being is not determined solely by what he can offer during the rains, hence he must be befriended right from the dry season when his occupation is not in strict demand.²⁷

Yet, the claim that ‘it is human being that counts’ does not imply that African social ethics disregard the importance of earthly goods. The point is that, these goods should not detach us from others or community. Earthly goods have value only in relation to human beings. Think of a man who has big companies and no one goes for employment even for high payment. Think also of a sick rich man; can his wealth take him to hospital? No matter how many cars he has, it is only his fellow human being who can drive him to hospital since the car itself cannot. We can give so many other examples but the point stressed here is that mutual relationship, solidarity and affection towards other people has to be promoted by each one in the community.

A person is defined in a way s/he relates in the society. According to Polycarp Ikuenobe the term person in African tradition has dual standards of recognition: normative recognition and descriptive or metaphysical. Normatively, a person is defined or described based on the recognition s/he has acquired from the society due to his/her conformity to the social and moral norms. Metaphysical recognition is based on what constitutes a person. It is recognition based on the ontological analyses of the person; his/her make-up, the nature. It is normative standards that define a person in Africa and one has to prove so practically. Yet, one cannot be described as a person normatively without the metaphysical features.²⁸

The arrangement of human relation is that of being one’s brother’s keeper or caring for each other’s welfare. A way of life emphatically centred upon human interest and values; a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, and by consideration and compassion for human beings.²⁹ Life is a shared reality hence togetherness and cooperation are praised. Gerald Tanye affirms this saying:

Solidarity is expressed in work, helping one another to build or repair their houses, in funeral celebrations, in farming and education of children as a corporate responsibility and general involvement in one's another's life. The value of solidarity is expressed concretely through sharing at the heart of daily life where everyone feels to be truly at home³⁰

Onwubiko pointed that the African idea of security and its value depend on personal identification with and within the community. An authentic African is known and identified in, by and through his community.

d. Forgiveness and Reconciliation

It is within Africans' mind that people are unique with their own likes and dislikes, even temperaments differ from one person to another. Hence, misunderstandings and conflicts may arise at any time between individuals, in family or society. The spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation is always insisted to construct and maintain peace and good relationships in the community. For instance, people were warned about the tendency of berating others for their failings with this maxim *a cow falls despite its four legs*.³¹

A cow is not expected to fall easily precisely because it has four legs, these help it to have balance and be stable, but the possibility to slip and fall is there. If that is the case with stable creatures what about two-legged creatures? The message here is that, we do not expect to have infallible people in society. No matter how virtuous a person is, to err is human. Therefore we need to bear other people's failures and be ready to forgive regardless of how many times they failed.

Africans consider forgiveness and reconciliation as moral obligation in order to maintain solidarity and community ties which bring peace and harmony in the society. Regardless of other elements, blessings and success in one's life in Africa is associated with the good relations one has towards the community members. In the book *Truth and Reconciliation* we read that forgiveness does not mean to forget but an emphatic recognition of the moral vulnerability of human beings. This is by being ready to make a

change from the way we remember our traumas and the way those traumas and hatred have defined our relationships with others.³²

To bring back true peace and inner healing to the ruptured relationship, reconciliation is significant where the two conflicting parties must expose the root causes of the problem one after another. “For if the causes of suffering are not addressed, suffering is likely to continue and the wheel of violence keeps turning.”³³ After hearing from both sides the mediator with her wisdom reconciles the two.

In most of African societies the party found guilty, after apologizing publicly, has to pay something as a fine (is usually an edible thing) which is eaten by those who gathered for that purpose (elders) or part of it can be given to the victim or offended family. Regardless of the seriousness of the case, forgiveness and reconciliation is obligatory and there is no way the offended person can refuse. In some tribes there is a particular leaf the offender uses when asking forgiveness to show a heartfelt apology. The motive behind the reconciliation is the fact that it is an imperative duty to build a united community and eradicate roots of division, isolation and build friendship between a person and a person or between neighbour communities.

3. The Convergences of African Values to Christianity

Despite the transgressions found in African culture, a number of values practiced in the society exerted great force in evangelizing process. The Christian values such as respect to elders, hospitality, welcoming foreigners, forgiveness, reconciliation, solidarity and mutual assistance were not new in African land. Unknowingly the Africans lived the gospel message within their culture. To some extent this reflected the evangelizing work.

African hospitality is that extension of generosity, given freely without strings attached. It is a readiness to share gratuitously. It is, thus, the willingness to give, to help, to assist, to love and to carry one another's burden without necessarily profit or reward as the driving forces. African hospitality created the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood ‘between the members of the same family group, same clan and even strangers. Hospitality is perceived and practiced by Africans as open-handed, instinctive and the most natural thing in the world.’³⁴ This is to say hospitality in Africa is not an academic

theory that is simply exercised by ‘arm-chair’ practitioners but a practical way of life on how people live their lives on a day-to-day basis as this study seeks to show.³⁵

Analogously, from biblical context hospitality is intended to make human being enter into fellowship with one another and practice Christ’s commandment of love. Jesus pointed that, the very credibility of our witness to the gospel is at risk when our ministry of evangelism fails to cross boundaries; when it is limited to those who are culturally or racially similar to ourselves. The real nature of the gospel is contravened when our witness is not extended to those who are far from our ethnic or racial boundaries (Lk. 6:32).

Hospitality is more than simply a context for evangelism; it is integral to the gospel. In fact, the whole life of Jesus was that of hospitality, as Pohl suggests: “Jesus gave his life so that persons could be welcomed into the Kingdom.”³⁶ Koenig puts it this way: “When Paul urges the Romans to ‘welcome one another . . . just as Christ has welcomed you’ (15:7), he is revealing something close to the heart of his gospel.”³⁷

The uniqueness of African hospitality can be argued on the basis that, unless you are invited for a meal or dinner by a westerner, you do not expect a treat. In ancient Kikuyu hospitality, it was more distinctive than it is today in that, a hungry person, a passer-by or a stranded stranger could go to the garden, in a strange land, and if he was genuinely hungry, he would get into somebody’s garden and consequently eat as many ripe bananas, sugar cane or any ripe fruit but was not supposed to carry it with him (or her) outside the spot. The danger of this rule is that it could encourage parasitism whereby when a person does not want to work, he moves to a strange corner where he is not known and enjoys their hospitality like any other genuinely stranded stranger. However, it is imperative, at this stage, to underscore the fact that such attitudes are changing very slowly in our modern day Africa. This can be attributed to the fact that supply in proportion to the people in our modern world is less.³⁸

On the whole, both Western hospitality and African hospitality have something to learn from the ideal of Christ’s hospitality which is too sacrificial. Since none of us is perfect before God, we should therefore avoid being judgmental on whose hospitality is more

Christ-like or less Christ-like. Rather, we should simply let Christ perfect us.

To wind up this subsection we can rightly argue that rather than African hospitality being seen as unique when we compare it to the hospitality of the rest of the world, it is Christ's hospitality that is clearly and ideally unique and worth of imitation by all nations of the earth

Solidarity and mutual assistance in African life is grounded in the fact that no one is an island in himself or herself, rather each and every one is part of the whole. Mbiti's dictum, 'I am because we are and since we are therefore I am' sums up the basis on which African hospitality and solidarity is built. The emphasis is put on interdependence, which is in accord with Pauline theology on the need to recognise other people's gifts and talents in order to edify the Church and society in general. (1 Cor. 12.)³⁹

Scriptures requires us to practice hospitality and mutual assistance by recognising the equal worth of every person. In African culture hospitality and mutual assistance "both reflect and participate in God's invitation of welcome to all."⁴⁰ The African values under discussion are thus characterized by the emphasis on interdependence. It is in agreement with Pauline theology, which is echoed from Christology, especially on the assertion that we are one body, one people of God and this touches the African emphasis on interdependence. According to Paul, the many different gifts, and talents that are bestowed upon each and every one of us by God our maker makes us one in diversity.

The Gikuyu tribe insists interdependence using the proverb 'The hornless animal leans on the one that has them.'⁴¹ The proverb can be connected with what the New Testament implies by fellowship among the believers in Christ. The hornless animal could be equated with someone who is a doctor but cannot teach his children because he does not have that training. Even though his/her profession is noble, he or she needs the services of a teacher and vice-versa.

Africans' sense of community is expressed in innumerable proverbs such as 'One log does not make a bridge' 'one finger does not kill lice, unity is strength, etc. All these proverbs emphasise that

by himself or herself, an individual cannot do something substantial. One needs others for advice, teaching, rebuke, correcting and training above other things (See 2 Tim. 3:16). One cannot give advice to himself; nor rebuke his own wrongs; nor correct or train himself; nor can he see his or her back. This calls us to share whatever talents and gifts we have for the sake of God and the general prosperity of our society as a way of encouraging one another. For 'we ought to encourage one another for the Day of the Lord is coming' (Heb. 10:25).⁴²

The interdependence which exists among human being is like that which exists between cattle and cattle *egret* (Latin *bubulcus* means shepherd). Cattle *egret* is a type of a bird which accompany the grazing cattle and other large mammals as if it is the shepherd. The logic of doing so is that as the cattle moves in the grazing land, grasshoppers and other nutritious insects are disturbed and exposed and the bird gets the chance to feast them easily.

In this analogy, we realise that both the cattle and the bird need one another in that the bird helps to remove the ticks that cling to the body of the cow to suck its blood, with the danger of infecting the animal with East Coast Fever and other diseases; while at the same time, the bird depends on the cow, which exposes insects from their hiding places thereby giving it a chance to feast them.

This symbiotic behaviour clearly expresses the ideal African solidarity where we see one another as possible assets at all times. It agrees with St. Paul who echoes Christ when he says that the body is a unit of many parts which need one another at all times. For 'the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body....If the whole body were an eye where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be...' (1 Cor. 12:12-26).⁴³

The philosophy behind exchange of greetings in Africa is to acknowledge the deep sense of affinity in society. Greeting someone in Africa has the following connotation: telling somebody 'I am at peace with you', 'I do not have anything against you'; 'we are brothers', 'I wish you well being', 'all is well' etc. ⁴⁴ This

idea is expressed in 2 Sam.18:28; a messenger arrives to David to announce the victory over Absalom. He begins with *shalom* “all is well”. Often in greetings the use of the word *shalom* is an assurance to the person spoken to of one’s good intentions that is one pledges oneself to keep peace.⁴⁵

Existence of hatred between individuals in Africa is immediately discovered by absence of salute. A greeting offers and creates a sense of unity and avoids enmity. Similarly, theologically greetings symbolize token of mutual love and friendship. For instance the implication of epistolary greetings of Paul’s letter goes beyond identifying writer and addressees; it is more than saying hello. The author’s salutation manifests the nature of the relationship between the author and the audience and even draws lines around the conversation being carried on by the letter in hand. Meanings are more readily and rightly determined in terms of this “rhetorical relationship” formulated by the letter’s opening words.

In 2 Cor.13:12 when Paul says “salute each other with holy kiss” he does not necessarily say Christians should kiss each other even when culture does not allow. But the passage recommends the cultivation of the spirit of love by being affectionate to one another. It means: show affection by hugging, smiling, shaking hands and being overall warm and affectionate to others. These are exterior manifestations of a strongly founded element of congeniality within families and the entire African I-Thou relationships well reflected within multi-form of social realities.

Africans observe reconciliation as a value and part of social norms. Due to the fallible human nature, an emphatic recognition of the moral vulnerability of human beings call for the virtue of forgiveness and reconciliation to refurbish conflicts that would cause a rupture of relationship as insisted by Jesus Himself in his teaching. (Eph. 4:32)

4. Divergences Found within African Cultural Values

Having established some convergences of African values with Christianity, it is worthwhile also to see a few divergences within their culture. Africans were aware of the existence of a Supreme Being to whom they attributed all power and life. However, they believe that this God is very far from them and therefore they consid-

ered their ancestors as their intermediaries. This background makes them seek help and direct their prayers to ancestors than God their Creator. Sacrifices, rituals were offered to these ancestors. Automatically this made them to be recognised as polytheists and ancestral worshippers.

Other appalling cultural traditions practiced by some of the African tribes include severe punishment for those who broke social norms like killing or sending them to exile, suppression of women, killing of twins because of the belief that they bring bad fortunes, etc. So, despite the fact that good values exist in traditional African society, Christianizing Africans was substantially necessary to bring changes in those unbecoming cultural rituals and to evoke conversion to authentic Christian life based on strong ethical values.

For Christ's Gospel to be firmly rooted in the African soil would indeed mean a reversal of many traditional values and practices long cherished by the African. It would mean also a new ethical reference point, Christ's own love ethic as his new commandment. In practice this new faith with its new morality means to the African a higher idea of God and more perfect rules of human conduct.

Conclusion

As regards the reasons of the aforementioned African practices is that "the Africans find it difficult to conceive a man as a purely contemplative being; for them human qualities presuppose a world of human relations. It is only within our relationship with others that we can actualize our humanity. We believe strongly that isolation make our potentialities become inert, static and dormant. Relationship therefore is a crucial element and it needs to be cultivated by any means in every society. The above discussed values make Africans a single family; everyone feels at home wherever s/he is. This is all to do with the communality of African society where one person's happiness is happiness for all, and one person's sorrow is a sorrow for all.

Notes

1. Kofi A. Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy*, Praeger, New York, USA, 1967, p. 1. Commenting on the intensity of religious attitude in African society, Leonard G. describing Igbos life says “they are, in the strict and natural sense of the word, a truly and a deeply religious people, of whom it can be said, as it has been said of the Hindus, that they eat religiously, drink religiously, bath religiously, dress religiously. In a few words, the religion of these natives as I have all along endeavoured to point out is their existence in their religion.” A.G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes*, Frank Cass, London, 1968, p.429.
2. *Ibid*.
3. Hugh Barber, *Crazy Revolution: Living Outrageously in Faith for the one who gave everything*, Xlibris Corporation, Bloomington Indiana, 2012, p. 35
4. Jerry D. Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*, Rowman Altamira, California- USA, 2004, p. 5.
5. Nigel A. Kumar, *What is Religion? A Theological Answer*, SA-IACS Press, Bangalore- India, 2014, p.293.
6. Odejobi Cecilia Omobola, <http://ijsse.com/sites/default/files/issues/2014/v4-i3-2014/Paper-4.pdf> accessed on 9th July.
7. George A. Phiri, *Social-Cultural Anthropology: Communication with the African Society*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene Oregon, USA, 2009
8. Biko in Yosefu Waghid, *African philosophy of Education: On being human*, Routledge, Taylor, London, 2012, p. 27
9. See https://sielearning.tafensw.edu.au/MCS/CHCAOD402A/chcaod402a_csw/knowledge/values/values.htm
10. William Frankena, “Value and Valuation,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 8, New York: MacMillan, 1967, pp. 583-584.
11. Gayle Cotton, *Say Anything to Anyone, Anywhere: 5 Keys To Successful Cross-Cultural communication*, John Wiley & Sons Publishers, USA, 2013, p.45.

12. Macaulay A. Kanu, *The indispensability of the basic social values in African Traditional: A Philosophical appraisal*, p.150 in <file:///C:/Users/teresa/Downloads/57930-101933-1-PB.pdf> accessed on 9th July,2015.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Ifeanyi A, Menkiti, “*Person and Community in African traditional thought*” *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, 3rd edition, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1984 p. 176
15. John S. Mbiti, *An Introduction to African Religion*, East Africa Educational Publishers, Nairobi, Kenya, 1991, p.176. (Hereafter referred to as Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religions*). Fr. Joseph Israel comment about this saying a visitor in Africa is not seen as an interruption; people are happy to see visitors and they welcome them wholeheartedly because hospitality is a cultural and social value which is promulgated by each community. Cf. Joseph Israel, *The Church as a Family: A Theological Pastoral Study With Reference to the African Synod*, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, Rome, 1998, p. 52. Also Pope John Paul II in his pastoral address in Congo said “Nor can I pass over in silence the deep impression made on me by the vitality of that continent, which preserves intact a good many fundamental moral values, such as those of hospitality, the family, the community sense, life as a precious gift, which is always given a generous and happy welcome.” John Paul II, in Tanye, *The Church as Family*, p. 30. Africans believe visitors bring blessing to their hosts and are considered as divine agents. Sybertz observed “....when a visitor comes to someone’s home, family quarrels stop, the sick cheer up, peace is restored and the home is restored to new strength. Visitors are therefore social healers. They are family doctors in sense.” Sybertz D. & Healey J., *Toward an African Narrative Theology*, Maryknoll: Orbis, New York, USA, 1996, p. 174.
16. Afolayan, *Culture and Customs of S. Africa*, Pp. 221-222.
17. Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, Oxford University Press, Dar es-salaam- Tanzania, 1968, p. 5.

18. A. Briton, *In the Heart of Bantuland: A record of twenty-nine years in Central Africa among the Bantu Peoples*, Dugald Campbell, London, 1922, p. 45.
19. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Sankofa Publishing Company, Accra, Ghana, 1996, p. 25.
20. Menkiti, *Person and the Community*, p. 189.
21. Healey and Sybertz 1996:173
22. Ibid. p.172
23. Julius Mutugi Gathogo, *African Hospitality: Is it Compatible with the Ideal of Christ's Hospitality?* in http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/120/Cman_120_1_Gathogo.pdf accessed on 21 July, 2015. (Hereafter referred to as Mutugi Gathogo)
24. Sambuli, *The heartbeat*, p. 95.
25. Philip Higgs, *African Voices in Education*, Juta and Company Ltd, Cape town, South Africa, 2000, p. 183.
26. See http://www.emeka.at/african_cultural_vaules.pdf accessed on 25th July, 2015
27. Ibid.
28. Polycarp Ikuenobe, *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in Africa Traditions*, A division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Oxford, UK, 2006, p. 52. (Hereafter referred to as Ikuenobe, *Communalism and Morality in Africa*).
29. Macaulay A. Kanu, *The Indispensability of the Basic Social Values in African Tradition: a Philosophical Appraisal* in [file:///C:/Users/teresa/Downloads/57930-101933-1-PB%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/teresa/Downloads/57930-101933-1-PB%20(1).pdf) accessed on 26th July, 2015.
30. Tanye, *Church as a Family*, p. 28.
31. Rose R. Korir, *An Analysis of the Nandi Proverbs and its place in critical psychology* in www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5. Accessed on 20th Sept. 2013.
32. Charles V. Vicencio & Fame Du Toir eds., *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: 10 Years On*, New Africa Books Ltd, Cape town, South Africa, 2006, Pp. 75-76.

33. Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation Mission & Ministry in Changing Social Order*, Orbis Books Maryknol New York, USA, 1992 p. 20.
34. See Mutugi Gathogo.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), xi.
37. John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), p. 11. Koenig also states in his recent study on the missionary dimensions of the church's Eucharistic rituals: "Answering the command to join Christ's mission becomes possible only when we can savor the eager and compassionate welcome that he extends to each of us personally (Matthew 11:28f.; Romans 15:7ff.)." *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), p. 220.
38. See Mutugi Gathogo.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 172.
41. Julius G. Mutugi, *The Truth about African Hospitality: Is There Hope for Africa?* Salt Productions, Kenya, 2001, p.21.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Julius G. Mutugi, *African Hospitality: Is it Compatible with the Ideal of Christ's Hospitality? Part 1* in http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/120/Cman_120_1_Gathogo.pdf accessed on 26 th July 2015.
44. Unfortunately nowadays things are contrary. Malicious greetings exist almost everywhere. Many people do not want to show they are in bad term with somebody; they will exchange greetings as usual. But what happen behind this you cannot imagine. People are even killed by those whom they think is a friend without knowing.

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Friends for a Purpose: South Africa's UDF as a Model for the Environmental Movement

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Abstract: Multiple serious threats face Earth as a home hospitable to the human race and the myriad species that inhabit this planet. Nine of these are named in the 2009 “Planetary Boundaries” theory of Rockström et al. Pope Francis discusses many of these threats in his highly spiritual, accessible, groundbreaking 2015 environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In the encyclical, Pope Francis calls for political action to pressurise governments to legislate and enforce sound environmental policies. Such action to limit environmental degradation entails sustained strategic citizen mobilisation at national, regional and municipal levels.

In this paper I maintain that the United Democratic Front (UDF), which contributed to the toppling of apartheid in South Africa in 1992, might serve as a model for such multi-level sustained strategic citizen mobilisation. What I dub the “United Environmental Front” should involve every citizen of planet Earth, and operate internationally, regionally, nationally and locally. Alliances of concerned citizens should challenge the hegemony of vested political and economic interests which pollute, strip landscapes, dump radioactivity, contribute to global climate change, etc.

Having undergone a personal conversion, activists will educate others to avoid ecologically harmful lifestyles. Shouldn't people in religious life be at the forefront of this global and intergenerational solidarity?

Keywords: Environment, UDF, South Africa, *Laudato Si'*, activism

Introduction

South Africa (hereafter, SA) had a history of alliances to topple apartheid. For instance, the multiracial Congress Alliance was founded in the 1950's and included the SAIC - the SA Indian Congress - founded in 1924, (of which Mahatma Ghandi was an important member).¹ The Congress Alliance led to the writing of the Freedom Charter in 1955. A larger political tripartite "strategic alliance" was forged later between the African National Congress, the SA Communist Party and the Congress of SA Trades Unions. This alliance persists till this day in SA parliamentary politics, preventing the communists and largest trade unions from effectively challenging the policies and candidates of the ruling party.

1. The United Democratic Front

Arguably the most effective of the alliances to challenge apartheid was the United Democratic Front (UDF), launched in 1983 in opposition to P.W. Botha's proposed changed constitution and tricameral parliamentary system. This was designed specifically to co-opt "Indian" and "Coloured" minorities to prop up SA's faltering apartheid government. The tricameral parliament was mere window-dressing. It offered no executive powers to the House of Representatives ("Coloureds") or House of Delegates ("Indians"). The purpose was to keep the majority Black population disenfranchised with no share of power in SA.

The UDF brought together members well over five hundred anti-apartheid groups, civic, student, political, labour, and ecclesiastical movements. Based on non-racial principles, the UDF brought under one umbrella members of “Black, White, Coloured and Indian” organisations.²

The front operated countrywide, incorporating movements from all the ethnic groups scattered around the country. The UDF brought together people who did not have a natural affinity to each other, e.g.

- White madams of the Black Sash movement who were initially and primarily concerned for their domestic servants’ welfare.
- Congress of South African Trade Unions - an umbrella body of mostly “black” (meaning everybody not identified as “white”) trade unions.
- Conscientious Objectors: End Conscription Campaign - young white men who refused to do four years of military national service. Many of the members of the ECC were labelled “homosexuals” – in those days a grave insult – because they were either pacifists or strongly objected to SA’s military adventures in the neighbouring states and in the townships of the country
- Black student activists, members of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) at secondary and tertiary level, protesting the scandalous apartheid educational system

Yet participating together in the struggle for democracy, calling one another “comrade,” and learning about and undergoing the trials and persecutions meted out by the apartheid government helped people to forge friendships and understanding despite their vastly disparate backgrounds.

2. Reason for Such a Front: Apartheid as a Totalitarian Ideology

Why was there a need for such a broad front? As an ideology, apartheid touched every dimension of SA life, segregating people from birth to the grave. Opposition to apartheid was equally needed at every level of SA society. The grand vision of apartheid was of keeping Members of the racial groups completely separate and affording them (read: “whites,” and particularly Afrikaner whites, descended from Dutch colonialists) “separate development.” The strategy was to “other” – i.e. alienate – members of different racial groups to the extent that they believed in the need and the logic of apartheid. With its accession to power of the Nationalist Party in 1948, a whole raft of legislations was enacted to entrench white domination of the economy, codifying what had existed in many instances since the British colonial period, and from 1910 when the Union of SA became independent from Britain.

With the Immorality Act (1950) and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), (sexual) relationships were prohibited across colour lines. The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953) assigned different amenities to different “communities” - e.g. municipal facilities like benches, buses, libraries, swimming pools, beaches; provincial facilities like hospitals, schools; and national facilities like post offices, universities, etc. The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act (1971) assigned different parcels of the country to different Bantu tribes. These were tiny tracts of land like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which amounted to a fraction of the country, and were intended to deprive Bantu people of the natural richness of the land. Four of the tribal “homelands” took so-called “independence” (Transkei, Ciskei, Venda and Bophutatswana) and became separate “states” with their own laws, borders, passports, citizens, etc. and diplomatic representation in SA - the only country in the world that recognised them. The

homelands policy was designed to deny SA citizenship to the Black majority. The Bantu Education Act (1953) was enacted to provide inferior education to keep black people as hewers of wood and drawers of water - so that they would never be suitably qualified to participate as significant wage earners in SA's rapidly industrialising economy. Indian and Coloured schools and universities were allocated considerably less funds per student than white schools. White universities were world-class and black universities were no more than overpopulated "bush colleges" - some of which, however, contributed to the education of famous leaders like Nelson Mandela, Robert Mugabe, Steven Biko, etc.³

Each race was to have its own space and facilities, and there was no need for any group to mix socially or politically with another. The lie, of course, was that the white economy was completely dependent on the labour input of every other race. And so the government created labour pools within commuting distance of each white urban centre. There were Black, Coloured and Indian townships "out of sight, and out of mind" of the white suburbs, and further afield were the so-called homelands, enormous impoverished labour reserves, from which labourers were allowed to come to service the white economy - provided they had the right stamps in their "pass book."

3. UDF's Achievements

The UDF co-ordinated rallies, marches, political protests, student unrest, intellectual ferment - all around SA and abroad. Through its various labour union branches, it organised mass action for improved working conditions and remuneration. This was widely supported by other branches of the UDF. The front argued for disinvestment and sanctions, thereby contributing to the growing international isolation of SA.⁴ The UDF challenged apartheid education, health, economy,

job reservation, etc. to the point where the President P.W. Botha believed there was a “total onslaught” against white domination. He met this with his brutal “total strategy,” bringing the army into the townships to suppress any protests. Students were arrested, children were killed, activists were detained without trial, tortured, “disappeared.” Spies were deployed everywhere. Against enormous opposition, the UDF continued its activities, eroding the legitimacy and gradually wearing down the resolve of the SA government. On 2 February 1990, the political parties were unbanned, some political prisoners were released, some exiles were permitted to return, the State of Emergency was partially lifted, executions were suspended, and restrictions on the UDF were lifted. This created a climate in which, negotiations could be held for a new constitution, and ultimately democratic elections could be held with universal franchise on 14 April 1994. After that, the UDF naturally disbanded. The political landscape had obviously changed over the decade of the UDF’s existence. Having come together from very disparate backgrounds into a single struggle, many comrades in arms found common ground to continue their journey towards greater justice, equality and freedom, even in the new democratic dispensation.

4. Environmental Threats

There are multiple serious threats to the wellbeing of every person on this planet, and to the survival of the human species.⁵ “Planetary boundary” theory outlines nine threats to human existence on the planet. The theory shows that everything is interconnected. Our planet is not a collection of disparate cycles. But rather it is an “earth system.” Interfering with any set of factors may tip our planet beyond the point at which it can support human life. The 2015 version of this research lists these factors as: climate change, stratospheric ozone depletion, atmospheric aerosol loading, ocean acidification, freshwater use, biogeochemical flows, land-system change,

biosphere integrity and novel entities.⁶ Trained as a chemist, Pope Francis deals with five of these threats in his groundbreaking encyclical *Laudato Si'* (LS).⁷ But I argue that he barely scratches the surface of the environmental threats facing human life on the planet.

The welfare of every citizen, and our descendants for generations to come is threatened by these ecological factors. To face such threats will require concerted effort from every member of every layer of human society if our species is to survive. Francis is aware that the environmental threats are global in their scope. Thus he makes a break from previous encyclicals and teachings of the church which are addressed to Catholics or to “all men and women of good will.” He breaks out of traditional partisan teaching, and writes “I would like to enter into dialogue with *all people* about our common home.”⁸ In his section on “justice between the generations”⁹ he urges cross-generational solidarity – to the point of befriending the generations that are yet to come, and preserving a home on Earth for them.¹⁰

Francis writes that we need to wean ourselves from our “throwaway culture.”¹¹ To do this, we must think of the origin and destination of everything we buy, including every piece of packaging and the rubbish we generate. We need to participate in climate demonstrations, such as are taking place around the planet. We need to disinvest and call for disinvestment from fossil fuel companies – no matter the cost and inconvenience to us. We need to expose the lies and hypocrisy of industrialists, and also be prepared to have our own moral compromises exposed. We need to educate our children and all adults about the harmful effects of our transport and fuel choices. We need to begin to invest heavily in more renewable sources of energy. We need to block the further development of nanoparticles if no environmental impact study has been done on them – even

if our brothers and sisters, our spouses and uncles are involved in these industries.

LS is not just a pious reflection on our common home, with a touch of St Francis Assisi to make us feel good. It is a battle cry to save our planet. To heed the call, every person needs to be involved. It is commendable to pressurise governments to carry out their responsibilities towards the environment. Pope Francis writes:

We cannot fail to praise the commitment of international agencies and civil society organizations which draw public attention to these issues and offer critical cooperation, employing legitimate means of pressure, to ensure that each government carries out its proper and inalienable responsibility to preserve its country's environment and natural resources, without capitulating to spurious local or international interests.¹²

While this is a very good place to start, environmental activism is not just about cleaning up the local river or sidewalk. Francis is clear that it involves political and strategic mobilisation at the national, regional and municipal levels. *Laudato Si'* tells us:

Because the enforcement of laws is at times inadequate due to corruption, public pressure has to be exerted in order to bring about decisive political action. Society, through non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, must put pressure on governments to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Unless citizens control political power – national, regional and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment.¹³

Francis does not condemn governments for placing their priorities on short-term, visible projects, which bring returns within the immediate election cycle – particularly when resources are limited. Rather with a dose of realism, he writes:

“Results take time and demand immediate outlays which may not produce tangible effects within any one government’s term. That is why, in the absence of pressure from the public and from civic institutions, political authorities will always be reluctant to intervene, all the more when urgent needs must be met.”¹⁴

5. A Similar United Front is Required for the Ecological Challenge

It is no exaggeration, thus, to say that Pope Francis is calling for a co-ordinated approach to environmental threats along the lines of the UDF – not just groups of “environmental” activists, but every citizen of Planet Earth.¹⁵ The breadth of the environmental threats calls for a worldwide “UEF” – a United Environmental Front. There are world-wide networks and alliances of activists challenging the hegemony of vested political and economic interests which strip our forests bare, which pump pollutants into our air, water and land, which extract minerals and fossil fuels as though there were no tomorrow, leaking chemical by-products and fossil fuels in precious water reserves, which produce radioactive waste and dump it in Africa, which develop nanotechnology with no thought for its environmental impact, etc. Similar to the strategies of the UDF, these networks need education to enhance our personal conversion.¹⁶ They need to promote intellectual ferment, so that other ways of problem solving and new models of development might be conceived. These networks will thrive with some kind of co-ordination at grassroots level. We need to disinvest funds from all kinds of environmental demons. We will see larger and more intense protests, marches and demonstrations. Ultimately it is conceivable that this might lead to civil disobedience and occasional acts of industrial sabotage.

For people in religious life, environmental advocacy must become a constitutive dimension of all our ministries. We should discover all sorts of new friends: Jesuits should learn from Franciscan tradition. Men must sit at the feet of women theologians who are at the forefront of Christian environmental concerns.¹⁷ Christians can take a leaf out of Buddhists' behaviour with their "tread lightly" philosophy. People "in the world" would benefit from the wisdom of monastic movements and live more in tune with natural cycles. Theologians can learn from agriculturalists so that our speculation is not in some ethereal beyond, but rooted in the vital concerns of everyday life.

The trouble with living in emerging economies like India and Africa is that our compatriots have such high aspirations. Everybody wants to live the capitalist dream, ignoring that this is a distorted, unsustainable model of development. Telling people that this lifestyle is neither possible nor desirable is a sure way to "lose friends and influence over people."¹⁸ As we lose friends, we form new friendships and alliances, collaborating with like-minded people, including people who are not-so completely different to ourselves – even those on other ends of the planet.¹⁹

Notes

1. About 152,000 Indians arrived in SA from 1860 to 1911 to work mainly in the sugar fields of Natal, as indentured labourers (a sanitised version of slavery). See Pdraig O'Malley "The Indian Community in SA" - <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/031v02424/041v03370/051v03414.htm> .
2. These are the four largest race groups identified under apartheid. At one time, the classification included Griquas, San, etc. (e.g. Japanese were regarded as 'honorary whites.' Yet Chinese were in a group of their own.)

3. I have no wish to disparage the dedicated and (in some cases) highly qualified academics who taught there, selflessly committed to providing black students the best education they possibly could.
4. Jawahrlal Nehru led international isolation of SA because of its apartheid policies when he opened the discussions that finally saw the expulsion of SA from the Commonwealth in 1961.
5. See Johan Rockström, et al., “Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity,” *Ecology and Society*, 14, no. 2 (2009).
6. like nanoparticles and radioactivity.
7. Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ on the Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: 2015).
8. Ibid., 3. Italics mine.
9. Ibid., 159-162.
10. In LS 53, Francis specifically picks up on the UN’s notion of sustainability which implies that the present generation not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. See United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oslo: 1987), 27. He has a great ally in the Brundtland Report which decries that “We borrow environmental capital from future generations with no intention or prospect of repaying.” See *ibid.*, 25. This is not original to Pope Francis in Catholic Social Teaching. In his annual peace message for 2010 Pope Benedict quotes the concept of intergenerational solidarity from his predecessors John Paul II and Paul VI. See Benedict XVI, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, Message for World Day of Peace (Vatican City: 1 January 2010), 8.
11. See Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 20-22.
12. *Laudato Si’* 38.
13. *Laudato Si’* 179.
14. *Laudato Si’* 181.
15. Particularly the most powerful - businesspeople who can make the difference to the way industry is conducted. But the likeli-

hood is that they will be the last to act - having such strong investments in the current way of conducting business. A case in point is the 2015 disclosure of industrial-scale cheating on Nitrous Oxide emission results on diesel vehicles manufactured by Volkswagen. There is no doubt in my mind that this is not reserved to one German motor manufacturer, but it betrays industry-wide deception to get around inconvenient legislation designed to protect the environment from nitrous oxides. These carcinogenic air pollutants are particularly virulent contributors to the greenhouse effect.

16. For a very accessible online textbook go to the Jesuits' Healing Earth: <http://healingearth.ijep.net/>.
17. Pioneering 'ecofeminists' like Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie Me Fague and Evone Gebara come to mind.
18. As opposed to Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936).
19. There are many global networks such as Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), AVAAZ and 350.org which enhance the sense that we are all citizens of one world, with common concerns and a united voice. Visit <https://avaaz.org> and www.350.org and <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/>.

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Befriending the Other: A Paradigm for Re-Building Relationships

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Abstract: Africans believe that life is a complex web of relationships. “Befriending the other” in an African context aims at rebuilding relationships that are broken and distorted due to slave trade, religious fundamentalism, tribalism, and all sorts of gender and cultural inequality that destroy human life. In the Old Testament God revealed himself in constant relationships by rebuilding the community of Israel through His own Spirit and in the New Testament Jesus makes the theme of relationship central through his vision of “who the other is” and how one should respond to the other. Pope Francis invites us to share our lives as a symbol of God’s love with the marginalized and the poor and Jean Vanier insists that “each one is carrying the capacity to be, to become, to love and to be loved. The goal of ‘befriending the other’ is to transform our relationships in all spheres of life. It is to make our entire cosmos a better place to live in. The various efforts of our Inter-religious Dialogue invariably aim at building bridges with the other and to learn to accept others with all their differences. Befriending the other indeed is a process of radical opening of oneself up to God and to the ‘other towards the fullness of humanity.

Keywords: Befriending; Bridge-building; Relationships; Interconnectedness; Harmony; Africa

Introduction

Have you ever been an alien, a foreigner, or a stranger? I have and I thought I was going to die. I felt I was losing my

identity; no longer sure of who I was, as if the ‘me’ I thought I knew had been steamed off. I understood however, that I was different. Still the question of who the ‘other’ is might seem useless because in some way we are all the ‘others’ to someone, and everyone else is ‘other to us. We can never fully know ‘the other’ and even if we strive to do so, ‘the other’ is constantly changing. At the same time, there can be no ‘I’ without relation to the concept of the other.

The concept of the ‘other’ is considered to be an individual or a group perceived as not belonging, as they are culturally constructed as being fundamentally different in some way, those we usually do not want to see or those who pretend do not exist and are excluded.¹ The other is also seen as a lesser or inferior being and is treated accordingly in a society having fewer or no legal rights or may even be regarded as sub-human. The paradox of our times is that the drastic process of ‘othering’ is accelerated in an apparently ‘unifying’ world through unitive processes of globalization and information and communication explosion.

Befriending the Other means treating human as “human” and giving them due respect. It is veritably the need of the hour as the panacea to various conflict situations both national and global such as socio-political-economical-cultural-ethnic tensions, religious rivalries, terrorist violence, ideological differences, dehumanizing elements, selfishness, individualism, egoism, oppression of women, the poor, the orphan, sexual abuses, deforestation and ecological unawareness.

We meet many people every day. We might have often looked at them but without seeing them because we think that they are different. Befriending the other in the society is to understand them, to respect them and accept them as they are and treat them with dignity and justice rather than belittling

them because they are created in the image and likeness of God, the Ultimate OTHER.² It is to cause someone to be your friend. It is a means of reducing the isolation (*Ecclesia Africa* 79) and build up bridges to maintain close relationships, nurture confidence and trust. It is the best gift to the world, a spiritual nova in our midst exerting a force stronger than vengeance, stronger than racism, stronger than discrimination and hate.

Hence each relationship is effectively a union of what the referred person needs and that which the other can offer. Certainly this asks a lot of effort on all sides, as it encourages being open and walking step by step - towards building a compromise where the world views/feelings and needs of each member have a place. We are shaped by those who love us and by those who refuse to love us. Befriending has the potential to rip through the processes of ‘othering’ and accentuate the processes of ‘building bridges’. Most relationships can begin with a simple greeting offered sincerely. It can begin a conversation, which in turn starts a friendship that can powerfully affect lives and relationships. Learning to be quick to befriend the other, ready to accept them, and join them in their life journeys begins the process of rebuilding relationships with others around us and offers to them a soft place to fall,³ shares stories, cry together and forgive.⁴

1. Befriending the ‘Other’ Is a Bridge Building

Human beings are beings for others. Befriending is a state of genuine well-being of an entire community, of which human relationships form the core. Be-friending the ‘other’ in Africa aims at rebuilding relationships that are broken, due to slave trade, colonialism, tribalism, corruption, gender discrimination and religious fundamentalism that has destroyed human life, culture and human possibilities.

Jean Vanier presents a radical way to embrace the ‘other’ when he says, “each one is carrying the capacity to be, to become, to love and to be loved.”⁵ We are all called to share our lives with people in dehumanising ambiances and pain, and place them in a position where they can grow toward authentic humanity in all its fullness of life.⁶ Befriending the other challenges us to venture beyond our boundaries towards wider horizons, where the rest of the human family may be encountered and appreciated, learn to share, build spaces⁷ and relate because each person is a house where God resides.⁸ Pope Francis in his *Evangelii Gaudium* invites us to share our lives with the marginalized of the society “because God’s heart has a special place for the poor,⁹ those we consider the ‘other’.

The African Philosophy of *Ubuntu*¹⁰ (humanness) insists on the inter-connectedness of all humankind, an all-inclusive nature of community in which every individual is befriended. The Zulu expression of ‘*Umuntu ngubuntu Ngabanye Bantu*’ means ‘a person is a person through another person’, insists on interconnectedness of humankind and an all-inclusive nature of a society in which every individual is valued and appreciated. Archbishop Desmond Tutu tells us that “if at all we are to prosper it will only be together.”¹¹ This is also stressed in GS 25 where human beings are essentially social and interdependence by nature. Community building values of love, generosity, reconciliation, freedom, justice, peace and trust should be everywhere cultivated.

2. Areas in Africa Crying for Befriending the Other

Relationships can be messy. When they are good, they are really good, but when they turn sour nothing can be more painful. Being hurt by others can make us so judgemental and so protective of ourselves that it is difficult to invest in new relationships.¹² It is not just the interpersonal relationships between individuals that requires reconciliation, healing and

befriending but the social and cultural relations as well. The socio-historical experiences of othering in Africa have left profound and evident scars in communities and persons, and they require the healing touch of ‘befriending’. Those areas are:

a. Slavery

People are considered slaves when others have total control on their life and they are used, forced to work either by mental and physical threat instead of being loved. Human beings were reduced to commodities (‘other’) a category that sanitizes the high level of violence and mass murder that inflicted on the Africans and their societies.¹³

Between 16th and 19th centuries about hundred million people were uprooted from Africa by this physical and social violence.¹⁴ Of these millions only 10 million arrived America, Europe and Asia. Many were killed individually or collectively in various brutal and vicious ways.¹⁵ In 2001 Pope John Paul II in Senegal asked for forgiveness and said “Christians may never again become the oppressor of the other brethren.”¹⁶ Sad enough this evil is still going on in some parts of Africa. Global Slavery Index 2014 shows that out of 35.8 million enslaved people in modern world 6.4 million are in African Continent.¹⁷

Wars and political instability have forced many African citizens to move to other parts of the continent and abroad which makes them vulnerable. In South Sudan for example, there are 800,000 people currently enslaved citizens¹⁸. The country’s decades of civil war between the North and the South has enslaved thousands and resulted periodic raids on villages. Many local residents were subsequently enslaved to work as local domestic field workers, many women forced into marriages, boys and men forced to join armed groups.¹⁹ In this context of deplorable social cleavages and bruising

historical experiences of dehumanizing slavery, the Africans are called to be agents of befriending the other which Christ our peace (Eph.2:14) offers to humanity and rebuild our embittered relationships.

b. Gender Inequality and Cultural Barriers

Many women in Africa are not perceived as equal citizens as they have few rights and no decision-making in the families, religions or societies.²⁰ They are often denied access to health care, property, education and information and are affected by religious and cultural oppression.²¹ Women are often considered the ‘other’ especially in the patriarchal system²² and not “treated as person and sister in humanity.”²³ The working paper on the African Synod, “*Instrumentum Laboris*” clearly outlines some of the types of discrimination as:

- Some aspects of marriage laws and customs in Africa which are oppressive against women and really dehumanizing e.g. polygamy²⁴, dowry system, virginity rituals and child bearing force.
- Clan consciousness which is exclusive.
- In some societies a girl of 13-16 years is given in marriage to a man she does not know and is much older than herself. This can be a very sad experience for the young bride.
- Customs of widowhood which are generally oppressive of women, e.g. widow’s disproportionate exclusion from property ownership.
- Cultural practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting.²⁵
- The role of women within society is something unduly restricted.

- In some societies women are practically reduced to beasts of burden and are subjected to untold suffering and inhuman treatment.

This has been part of the fate of the African woman. But befriending the other will show that it is not her destiny. Despite all these a woman in Africa remains the source of strength and the backbone of the society. Her spit remains a fire that flares stronger and higher with each attempt to extinguish it. Her smile lights up the darkest night and the warmth of her embrace heals the worst wounds. This strength is for the well-being of the whole community rather than for the woman herself.

In those countries where there is war, women and girls are targeted of conscious shocking brutality and sexual violence and being taken to slavery. Every day they face threats from armed militias, the military and even the police who are supposed to protect them. Where are the 220 school girls of government secondary school Chipok Nigeria kidnapped by Bokoharam in 2014?²⁶ Parents say the girls are being sold to their Islamic extremist abductors for 2,000 naira (\$12) and married. If numbers could scream,²⁷ the world would understand how women are silent sufferers in a society we now live and it is more dangerous to be a woman today than a soldier.²⁸ It is in such situation St John Paul II once said, “Men must be taught to love in a noble way; they must be educated in depth in this truth, that is, in the fact that a woman is a person and not simply an object of adultery.”²⁹

Women as primary caretakers of the family are afraid to work in the fields or gather firewood from the jungle or collect water even in a group as it puts them at a greater risk of attack. They have to care for children and try to earn money with no social safety net. Women are silent sufferers. How to befriend

the ‘other’? How do we equalize oppressive power relations through the process of befriending? We are in dilemma!!

Befriending the other will provide an atmosphere for women to be loved, to be listened, to be appreciated and to be treated with absolute ease and a sense of friendliness that hold no trace of embarrassment or inappropriate familiarity. It will change the mindset of the Africans and “study further women problem in cooperation with the government and church agencies whenever possible” (*Ecclesia in Africa* 121) and create inclusive conditions on which we relate and accept ‘the other’ for we are all one in Christ (Gal. 3:28)

c. Religious Fundamentalism

Relationships in Africa are at stake. There are groups based on Religious Fundamentalism (known as “*Born again fundamentalists and fanatics*”)³⁰ e.g. *Bokoharam* – Nigeria, *El Shabaab* – Somalia, Brotherhood – Egypt, and *Uamsho*³¹ – Tanzania and more others. In these countries, Christian-Muslim relationship is at its lowest ebb. Fundamentalist’s activism is nothing if not youthful, and its young disciples are most urban, unemployed and profoundly unhappy with the politics they have known. The ‘other’ who is my sister and brother is seen by the religious as ‘*Kafir*’ – infidel who deserves only to be killed. Such groups and more others have forgotten that human life is sacred and valuable and each has the right and freedom to live and worship. The sanctity and dignity of life which has been preserved and adored by all cultures and religious traditions in the past, seems now to be weakened. This is challenging the ‘*Ubuntu*’ understanding.

Religion must touch upon the deepest level of identity. It is a relational identity because religion in its purest sense is about relationship. It challenges the believer to grow into an ‘I’ – ‘Thou’ relationship with the Divine and resonate its dynamics in the relationship with the ‘other’. Here the ‘other’

is not an object or an 'it' but a 'thou' a subject, a person.³² However, the existence of such extremist groups shows that the main groups have failed to give meaning and identity to their people especially the young. Many see life as meaningless because of sufferings, hardships and unrealized goals in life. They are hoping for eschatological satisfaction and promises. African values of family, generosity, protect life, care the other, freedom to worship and religious pluralism are losing meaning.

It is in this context that we have to understand befriending 'the other' as a paradigm for rebuilding relationships for "the greatest needs of human being are the needs of fellow human beings."³³ You recognise me in my sameness when you acknowledge me as a human among humans. Therefore befriending 'the other' is a vision of both an on-going process to establish a community of love and care in which conflict and injustice, though still present, are actively being addressed, and the eschatological goal of cosmic communion in love being definitely achieved."³⁴ A call for religious pluralism will lead us to transcend the borders in a radical way by fashioning an agenda for dialogue,³⁵ and make all aware that no matter what religion one is believing we are all "fellow-travellers searching for life, light and truth."³⁶

d. Tribalism

Within the borders left by the colonial powers, the coexistence of ethnic groups with different traditions, languages and even religions³⁷ often meets obstacles arising from serious mutual hostility (*Ecclesia in Africa* 49). It is common in Africa to find people of the same tribal supporting each other. The problem begins when this 'standing together' is exclusive. This malaise is spiritually, emotionally and socially crippling and social and religious communities, thus making them unspiritual, unhappy, unloving, unfruitful and

unfriendly. Divisions due to tribalism have been a scandal to witness the Gospel as many live unfulfilled life in the society and Church as chances to fulfil their dreams are blocked.³⁸

Although Bujo Benezet reminds us that Jesus Christ, the Proto Ancestor is the foundation of a new tribe/clan community and culture. Such a culture is challenged by the culture of Christianity and of *Ubuntu* that celebrates the spirit of unity in diversity which upholds an inclusive solidarity as opposed to exclusiveness: “All people are called to belong to the new People of God to promote peace” (*LG 13*) and “Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with human race in its history” (*GS 1*). Unfortunately, in many parts of Africa, stress on ethnicity, tribalism and regionalism have threatened living together in amity. Ethnic antagonism can be very disastrous. The worst case of genocide in 1994 took place in Rwanda where about a million Rwandans died. “The Hutu saw the ‘elimination of Tutsi sisters and brothers as a practical solution to their political problems.’”³⁹

Befriending the other protects our relationships from the damage of the past. It frees others from demand of perfection as it overlooks faults and offenses. When the Africans learn to share the journey together they will be able to transcend tribalism that has enchained the mentality of many. This challenges us to venture beyond our ethnic or regional boundaries towards wider horizons and open spaces where the rest of humanity will be encountered and befriended.⁴⁰ Africans must energetically combat tribalism, which is a poison, a social scourge that is Africa’s misfortune today.

3. The Biblical Call to Embrace the Other

As scriptural image of befriending, shalom, peace addresses the fundamental order of relationships with physical world, other persons both individually and collectively, oneself and

God. Befriending the other reigns when the whole world and its parts are in right relationships. It evokes an image of harmonious interrelationship order and cooperate for independence.

Living in God's love is the first step of befriending. Befriending the other is the covenant relationship of Yahweh and the people: they shall be my people and I will be their God with faithfulness and justice (Zechariah 8:8). The chapter ends (vv 20-23) with the image of God's dwelling among the people. In Is. 2:2-5 it is the word of Yahweh which instructs the nations to beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into punning hooks (Hos. 4:1). For Hosea, one cannot claim to have experienced God as a covenant partner if one does not maintain the same relationship with one's fellow human partner.⁴¹

When relationships are broken we see God repairing with his own Spirit (Ez. 37:23). Thus relationship with God seems prerequisites to befriending the other and its fulfilment is to live the life in fullness – live in God and God in us (Jn. 5:20). The entire biblical narrative can be read as the consistent, persevering attempts of befriending from an unconditionally loving God to a people who constantly rebel, distance and seek to retreat to their own selfish shells. God doesn't give up! This can be a paradigm for all our initiatives of befriending.

Service to other person flows from fundamental openness to a personal reality. Human persons are being for others. Prophets Amos 5:10-12; Isaiah 1:21-23 measured the quality of community life by response to the concrete needs of those who were powerless to demand a response, namely the poor, the widow and the orphans. Prophet Amos has strongly insisted "Where there is no justice the society suffers, and where there is no righteousness the society dies"⁴²

The New Testament presents a recurrent cluster of ideas in its descriptions of befriending the other and of bringing people together.⁴³ The breaking-in of the reign of God in Jesus' mandate connected to some specific signs (Lk. 4:18-19) reveals the whole idea of befriending. This liberation means wholeness on socio-political as well as personal level. In Lk. 19:1-10, Jesus risked ruining His own reputation by befriending Zacchaeus and called him in the world of love. The simple act of offering lunch and conversation rocked Zacchaeus entire world and transformed him.⁴⁴ The call of befriending the other comes from Jesus himself in the form of command: "love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn. 13:34,35). "There is no greater tool for touching the world than simple demonstrations of love".⁴⁵

Befriending the other is God's action through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1-8); Eph. 2:13; Col.1:20). The whole ministry of Jesus proclaimed this reality of befriending the other and particularly his death on the cross and resurrection. He gave us the divine response to human sufferings as well as injustice and violence.

By His incarnation where "God himself in Jesus goes out in search of the "stray sheep," a suffering and lost humanity,"⁴⁶ God raised the dignity of human beings beyond creatures to a higher and more noble level of children of God "by adoption" with the possibility of inheriting from God as from a father (Gal. 4:4-7). He overcomes the historically accrued divisiveness between God and human persons, between groups as well as between human persons (Jn.10:35-37) and how we should respond in case of a need. It is in this dignity and respect of the other as fundamentally equal and origin in needs which the story of Good Samaritan salutes. This Samaritan saw the robbed victim an equal whose specific needs called for corporeal works of mercy.

4. Befriending Is Cosmic

Seeking God is the universal human quest. It is common to all cultures. It is the fundamental human longing and ultimate to all human activities.⁴⁷ We can find God in everything; we can commune with God in and through all things. Creation and other people in particular, not only regain their true light, given to them by God, the Creator, but, so to speak, they lead us to God himself the way that God will to reveal himself to us. Human persons are fundamentally equal in originality (*GS* 29). This equality calls for an end to discrimination or violations of basic human rights. The other is also knowing, willing, feeling, acting subject just as the “I”. The other is neighbour, colleague and equal. One cannot exist without the other.⁴⁸

Human person lives in relationships and is equal in God’s sight.⁴⁹ The human person is fundamentally open to external reality that involves dialogue with reality. The human person is in relationships to the material world, to other persons, to the group of persons and to God. These relationships can be characterized as associations of solidarity (a being with), of creation (a being by) and of service (a being for). There is solidarity with the material world in that human person and the material world share the same earth, and labour under the same needs and laws.

All are related to the whole created order (Gen 1). Dominion over creation is the capacity to love, to nurture and to develop into wholeness and any human approach towards this material world needs to be a posture of service in contrast to exploitation. We Africans hold that the world and nature are gifts that entrusted to us to provide: nourishment and security. Nature was altars and temples. It was under the big trees where people used to meet for reconciliation, sacrifice offering and plan for building the communities.

God in Africa is a relational being who is known through various levels of relationship with creation, a cosmic wholeness.⁵⁰ In relation to humanity, God is the great ancestor of the human race. This is what also moved intimately Pope Benedict XVI in his call for peace to exhort humans to make ‘heaven on earth.’ “Our use of creation and human development in general should be for the development of the whole human being and all people,” he said. (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* 30). The same idea is strongly stressed by Pope Francis in his *Laudato Si’* “to work together in building our common home”.⁵¹ Therefore befriending the ‘other’ is on-going process to establish a community of love that the eschatological goal of cosmic communion is definitely achieved and “together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with sacred, affection and humble respect.”⁵² Thus the heavens, the land and the animals contribute to a befriending the other rebuilding of all the relationships. When Yahweh is the God of the nations, then befriending the other can be known in personal well-being, in social-political and in the cosmic world (*GS* 39).

5. Encounter the Other as Neighbour in Inter-Religious Dialogue

Africans believe that life is a complex web of relationships that may either enhance and preserve life or diminish and destroy life. The goal of religion is to maintain those relationships that protect and preserve life. *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity’ recalls God’s universal plan of salvation of mankind and the sending of His Son, in order to establish a relationship of peace and communion with himself and in order to bring about brotherly/sisterly union among people.⁵³

Interreligious Dialogue in Africa is particularly necessary because people are literally surrounded by religions. It is the

way with which mutual relationship can be made possible. Often religious pluralism cuts across nation, tribe, and at times even family lines. Moreover, the dialogue the “primary importance should be given to getting involved with the life of the neighbour next door”⁵⁴ Cardinal Arinze tells us that “Interreligious Dialogue is a meeting of sincere believers who want each to listen to the other and identify areas to study together what they can do together.”⁵⁵ The unity of all united humanity is the will of God (*Ut Unum Sint* 27). It creates and revives relationship in all religions. The act of befriending the other challenges and opens hearts, heals wounds of divisions and creates communion.

The pain and cost of the broken relationships in our world and the frequent use of violence as a tool for achieving happiness is a draw to any process of befriending the other. Change of hearts and minds will re-enforce befriending as a process that brings healing. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “It is easy to be friendly to one’s friends. But to befriend the one who regards him/herself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion.”⁵⁶

For it is the harmony and stability that provides good relationships, that create the conditions for well-being and wholeness. Inter-religious Dialogue in Africa is a tool for peace and language for befriending. It “is a meeting of hearts and minds across religious frontiers who want each one to listen to the other and identify areas of convergence and divergence and to study together what they can do together”⁵⁷ to build trust and understanding of the world of the other. Religious Dialogue in Africa is particularly important and indeed necessary for relationships. This is because people are literally surrounded by other religions among which they live, witness to and work for the Kingdom of God. Often religious pluralism cuts across nation, tribal and, at times even family lines. We seek dialogue with persons of other religions not because we tolerate their

beliefs out of courtesy but a specific mode of being and a way of life in view of forming one communion of communities. Fr. Arul Swamy Kaspar is reminding us that “We shall not live in our own petty narrow worlds of hatred and violence against those who do not belong to us but rather we shall imagine the greatness and uniqueness of everyone and revere them as sons and daughters of God.”⁵⁸ Each religion is called to a critical appropriation on its own tradition and also to openness to the truth and grace in other traditions and no religion shall hinder us to befriend the other for there are no strangers and aliens in our common Earth. Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania and the Father of the Nation, during his time of ruling (1961-1985) not only tolerated, but respected other people’s beliefs.⁵⁹

Inter-religious Dialogue is “building bridges to others who do not share our faith. “In this way we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking.”⁶⁰ It is the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to reality centeredness.” It leads to mutual conversion, removes prejudices; brings greater understanding and it leads to communion, peace, harmony and integrity of nation. When some of us in Africa have lost courage to hope, dialogue becomes an invitation to solidarity in a challenging hour of sufferings. “We cannot truly call on God the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a sisterly/brotherly way anyone created as image of God” (*NA* 5). Africans must respond to the signs of the time and see the human race as a complex whole (*GS* 5) and make the “joy and hope, grief and anguish of people especially of those who are poor and afflicted to be theirs (*GS* I). Change of heart and mind is what reinforces befriending, a process that brings healing.

6. Conclusion

Jesus came to give life and life in abundance (Jn. 10:10) and announces the kingdom that brings life. It is this Kingdom where people 'the other' are embraced and experience life, love, freedom and justice we are called to build in order to befriend the other⁶¹. We are today in an age of befriending. The age of rivalry is over and the world is taking different turns. In this context religions and politics have the responsibility of coming together and working hand in hand and solve the world issues and give meaning to the life of people.

We are now called upon "to promote together for the benefit of all humankind social welfare and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom" (NA 3). Dialogue is a tool for peace and language of befriending. Befriending remains an important bridge for us to cross into the other ⁶² as it involves both listening and replying. Befriending therefore is a radical opening up to God, to the 'other' and to the cosmos. It is a process in which there is a transition from brokenness to fullness of humanity that leads to true relationships.

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Befriending the Other as Nature's Recipe for Greater Stability and Prosperity

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Abstract: Perhaps the most baffling trait of the universe is its stability, despite its long history of almost 14 billion years, despite its almost limitless size and innumerable constituents, despite its state of continuous motion and complex interactions. This paper points out that mother nature achieves this extraordinary feat by using the strategy of befriending the other. It identifies some of the principal constituents and conditions involved in this strategy, and studies with concrete scientific examples how this strategy is applied at different levels of cosmic beings: human/rational (science-religion dialogue), biological (human body, carbon cycle, photosynthesis), and physical (solar system). The paper concludes by reflecting on what lesson we can learn from mother nature in this regard.

Keywords: interconnectedness, science-religion dialogue, stability of the universe, carbon-cycle, photosynthesis, stability of the solar system.

0. Introduction: Interconnectedness: A Fundamental Feature of the Cosmos

Interconnectedness is one of the most fascinating features of our universe. For a long time our sages and mystics

had come to notice this intuitively. Fortunately, in recent times contemporary science has been confirming this fact scientifically. Not only are the different constituents of the vast universe interlinked, within each individual member of the universe also we can see amazing interconnectedness. This observation has convinced thinkers like Immanuel Kant to look upon our universe as a unified whole. True, there are certain instances of disconnectedness and disharmony; there are also occasions of discord and dissonance. But it seems to me that in the vast ocean of order and harmony these should be taken as puddles of exceptions. It is important to recognize that this cosmic interconnectedness is not something peripheral and merely cosmetic – not something the universe can easily dispense with. Rather it is something fundamental and deep, substantial and essential for the universe since, as I shall point out, the universe depends on it in a significant way for its existence, preservation and smooth functioning. For instance, we know that the different planets and other heavenly bodies in the solar system are closely interlinked. Disturb any segment of it, the whole system goes out of step and eventually collapses. This interconnectedness is not confined to the physical world only, it is applicable also in the biological as well as rational/human world. Again, interconnectedness is found not merely between beings of the same type. It is found also among items which appear to be different and unrelated – at a deeper level these dissimilar beings are found to be deeply and intimately related. Often this discovery of the deeper linkage and unity between apparently dissimilar candidates can serve as a source of growth and enrichment since this process involves tapping the resources from different sources. For instance, at first glance it may look that science and religion have hardly anything in common, but, as will be discussed later, deeper interaction and reflection can show that they have much in common, and pooling these resources can trigger greater growth and enrichment. It is in this kind of context

that ‘befriending the other’ becomes a successful strategy for mutual growth and enrichment. This paper is a detailed study of some of the salient features and benefits of ‘befriending the other’ at the different levels of existence – rational/human, biological and physical. At all these levels it will be seen that befriending the other is an effective way for greater growth and development. It will also study some of the implications of this strategy and practice.

1. Befriending the Other – Exploring the Concept

It may be useful to deal with this issue from various perspectives.

a. Some Features of Befriending the Other, Particularly at the Human Level

Befriending the other is a process, a complex process, involving many aspects. It is important that we unpack this rich concept in the beginning itself. First of all, as mentioned already, we need to keep in mind that this process is not limited to the rational, human level only. It is universal, embracing the different levels of existence: the rational level in humans, the biological level in living beings and the physical level in the physical nature. However, the process of befriending the other is most commonly and frequently studied and practiced at the level of humans. Hence now we will enter into a short discussion of what it means to befriend the other at the human level.

We can befriend the other at the human level in many different ways. Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, has a very negative and pessimistic view of the other when he says: “hell is other people.” Jesus Christ, on the other hand, asks us to consider the other as our brother and sister. In fact, he goes much further to identify the other with himself: “When you did it to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.”

For Jesus and his genuine followers the principle and practice of befriending the other is very positive; it takes the other as a friend, not as an alien.

Again, the spirit of befriending the other looks upon the other as a person, who is an end in himself/herself. It can never look upon the other as an object to be used. The other is a person with rights and privileges, duties and obligations, freedom and limitations, likes and dislikes. Befriending the other means recognizing all these different dimensions and taking them into serious consideration while dealing with him/her.

The other becomes a close collaborator in the context of befriending the other. It means that the other is considered an equal partner having something valuable to contribute. It means also having confidence in the sincerity and seriousness, competence and capability of the other. It involves listening to the other with care and attention.

The attitude that should animate the spirit of befriending the other is one of openness and positiveness. It involves accepting the limitedness of one's own resources, and being ready to welcome the almost unlimited resources available in others outside. This positive attitude does not mean uncritically acquiescing to the other, rather it means a willingness to agree joyfully and a readiness to disagree gracefully.

The benefits one can reap from the positive approach of befriending the other are many. It leads to greater efficiency by dividing the labour and multiplying the benefits. It can be a source of joy and consolation since it often involves dividing the pain of the struggle and multiplying the joy of the reward. It results in the redoubling of the resources since the resources of the other also become available for the common good.

b. Some Important Conditions of the Process of Befriending the Other

In general to render the process of befriending the other an enriching experience a number of conditions or requirements can be of help, some of which are given below.

1. The process of befriending involves a complex issue having many essential components or partners.
2. The components or partners often differ significantly from each other.
3. The outcome cannot be achieved by any one of the components or partners alone.
4. Each component or partner brings in something essential for the outcome, which the others cannot.
5. The outcome achieved benefits the whole system.

As has been mentioned already, the process of befriending the other is universal, cutting across all forms and levels of being. Furthermore, this can take place at different levels and in different forms. It can take the form of interaction among the different partners; it can take the form of dialogue between the different parties, etc. In all these cases, it is expected that the attitude taken and the spirit animating is one of mutual respect, mutual understanding, genuine openness and creative concern for the general good. Also in this context special effort is made to focus on what is common to all, what unites all with a common goal.

To substantiate our claim that the process of befriending is universally applicable, and exercised at all levels, we will take up different cases from the three realms of existence – the human/rational, the biological and the physical.

2. Befriending the Other at Different Levels

We may talk of befriending at various levels.

A. The Human/Rational World – Science-Religion Dialogue (SRD)

i. Science and Religion and Their Need

Science and religion arguably are two most powerful influences in our world today, having vast resources and affecting our lives most profoundly. In some significant ways they shape our worldviews, set our goals, form our value system and control our ambitions and aspirations. Since they are very different from each other, there may not be any natural tendency to pool their resources together. At the same time, it is well known that they both have much to offer to humans, and the human race will be far better off if their vast resources can be brought together for the betterment of humans and society. This is what science-religion dialogue attempts to achieve.

ii. Science-Religion Dialogue – Its Nature and Significance

Although science-religion dialogue is as old as science itself, it is quite recent as a systematic, interdisciplinary field, particularly in the academic circles. Inherently general and interdisciplinary, it is open to many forms and interpretations. I look upon it as an attempt to bring together the latest findings of modern science and the deepest insights of religions in order to build up a better humanity in the multireligious, multicultural and multiracial context of our globalizing world. Obviously, it is open to all religions and all branches of modern science, including social sciences. It is based on the belief that both science and religion are the most powerful influences in our society today, wielding tremendous power in shaping our attitudes, meaning-system, value-system, etc. A well-informed approach to issues with mutual respect for the

perspectives of each other, openness to new possibilities, and readiness to change are the trademark of this field. Although the initial stages of science-religion interfacing were marked by unsureness about its feasibility, uncertainty about its capability and doubts about its success,¹ today this field has undergone a quantum leap, moving to the central stage of academic research and study, engaging many outstanding scientists, philosophers, theologians and other thinkers all over the world, thanks, to a great extent, to the substantial support and encouragement, especially monetary, it has been receiving from generous patrons like the John Templeton Foundation. It seems that almost every month a new book is out on the subject; frequent conferences, seminars and symposia are held in various parts of the world as a matter of routine. India has been making its share of contribution, particularly at the Indian Institute of Science and Religion (IISR), Delhi, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV) Centre for Science and Religion (JCSR), Pune, Institute of Science and Religion, Aluva, Kerala, Science and Religion Samgam, Goa, etc. For instance, on the average once every month IISR has been conducting programs in this field in some college or academic institution in India, and the response has always been very positive and encouraging.

iii. Different Models of Science-Religion Interaction

Although there is near unanimity concerning the importance of science and religion as the two most powerful influences in our world today, with regard to the relationship between the two no such unanimity is forthcoming. The pioneering work of Ian Barbour identifies 4 different models: Conflict, Independence, Dialogue and Integration. John Haught, on the other hand, suggests Conflict, Contrast, Contact, and Confirmation. Ted Peters goes on to present eight different models to account for the complex relationship between science and religion. My own study and reflection on the

matter has identified mainly 3 different models: Conflict, Compartmenting and Complementarity. It seems to me that the many models suggested by various scholars can, with appropriate adaptation, be shown to be different variants of these three basic models. When we come to certain specific cases, this relationship can be highly complex, defying any attempt to reduce it to a single model. For instance, my own study of the relationship between Catholicism and modern science over the centuries shows that the relationship went through three different stages: Encouragement, Estrangement and Engagement.² When modern science was in its infancy, the Catholic Church encouraged it enthusiastically. However, later on a period of estrangement ensued, the classic instances being the unfortunate and avoidable Galileo episode and the Darwinian controversy. Later on this period of estrangement gave way to the period of engagement, the state the dialogue between the Catholic Church and science is in today.

a. The Conflict View

The fundamental idea of the conflict view is that science and religion are not only radically different, but also are antagonists constantly at war with each other, with science mostly at the winner's seat. Over the years science has been winning, and it is only a matter of time before it attains total victory, while religion gets vanquished.

“The boom of science is the doom of religion” is the standard slogan of this view. In the past this model was considered almost the standard view on the relationship between science and religion. Even today this remains the most common popular perception on the matter, thanks mainly to the popular cliché-driven media which often uncritically presents this view. This view has been propounded by Logical Positivism and other atheistic systems of thought.

John William Draper (1811–1882) in his book of 1874, *The History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, and Andrew D. White (1832-1918) in his book of 1896, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, contributed considerably towards popularizing this view. However, in recent times this view has come under severe criticism, in light of serious study and research in the history of science by eminent scholars.³ It is true that in the context of religious fundamentalism and scientific materialism this view may get some support, but these cannot be considered legitimate representatives of religion and science. Today very few scholars subscribe to this view. My own study and reflection on the matter reveals to me that this conflict view is more the creation of certain historians of science with vested interest than of historical data.⁴

b. Compartmenting View

The basic idea of this model is that science and religion are two valid, legitimate systems, but they remain independent and do not interact. The claims they have and the statements they make are legitimate and worthy of respect and acceptance in their own respective domains, having no significant impact on others. Classical statements like “When Faraday opens the door of his oratory, he closes the door of his laboratory,” bring home the spirit and substance of this position. In the past many scientists used to subscribe to this view, particularly since it avoided most forms of controversy and consequent tension. In recent times Stephen J Gould in his *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* has brought back this view under the title NOMA (Non-Overlapping Magisteria).⁵

c. Complementarity View

The complementarity view, which I consider the best to describe the complex relationship between science and religion, respects and accepts both science and religion as very important

and legitimate areas of importance in our world, particularly in the life of humans. Each has very valuable and even necessary contribution to make. Each is legitimate, but differs substantially from the other. The two are complementary in the sense that one brings in something important and necessary which the other does not and cannot. It is also found that for the fullness of human life both are needed since human life will be incomplete and impoverished if either one is missing. It may be noted that the complementarity relationship takes place not so much at the level of a particular theory or law in science, or a particular belief or dogma in religion as at the level of human life – they complement each other at the level of the lived life and deep experience of humans. For human life to be complete and fruitful the contribution from both is needed. Some representative statements illustrating this relationship are: “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.” (Einstein). “Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.” (Pope John Paul II). “Science does not need religion (mysticism); religion does not need science; but man needs both.” (Fritjof Capra). It seems to me that today many scholars, particularly scientists, are becoming more and more inclined to embrace this complementarity view.

B. Befriending the Other at the Biological Level

i. Befriending of the Different Components (interconnect-edness) of the Human Body

The human body is a miracle of coordination and collaboration of the constituent parts. It has been estimated that an average human body has 100 trillion cells. We know that in each cell there is a DNA molecule with about 3.1 billion base units, each of which is made of many atoms. From atomic theory it is known that each atom comprises many elementary particles like proton, neutron, electron, etc. Now the remarkable point is that all these are constantly moving and carrying

out important functions. The movements and activities of such an incredible number of particles will have to be carefully coordinated and harmoniously blended to make the human body function normally. These innumerable components will have to adjust, accommodate and collaborate. This is a beautiful illustrative instance of befriending the other taking place all the time in the biological world, which ensures the stability and healthy functioning of the biological world.

ii. The Carbon Cycle – Photosynthesis-Respiration Cycle

a. Different Natural Cycles

Our universe is blessed with a series of natural cycles – Carbon Cycle, Nitrogen Cycle, Phosphorus Cycle, Water Cycle, etc. A natural cycle is a phenomenon involving the use and reuse of a limited quantity of resources for an indefinite length of time. It involves several stages which are arranged in such a way that the end of the first stage becomes the beginning of the second, etc. Also what is remarkable about this process is that the waste product of one stage becomes the principal raw material for the next stage. This phenomenon is indeed an ingenious master-stroke of our mother nature wherein the minimum amount of resources is used to get the maximum output to carry out very vital functions. The natural cycle is a supreme display of nature's uncanny wisdom, unmatched economy and amazing efficiency.

b. The Carbon Cycle

Carbon cycle is a process in which carbon moves from one stage to another in a cyclic way performing important functions. Carbon is essential for life and living beings. But there is only a limited supply of it in nature. The carbon cycle process enables nature to carry out all these functions with this limited supply. The carbon cycle process can be considered a very interesting illustrative case of befriending the other in ac-

tion in nature because it involves the participation of different levels of beings – physical world, plant kingdom, animal kingdom and even humans. All these different partners contribute and collaborate, mutually ensuring that the life functions are carried out efficiently and smoothly for the common wellbeing. To illustrate the point, let us consider photosynthesis, a process in which plants prepare sugars or carbohydrates by using carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as well as water in the presence of sunlight. In this process oxygen is also produced. Next comes respiration in which oxygen is taken in by animals and humans and carbon dioxide is produced which is discharged into the atmosphere to start the cycle all over again. Thus we see in this process the different items collaborate and mutually adjust to produce results for the common good. Here one item in nature befriends another apparently unrelated item to produce results that are beneficial for all the parties concerned.

C. Befriending the Other at the Physical Level

i. In the Astronomical World

Although contemporary science offers many pieces of evidence for the finiteness of the universe, there is no consensus with regard to the number of galaxies or the total number of stars in the universe. Some reliable estimates say that there are 100 billion galaxies, and in each one of them there are about 100 billion stars, thus putting the total number of stars at 10^{22} . Each star has its own star system, just like our solar system, with planets, satellites, comets, asteroids, etc. The total number of heavenly bodies is simply mind-boggling. Even more amazing is the fact that none of them is stationary; all are moving constantly in complex motions. And yet they do not seem to be getting in the way of each other or disturbing the stability and normal functioning of the universe! They must be moving and interacting with each other in a highly coordi-

nated and collaborative way to allow the smooth functioning of this vast universe. This is another magnificent display of befriending the other in nature, in the physical universe.

ii. The Stability of the Solar System

According to some calculations, it is about 5 billion years since the solar system was born, and it may be another 5 billion years before the sun dies. The solar system is expected to remain stable for all practical purposes for this long span of time, although recent studies show some difficulties in the long run in this regard. The stability of the solar system was a major puzzle for Newton. He studied this problem at considerable length in 1687 and could not find any natural, scientific explanation for this stability. Since he was a firm believer in the rationality of nature, according to which all natural phenomena should have a genuine cause, he invoked the periodic divine intervention to explain this stability. According to him, God periodically intervened to ensure that the solar system was maintained in its original condition. However, Laplace, building on the works of Euler and Lagrange, showed the dispensability of any such outside divine intervention. Laplace studied the motion of Jupiter and Saturn and found certain anomalies in their motion: Jupiter's orbit appeared to be shrinking, while that of Saturn was expanding. He showed that this was due to "the gravitational attraction of each planet upon the other." He found that any two planets and the sun must be in mutual equilibrium. Generalizing the results of his investigation, Laplace pointed out that the total eccentricity of the planetary orbits of the solar system had to remain constant. This meant that the eccentricities of planets would have to be balanced. If the eccentricity of any one planet increased, then that of the other planets should decrease such that a balance would be maintained. It was also found that the same balancing arrangement would hold in the case of the inclination of a planet's orbit to the plane of the ecliptic. In short, mutual co-

operation and mutual adjustment was the secret of the stability of the solar system. According to Gerald James Whitrow, the work of Laplace was “the most important advance in physical astronomy since Newton.”⁶

It may be noted that in light of more recent studies on the solar system, the findings of Laplace are found to be only approximate, and can ensure only limited stability for a limited time. Recent studies lead scientists to conclude that the solar system is chaotic, although it happens to be somewhat stable. My point, as far as this discussion is concerned, is that this remarkable stability, albeit limited, of the solar system has come about because it has been exercising the strategy of befriending the other. This stability is the end result of mutual collaboration and adjustment by the different partners for a common good.

A similar process is responsible for the stability of the earth’s orbit around the sun. Primarily two forces are involved here: The gravitational force between the sun and the earth because of which the earth is pulled in and the centrifugal force due to the curved motion of the earth because of which the earth holds out. The stability is achieved by the mutual adjustment of the two forces: If the earth is too far out, gravity pulls it back; if it is too close, the centrifugal force pushes it back out. Similar is the case with other bodies going around the sun. The way our nature operates is indeed amazing, and in these situations the process of befriending the other is going on.

3. Some Significant Implications

a. Stability and Prosperity Achieved through Befriending the Other

The brief study above shows that the strategy of befriending the other carries with it many welcome rewards. The cases we discussed show that nature has used it to achieve much-

needed and hard-to-get stability and smooth functioning. It can be a reliable path to growth and prosperity. Nature teaches us in this context that the universe and beings in it can draw strength and stability through collaboration and partnership, while they collapse and destroy themselves if they remain in isolation.

b. Further Evidence for the Deeper Unity of the Universe

The process of befriending the other is not limited to a small part of the universe, rather it is found at all levels of being: human/rational, biological and physical. It seems to be a fundamental feature of the universe, thereby offering further evidence for the deeper unity of the universe.

c. Everyone Counts, Everyone Has a Definite Role to Play

In this strategy of befriending everyone counts. For it to be successful everyone has to contribute, everyone has to play a definite role. Hence none can be bypassed or ignored. Everyone needs to be taken seriously and respectfully.

d. Need to Develop Skills in Interpersonal Interaction

One of the lessons we can take home from this study and reflection is that to befriend the other successfully the right way of interacting is necessary. At the human level this calls for developing skills in interpersonal interaction.

4. Conclusion: Befriending the Other in a Globalizing World

We live in a world that is globalizing continuously. This naturally calls for interacting with people of different cultural, racial, religious, educational and personal background. Only by learning to befriend them creatively and constructively can one get ahead in this globalizing world. As the world

gets more and more globalized, the need for befriending the other becomes more and more necessary.

As Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth is celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of its new home in Pune, it can proudly recall its own contribution to the process of befriending the other. For the last 122 years in general and for the last 60 years in particular JDV has been serving as a catalyst in the process of befriending the other – bringing peoples together, religions together, cultures together, disciplines together, binding them creatively and harmoniously to be ambassadors of love, joy, peace and harmony. May it continue this noble mission in the years to come! May it continue to inspire and guide men and women from all corners of India and abroad in this great art of befriending the other!

Notes

1. I remember in 1980 when I told a few eminent professors of the universities in New York that I was planning to do my doctoral dissertation in the area of science-religion dialogue, they gave me a wide look of surprise and discouragement. In their verbal communication they told me that the subject was too vague and unsystematic, and so no good work could come out of it. But the non-verbal communication was loud and clear: This Indian must be living out of this world, with no knowledge of what he is talking about!
2. For a detailed discussion of this point see Job Kozhamthadam, “The Changing Face of Science-Christianity Dialogue: Encouragement, Estrangement and Engagement,” in Job Kozhamthadam, ed., *Science, Technology and Values: Science-Religion Dialogue in a Multi-Religious World* (Pune: ASSR Publications, 2003), pp.3-34.
3. See Stephen J Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999).
4. For instance, see Job Kozhamthadam, “The Galileo Episode Revisited,” *Vidyajyoti* 58 (1994), 337–358.

5. See note 2.

6. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre-Simon_Laplace accessed on 2/11/2015.

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Befriending Nature: The Leaf That Smiles

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Abstract: We live with trees, are surrounded by them, yet just how often do we stop to consider how important they are to all life on earth? Perhaps it's because they have become such a common element of our lives that we often take them for granted. But doing so is increasingly at our peril. Things like extensive deforestation and invasive species are just some of the many threats to flora across the planet...threats we can neither ignore nor sustain.

If it weren't for plants and trees, the history of Human race would read differently. And yet, we have no reservations about bringing them down. Because they are primeval, they outlive us, they are fixed, trees seem to emanate a sense of permanence. And though rooted in earth, they seem to touch the sky. For these reasons it is natural to feel we might learn wisdom from them, to haunt about them with the idea that if we could only read their silent riddle rightly we should learn some secret vital to our own lives; or even, some secret vital to our real, our lasting and spiritual existence.

Keywords: Life, Trees, Deforestation, Renewable natural resource, Aesthetically pleasing, Spiritual existence.

The great poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once said of trees, "The wonder is, we see these trees and we don't wonder more."

We live with trees and are surrounded by them, yet just how often do we stop to consider how important they are to all life on earth? Perhaps it's because they have become such a common element of our lives that we often take them for granted. But doing so is increasingly at our peril. Things like extensive deforestation and invasive species are just some of the many threats to trees across the planet...threats we can neither ignore nor sustain.

1. The Grandeur of Trees

A tree is essentially the opposite of the way we breathe. A tree in fact takes what we exhale and use it for its own purpose, and it exhale what we need most- the oxygen. One tree can support ten people, so if you were to put a cover over this tree along with ten other people, you wouldn't need oxygen to be pumped in that would already be taken care of by the tree itself.

This giant that towers 50 feet or more above your head and has a rustling green canopy the size of a circus tent started life as a miniscule seed, a fragile sapling. In almost total silence, over a period of almost 50 years or more, it grew drawing only carbon-di-oxide from the air and sunlight to construct its graceful cathedral like structure. And in the process, sustained a host of other life forms; ants that cruise back and forth like traffic on highways, myriads of beetles, bugs and grubs buried under the bark, birds and mammals that help themselves to succulent leaves, delicious berries, yummy fruits and nutritious seeds. And build homes in them. Bees and wasps busy foraging nectar making honey and splendid job of pollination and generations of children who take joy in swarming up them.

All the while the trees get on with its own business- pumping up water from deep underground, its leaves producing food, starch and sugars, through the magic of photosynthesis—while

emitting oxygen as waste product (a waste product of a plant is life sustainer element of all animals) enabling us to live, its mesh of roots holding the very earth together.

Its flowers, often dazzling and fragrant, attract insects and a wide array of life with treats of nectar and pollen. Fruits, bursting with sweet juice, are dangled enticingly to tempt birds, bats and other animals which in return, scatter its seeds far and wide. On top of that it air conditions and purifies the environment too and provides shade on blistering days.

And nearly every part of it – roots, leaves and bark has some medicinal value. Remember Quinine the drug that saved mankind from the epidemics of malaria or the leaves of Holy basil that takes care of your blood pressure.

2. Environmental Impact

Can any human made factory emulate that? Can we produce anything at all, without making an ungodly din or fouling our surroundings?

The arboreal impact on the rest of environment too is of vital significance. They provide food, help prevent soil erosion and flooding and filter water. The economic footprint on human society is also remarkable. A relatively young tree of 50 years can have a big impact. A tree is an incredible natural resource humanity have inherited.

Even in death, trees provide life for many species of insects and animals. Trees eventually die, they fall down and they decompose. And that makes an environment for, whether it be insects on the ground or debris for animals, they derive food from it, can make their nests and things like that. It just works hand in hand, it's a lot better with trees. If you didn't have trees, you wouldn't have a lot of animals. They are the excellent example of plant animal association, an ecosystem that make possible life to prosper and evolve.

Trees also provide intangibles. They're aesthetically pleasing, just good to be around. This is something that artists and writers have extolled for centuries, the effect on the human soul that a simple walk in the woods can provide. Remember William Wordsworth 'The woods are lovely dark and deep and I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep'. You feel much better, you see in a walk through the woods, you see animals interacting with vegetation, birds you know and things like that. It just makes that a much more peaceful situation, instead of walking through a parking lot and there's nothing there at all."

Trees are a renewable natural resource and on an individual level, it's easy for anyone to plant a tree. This little action alone, just putting a tree that might have a two-inch wide trunk in the ground is a huge, huge thing that you're doing. And you just don't even think of it that way. You think, OK, I put that tree in the ground, some day it will get big, that's great, move on. But what you've just done is you've created an incredible amount of value back to the environment by what you've just done."

So the next time you pass a tree, take pause and consider the deep roots that bind the soil and add fertility to it, the branches reaching the sky saturating the immediate surrounding with oxygen and moisture, the leaves displaying their beauty...and say a little thanks for all they give.

3. Conclusion

We need to look at trees as part of the human element. It shouldn't be a separate situation, where you live your life and the tree lives its life. We have co-existed on this planet since time immemorial and must we co-exist now, and for this we don't need to do anything special, just be benign to it. Trees contribute so much to our lives, we really have to give it something back.

Because they are primeval, they outlive us, they are fixed, trees seem to emanate a sense of permanence. And though rooted in earth, they seem to touch the sky. For these reasons it is natural to feel we might learn wisdom from them, to haunt about them with the idea that if we could only read their silent riddle rightly we should learn some secret vital to our own lives; or even, some secret vital to our real, our lasting and spiritual existence.

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Befriending The Other: Use and Abuse of Social Media

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Abstract: The proliferation of smart phones and expansion in wireless connectivity form part of the pattern of our increasingly persistent virtual presence on social media services that has all but collapsed the boundary between being online and offline. Befriending the other used to happen off-line. Now with the proliferation of mobile devices and internet connectivity, befriending the other can happen online. There are more than two billion active social media users worldwide, representing a global penetration rate of 28 percent. This ability to engage so readily with digital media and online networks is empowering but our actions can also make us vulnerable. As the social networking is being increasingly used as an education and information resource, we have to decide how to make it a non-abuse place for our society. Pornography, violence, obscenity and hatred lurk in unexpected places, and innocent children stumble upon them all too frequently.

Keywords: Social connectivity, Cyberbullying, Online communities, Social media addiction, Surveillance society, Commodification of identity, Global village, Abuse of Social media

0. Introduction: Proliferation of Social Media

The proliferation of smart phones and expansion in wireless connectivity form part of the pattern of our increasingly

persistent virtual presence on social media services that has all but collapsed the boundary between being online and offline. Befriending the other used to happen off-line. Now with the explosion of mobile devices, befriending the other can happen online. The virtual and the real form a seamless space in which many of us live out our daily' lives. We fashion the self through social interaction, community, and network affiliations, and in these ways we construct our identities as well as interpret the identity of the others we interact with. The age of social media and networks and the ease with which individuals can now produce, reproduce, and distribute digital content has powerfully shifted the ways in which we think about personal and global connectedness, distribution of artefacts and access to media, social action, and the production of knowledge.

There are more than two billion active social media users worldwide, representing a global penetration rate of about 28 percent. This ability to engage so readily with digital media and online networks is empowering our ability to befriend the other, but our actions can also make us vulnerable. Social media make us suffer the pressures of information overload and time management. The Internet has shifted from a set of static objects to a dynamic network of connected, interacting subjects. The term digital identity is broad. It stretches from the 'certification of an individual to partake in authentication based transactions such as managing an online bank account' to 'online personas that are made visible through selective acts of self-disclosure, such as writing a blog or sharing our Facebook profile'.

There are millions of people on the internet who are looking to meet other people and to gather and share information and experiences on a variety of topics. Because of this, hundreds of social networking sites have been created, and they have attracted millions of users in the few short years that social networking has become a phenomenon. Whatsapp is one

application which is expanding exponentially . As of October 1st 2015, there are 700 million daily users of Whatsapp. The estimate is that every day 1 million users are added to Whatsapp. Today there are more than 1 billion users of Whatsapp. There are many such applications in use these days. Most of the key features of these sites are very similar, yet the cultures that form around the social networking sites vary in many different ways. Some of the sites target diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language, race, sexual preferences, religion, or nationality. The sites also vary the ways in which they show and incorporate new information and communication tools, like mobile access, blogging, and photo and video sharing.

In recent years, digital media and networks have become embedded in our everyday lives, and are part of broad-based changes to how we engage in knowledge production, communication, and creative expression.

1. Need for Social Connectivity and Community

Social connectivity is part of being human and there has never been a time in human history when people have been able to connect to one another with such ease. Social connections are no longer restricted to the people in our immediate surroundings, instead electronic media , such as smart phones, emails, and online social networks, have enabled us to connect with those both near and far. Specifically, the use of online networks have come to be an integrated part of people's daily routines¹. While feeling socially connected is important for our health there are still uncertainties about the implications of online connectedness.

Indeed, people are wired to socially connect. They are social beings who strive to connect and form bonds with each other, which is termed social connectedness². The broad concept of social connectedness refers to the desire people have to create

and maintain relationships, the social bonds they have with others, and the feeling of belongingness that results from these bonds. Social connectedness can be expressed through various needs fulfillments and social behaviors, such as seeking out other individuals to avoid feeling lonely, to ask for advice, or simply to socialize. Furthermore, people do not simply strive to create bonds they also resist dissolving relationships.

It is not until fairly recently the internet has exploded as a venue for social connectedness. Specifically, online social networks have emerged as a new way to socially connect, and in a short period of time connecting through these sites has become as common as other social phenomenon such as grabbing a tea/coffee with a friend. The media format allows for easy and convenient interaction among individuals, independent of their physical location. Thus, these online social networks have become a common way for people to share, communicate, and gather information. Indeed, several studies indicate that online social networks are now a common part of daily life, particularly among young adults all over the world³.

Social psychology recognizes the need for connectedness of human beings where the pursuit of connectedness represents one of the basic motivational principles that underlie social behavior. Connectedness can be described as the feeling of belonging to a social group and implies the creation of bonding relationships. The concept of “connectedness” can be defined as “a positive emotional appraisal which is characterized by a feeling of staying in touch within ongoing social relationships⁴”.

According to self-psychology theory⁵, a sense of social connectedness develops early in life and extends throughout the life span. In childhood, for example, parent-child attachments provide an initial sense of security and likeness with others. In adolescence, peer affiliations and group memberships allow

individuals to identify with others who share similarities in appearance, interests, and talents. By adulthood, the aggregate of these past and present relationship experiences are gradually incorporated into one's overall sense of self, providing a relatively stable psychological sense of connectedness that is not susceptible to vacillations in relationships, such as the loss of a friend or social exclusion from a group. People with high connectedness tend to feel very close with other people, easily identify with others, perceive others as friendly and approachable, and participate in social groups and activities.

The notion of community is at the heart of the World Wide Web. The psychological need for connectedness could therefore explain the popularity of social networks such as Facebook.

Social media and online communities offer increased possibilities for connection, interaction and participation but also new media with tools for self-presentation and identity management.

Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, and others have been growing at a tremendous rate and the adoption rate of such media has been skyrocketing which, in turn, has delivered astronomical numbers of users in less than 15 years. As a consequence of this astounding phenomenon involving both the rapid emergence of this cutting-edge technology and its adoption, social media have become an integral part of the contemporary classroom, of advertising and public relations industries, of political campaigning, and of numerous other aspects of our daily existence.

Originating from the Internet, different online communities pervade the public and private life.

Being part of a community or group fulfils one of the basic human needs, that of *belonging*. Nowadays the use of the Internet to build different interest-based and self-identified

communities evidently stresses that communities do not necessarily need to interact face-to-face. The development of the Internet resulted in the increase of different online communities since information and communication technologies enabled geographically disperse groups and individuals to connect.

Online communities cannot just be built. It can only be facilitated in order to provide people with inter-action platforms where people could come and participate in or form a community of their choice. This alone emphasises the human factor within the design of cyberspaces. Online communities do not have physical borders but social life within these communities does have expression boundaries as well as norms and rules for behaviour on-line and sometimes also off-line. These boundaries for social actions and behaviour are either inherited by the structure of a certain e-space or different social media, i.e., discussion forums and social networking websites, or imposed by the designers and users of e-spaces. In order to be successful, online communities, e-spaces and other electronic congregations need regular users. Cyberspace does not exist without electronic inhabitants; otherwise it is a deserted cyber place. The sense of community is one of the important social features that shape both the social qualities of an online community as well as activities and behaviour of the community members. Sense of community is often described as a set of subjective experiences of belonging, mutual respect, and commitment that can be gained only through interaction and participation.

The degree of success and functionality of virtual communities is incorporated and built through trustworthy group interaction. The rise of social software and online social networks impose new challenges for law, security and trust, identity and interaction. The challenges go sometimes as far as

to raise questions related to democracy and citizens' degree of participation in private or public online communities.

Entering cyberspace concerns issues of both *identity* and *identification*. The possibility to anonymously participate in online communities may ease the entrance to online communities. Some participants, though, may dislike anonymous people. They may however, gravitate towards digitally eponymous people welcoming them in an electronically-mediated social environment.

There is a multiplicity of people in online communities: e-learners, visitors of different chat rooms, participants of interest groups, and members of support groups and e-communities, as well as users of social media. All share different needs and have different aims. In cyberspace, group and community formation as well as identity building, testing and maintenance comprise the social, cultural and psychological aspects of behaviour with communication technologies.

The phenomenon of the digital identity has been referred to by many different terms including: online identity, online personality, digiSelf, virtual identity, avatar and online persona.

Marshall McLuhan, a communications theorist, philosopher and media guru, prophesied his visions of the future long before the world wide web existed. In McLuhan's iconic 1962 media analysis, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, he introduced the idea of the 'global village'.⁶ The term global village described a phenomena in which the world would become more closely interconnected like a village, and where the movement of information would instantaneously transmit from one point of the earth to another. McLuhan predicted the global village would happen with the rise of electronic technology and mass-media. The global village is

now used as a metaphor for the Internet, as the movement of information has become instantaneous, connecting the world and people to an intense degree that was not possible before.

As McLuhan prophesised the current reality of the ‘global village’, an online identity can be likened to be the global village’s citizen or ‘netizen’. The birth of a digital identity can start as easily and simply as creating a name, account or handle to register on an Internet website, and can be as elaborate as an online existence that spans over many different websites, including a multi-media trail that can include anything from photographs, text, videos, music and even live webcams.

2. Social Media Driving Changes in the Society

Social media’s quick development into an important way to influence society is part of the advancement of information and communication technologies. The following eight aspects of social media are driving changes in the society⁷:

The first change specific to social media is the anonymity of its agents, which means that those who write and comment often use nicknames or aliases. Even though anonymity provides an opportunity to comment on delicate issues, it can also sometimes lead to “flame wars” and avoiding responsibility.

The second change is the richness and diversity of information social media provide. Users are no longer dependent on a single source for their news and other data any more, but can flexibly use several different media side by side. The *modus operandi* can be thought of as remediation, where media use, modify and reorganise contents gathered from other media. Also connected to this changed information environment is the fact that it is not possible to participate in every conversation.

The third change is omnipresence – there are no longer any isolated places or hiding holes. The private and public lives of society's most influential figures have merged and become public space. Many a politician has had to face the fact that a phrase taken out of context or a joke they told during a private conversation has been recorded by outsiders and quickly made public on the Internet.

The fourth change is speed. News and information are spread more quickly than ever before, and the demand for speed can also lead to reports without any confirmation.

The fifth change is the multitude of roles that users assume, and their relationships to each other. The lack of a clear hierarchy is characteristic of social media. A good example is the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, which doesn't really have a main editor, but an army of tens of thousands of writers, inspectors, and editors. So, if inaccuracies are found, to whom at Wikipedia should complaints be directed? The answer to this: don't complain! Instead, supplement the article in question and correct perceived mistakes alone.

The sixth change is the move from objectivity to subjectivity. For example, in the United States, some of the so-called traditional mainstream media have abandoned the promotion of equality and pluralism.

The seventh change is the new ability to combine different kinds of recorded information in very flexible ways.

Social media isn't just text, pictures, audio, video, and animation, but all of these combined. With today's compact video cameras, sound recorders, laptop computers and other mobile devices, combined with affordable soft ware, one can easily create and edit impressive presentations.

The eighth change is the near absence of traditional methods of regulation. A government can attempt to restrict

the content of social media, but traditional censorship cannot keep up with ever-changing web pages.

3. The Social Media and Marketing

With over 1.2 Billion active users, Facebook provides a virtual reality in cyberspace where users can enact identities for their friends, acquaintances, and a larger passing public. The social media revolution has given consumers around the world the most powerful voice they've ever had. It has also forced companies to think about how they can be more transparent and responsive. Social media, along with a global recession, has led companies, organizations, and governments to figure out how to accomplish more with less money—to get their messages out there and talked about, without spending as many dollars on declining media like television, radio, and print.

Word-of-mouth marketing has always been considered the purest and best form of marketing, and social media has continued to prove this fact in many ways. People like to share with and feel connected to each other, brands, organizations, and even governments they like and trust.

Facebook's Like button, introduced in April 2010, has already been added by more than three million distinct websites. The Like button allows Facebook's more than one billion users, with one click, to express approval of companies, organizations, articles, or ideas. Whether it's a friend's picture of her baby you *like*, an article shared from the *New York Times*, a video from a local organization, or a contest from a global brand, the Like button gets more than two billion clicks per day.

Yet, as astounding as these numbers are, it's the new personalization of the Web that matters most in the social media revolution, both to companies and consumers. It's Facebook's ability to show you exactly what your friends and friends of

friends *like* that makes the *like* function such a powerful tool. If you have a new baby, for example, you don't care what stroller is advertised on television, and, in fact, you probably don't care if 50, 500, or 5,000 people *like* a new stroller on Facebook. But if a friend of yours *likes* that stroller, you are more likely to feel that you can trust the company that made the item and are comfortable buying,

Facebook isn't the only social network to adopt a "like" feature, either. YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, and foursquare have all added their own functionality that allows users to express approval of content, and Twitter has a Favorite button that allows users to approve of specific tweets. Content, companies, products, and ideas judged likeable by people you know and trust can be easily found throughout today's Internet. Companies and professionals who are worthy of people clicking their Like button will, in the short term, build trust and, in the long term, win the new Web in their respective categories.

4. Matrimonial Sites as Channels to Befriend Couples

Almost around the same time as the Internet boom began in India, the online matrimonial portals also came into existence. Contrary to expectations and surpassing the apprehensions, online matrimonial portals clicked. Online matrimonial portals were just the most needed oxygen for young boys, girls and their families. The space was more democratic when compared to the tedious route of matchmaking through uncles, aunties and neighbours. Matrimonial sites were conveniently anonymous, and could turn familiar when things moved from one stage to another.

Soon, the data analytics companies entered the fray. Online matrimonial sites became data-mining sites and spaces which gave deeper meaning to the 'fields' to collect data. For, when

the match was made, or the recommendation would be sent, the final result was the human meeting where a thousand things could go wrong. And, if they went right, the success would belong to the website that brought a good pair of individuals together. A country that believes in marriages are premeditated coming together of couples, their stars, their horoscopes and their families, has to rely on highly precise data to make this happen on the Internet. Online portals such as shaadi.com, bharatmatrimony.com, secondshaadi.com, jeevansaathi.com, shubhlaabhm matrimony.com among a few thousands of such dedicated spaces, started their journey much earlier and learnt along the way. They were dynamic and open for learning along the route.

As a result of this, today matrimony has turned into a huge business opportunity for budding e-entrepreneurs. The sector, right now, has a Rs 520-crore market, which will soon see a huge expansion in the coming days. For, it is clocking a compounded growth rate of 65% annually, according to ASSOCHAM survey conducted in 2013.

Apart from single men and women registering themselves online, the challenge of matchmaking is huge both in terms of data and logistics. With about 8,000 new members registering themselves every day, the number gets more tedious and difficult for mining and matching, if the technology used remains dated. As a result, both economics and technology of this matchmaking business constantly undergo changes, and mostly for better with more number of users entering the Internet space. One of the main reasons attributed to the growth of online matrimony business is the time efficiency and convenience that's a boon for those in search of partners for self or others.

The reason behind the success and the need of matrimonial websites is more predictable than any other social concept that prevails across countries. Arranged marriage has always

been a norm in India, with love marriages upsetting the social equilibrium. Culture and mutual understanding between the couple hold keys to a lot of situations which can blow up in the face. Moreover, marriage in India is never between two persons. It is always a give-and-take relationship between two families of similar background and economic status.

5. Social Media in Elections

Barack Obama's 2008 US presidential campaign has often been described as the first electoral campaign in which the use of social media had a decisive impact. The 2008 US presidential campaign had a huge presence on social networking sites. Barack Obama, a virtually unknown Democratic candidate, utilized 15 different social media websites to form relationships with the millions of American citizens who utilize those networks. His social networking profile pages were constantly being updated and interacting with followers. By the end of his campaign, Obama had 5 million social media network supporters. The use of social networking sites in his marketing campaign gave Barack Obama's campaign access to e-mail addresses, as posted on social network profile pages. This allowed the Democratic Party to launch e-mail campaigns asking for votes and campaign donations.

The "Arab Spring" uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, have proven that social media can be used to transform society and politics on a global scale. These uprisings used social media to organize protests, highlight injustices and government crackdowns, and sway public opinion at home and abroad. The effects spread to other nations, as even now, several nations in the Middle East find the status quo challenged by youths and social activists who use social media to rally others to their cause. In response, some countries have tried, often unsuccessfully, to limit access to social media sites, but these

efforts just go to prove the staying power of the internet and social media as a tool for social change.

For generations, if a person wasn't at an event alive, the only way they would hear about it would be from the news media. This worked well enough when you consider how things were before, but the side effect was that a few gatekeepers controlled what images people saw, what news stories were covered, and from what angle. Now that social media sites let people from all over the world share their story through videos and images, it has changed the way people get their news and think about news in general. It has become a big issue for governments or organizations that want to hide the truth behind the veil of official secrets. Exposés from behind closed doors and aired on channels like YouTube have forced changes in ways that traditional media couldn't because they lacked access.

6. Abuse of Social Media

As the social networking is being increasingly used as an education and information resource, we have to decide how to make it a non-abuse place for our society. Pornography, violence, obscenity and hatred lurk in unexpected places, and innocent children stumble upon them all too frequently. It is not the problem of parents and their children only, but employees viewing and trading pornographic, offensive or otherwise unproductive material has also emerged as a key concern of many business managers. Not only are these activities wasteful of time and resources in themselves, they may also involve the employer in legal issues. The ease of access and distribution of these materials makes these issues all too common in daily business.

It is clearly evident that social media is a very powerful means of exercising one's freedom of speech and expression. However, it is also been increasingly used for illegal acts which has given force to the Government's attempts at censoring

social media. Some of the misuses of social media are listed below:

a. Social Networking Addiction

Social networking addiction has become increasingly debated among experts. With recent abilities to become even more connected with user-friendly platforms, the ability to become addicted to social networking sites is becoming even more plausible. In a PDF research document entitled “Always Connected, How Smartphones and Social Media Keep Us Engaged,” Facebook and IDC tracked the habits of almost 7,500 U.S. smartphone users over a week in March 2013. In just a short space of time, these users now find Facebook as an almost as popular and meaningful way of staying connected with friends and family as using the phone to talk or send texts. Some 84% of communication is done through text, email or social means, leaving the phone bit of the smartphone at only 16%.

In the case of social media websites, what hooks people is the rush they get from social recognition, the thrill of getting a ‘like’ or a re-tweet. That ‘social high’ causes addictive personalities to check their Facebook, Instagram and Twitter timelines every few minutes. But as soon as they hit one level of social recognition, they want to go one level higher. Suddenly, it’s no longer enough to have five friends laugh at your clever turn of phrase or status on Facebook; it has to be at least 50. And when you hit 50, then it has to be 100. And so it goes.

But what’s wrong with all this, you might ask? At the end of the day, nobody gets hurt if somebody spends too much time on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter. Unfortunately, people do get hurt — just not visibly. In the obvious sense, a person who is so obsessed with their Facebook status that

they have to check it every few minutes is not going to be very productive at work.

There are other losses as well. Take, for example, the selfie obsession that has taken social media by storm. Unattractive and equally unnecessary, these selfies are taken anywhere and everywhere.

Social networking addiction is a behavioral addiction. Because social networking interaction can lead to elevation in moods, one may make the connection that social networking addiction is a disease. According to Rose, “the following are some of the most categorized symptoms of social networking addiction:⁸

- Your social networking activities cause you to neglect your obligations such as housework, school work, and work.
- You hide the truth about how much time you’re online.
- You lose track of time when you’re on sites like Twitter.
- Your social networking activities have caused negative issues at work or school, yet you continue those activities.
- Updating your Facebook status (how you’re feeling) replaces ‘talking it out’ with friends or family.
- You sleep less, and avoid sleep regardless of fatigue, too spend time on sites like Facebook.
- Your discussions (offline) tend to include your posts, or the post of others, more than conversations about the other aspects of your life.

- You have gnawing feelings of guilt and shame over the amount of networking use.
- You become agitated or have mood swings when you're forced to spend periods of time away from social networks.
- You devote increased thoughts to what activities are, or could be going on, on Friendster or Twitter when you are not on them.
- You create an enhanced online personality-unrelated to your real person.
- You increasingly share information or become apart of online activities and discussions you KNOW are dangerous.
- You create an enhanced online personality-unrelated to your real person.
- You lie about relationships or children to encourage more interaction online by other users.
- You spend more time socializing online, and begin to avoid person to person interactions.
- You prefer interactions on social networking sites over various intimacies with your partner.
- You are too preoccupied with the posts of those you follow.
- You begin to lie in order to add excitement to your Facebook and Twitter wall.

- You define yourself, or feel inflated and deeply saddened, by the number of friends or followers you have collected.

b. Cyberbullying

One problem with social networking is that it can lead to cyber bullying, which affects students in and out of school. Cyber bullying is a hard concept to define as more and more technology becomes available to children.

Cyber bullying is also complicated because there is direct cyber bullying, which most of us think of when we think of cyber bullying, but there is also cyber bullying by proxy, or indirect cyber bullying. The proxy bullying involves using other people to help cyber bully a victim, sometimes without the accomplice actually knowing what they are doing. It essentially is getting someone else to do the dirty work in bullying. Cyber Bullying by proxy also can occur when someone hacks into a victim's account of some type and uses it to send out inappropriate content to the victim's friends and contacts.

What really distinguishes cyber bullying from "playful teasing" is the aggressive intent behind the bullying. But again what makes it complicated is intent can be in the eye of the beholder, and someone can always claim they "were just joking." But a basic definition of cyber bullying is when someone bullies someone else through the use of technology. The cyber bullying exists on a continuum of severity. When the bullying is on the lesser end of the spectrum it is very hard to identify that it is bullying. But on the more extreme end cyber bullying has led to murder and suicide.

Types and Methods of Cyber Bullying⁹

- **Flaming** - Flaming is a brief, heated exchange that happens between two or more people using some sort of communication technology. It usually happens in a public space like chat rooms or discussion groups, rather than in private discussions like emails .
- **Harassment** - These are words, conduct, or actions being directed at a specific person with the intent to annoy, alarm, or cause emotional distress in that person. It is usually repeated messages or actions against one person.
- **Denigration** - This is information about someone that is derogatory and untrue. Online it can be posted to a website, sent via email, or messaged to someone else. This also included sending or sharing photos of someone that portrays them in a sexual or harmful manner. Online “slam books” which are created in order to make fun of others are also forms of denigration.
- **Impersonation** - This is when a person pretends to be another person, usually by using the victim’s password to gain access to their accounts. They then send communication to others that is usually cruel, negative, or inappropriate, posing at that person. In more extreme cases, impersonation has lead to someone giving out where a person lives to the wrong people, in order for them to be track down by said people.
- **Outing and Trickery** - Outing is sharing personal, and sometimes embarrassing, information with others who were not meant to learn that information. Trickery is tricking someone into revealing personal information, and then sharing that information with others.

- **Exclusion/Ostracism** - Children, like most people, just want to be a part of a group and fit in with others. Being excluded can be seen as “social death,” and people can be excluded using online methods. The online exclusion could be being locked out of a password protected chat space, or just being de-friended on Facebook.
- **Cyber Stalking** - This is stalking via the use of electronic communication using repetitive harassing and threatening communication.
- **Happy Slapping** - This is a fairly new method of cyber bullying that has become popular in England. People, usually teens walk up and slap someone, while another person uses a phone or camera to record the incident. The video is then put on the internet for others to see, even though the victim may not be aware of it.

c. Commodification of Identity

In today's economy, identity information often is viewed as a valuable commodity. Businesses desire to advertise their products to the markets most interested in them, and may even retool their products to be more appealing to certain segments of a market. Knowing the preferences of individuals allows a corporation to target perfectly their products to those who would prefer and, thus, be most likely to purchase, them. Making a detailed survey of an individual's preferences, though, is very difficult, if not impossible. Often an individual cannot specify the exact motivation for her purchase of a particular product. From the seller's perspective, determining which questions to ask purchasers can be a daunting task. Further, certain questions, despite their potential usefulness, are not likely to be answered by a purchaser. To work around this problem, businesses use identity information as a proxy for preferences.

As a result, many businesses collect information about identity as part of its transactions. A purchase order form may ask for an address, occupation, and income level. Stores may ask individuals to relinquish portions of their identity in exchange for goods and services. For example, customers may be offered special discounts or free products if they complete a survey. Similarly, a customer may be asked to complete a registration form detailing her reading and television-viewing habits in order to receive a card entitling the customer to a discount. The business creates a database using the information from these forms and the names of the products that were purchased. Hoping to develop a more accurate profile of their customers -- in essence, hoping to learn the full identity of the average consumer, businesses sell or rent portions of their databases to other businesses. Conceivably, if enough vendors collaborate, a “profile” of buyers may be created without the consumers express permission or knowledge. The information is then used to guide the direct marketing of other products to customers or the retooling of current products. It also could be used to identify those people who have a high probability of not paying their bills. Such databases stand to threaten the privacy interests of consumers, especially for those purchasing legal, but socially stigmatized, products like pornography.

d. Surveillance Society, Transparent Society

While concealing one’s identity might be easy to do online, it is a feeble defense against the predations of government and corporate power in real life. Though the digital identity might go to great extremes to protect their real identity when they are online, the real world they live in is becoming a surveillance society. With the belief that surveillance is synonymous with security, the world could enter into a surveillance society. The appetite for information and willingness to be monitored seems to characterise the modern world as an information society.

The rise of the surveillance society, would seem like a science fiction depiction of the future; however the surveillance society already arrived some time ago. Many civil rights activists fear that the power and authority can be misused, and can take away civil liberties formally enjoyed by citizens of democracies. However not all interpretations of the surveillance society are negative, some theorists have optimistic views on the surveillance society. The opposite of a transparent or open society is a secretive society that protects not only citizens but the larger powers, such as world governments, businesses and the criminal underworld.

e. Manipulation of Social Networking Sites for Commerce

Social networking websites allow individuals and businesses to interact with one another and build relationships and communities online. When companies join these social channels, consumers can interact with them directly. That interaction can be more personal to users than traditional methods of outbound marketing and advertising.

Social networking sites act as word of mouth or more accurately, e-word of mouth. Social networking sites and blogs allow followers to “retweet” or “repost” comments made by others about a product being promoted, which occurs quite frequently on some social media sites. By repeating the message, the user’s connections are able to see the message, therefore reaching more people. Because the information about the product is being put out there and is getting repeated, more traffic is brought to the product/company. They allow consumers to express their needs, wants and values, online. Social media marketing then connects these consumers and audiences to businesses that share the same needs, wants and values.

Through social networking sites, companies can interact with individual followers. This personal interaction can instill a feeling of loyalty into followers and potential customers. Also, by choosing whom to follow on these sites, products can reach a very narrow target audience.

Social networking sites also include much information about what products and services prospective clients might be interested in. Through the use of new semantic analysis technologies, marketers can detect buying signals, such as content shared by people and questions posted online. Understanding of buying signals can help sales people target relevant prospects and marketers run micro-targeted campaigns.

Social networking is used by 76% of businesses today. Business retailers have seen 133% increases in their revenues from social media marketing.

7. Conclusion

Social media has come as a blessing for be-friending the other in many areas of life- for building community, for sharing interests, for selling and marketing, for political activism, for getting help in need, for teaching and learning, etc. On the other hand, it has generated new problems and challenges which can alienate others. Some of those challenges are :

Networking addiction which can be harmful for the user , Cyber bullying which can destroy the other, Mislead unsuspecting persons for predation, Create a surveillance society where privacy is lost and Misuse social media for commodification.

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Psychospiritual Perspectives on the Other

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Abstract: Social sciences' and theological understandings of the "other" or the *anawim* have moved beyond traditional and conservative understandings. Understandings differ according to academic disciplines and thus there are various definitions, approaches and ways of knowing the "other." The *anawim* in today's literature include immigrants, the homeless, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ), and the elderly. Issues of domination, discrimination and exclusivity arise when considering them, in opposition to values of equality, unity and inclusivity. This article discusses two of the *anawim* - the "missing" girl child and the elderly. The "missing" girl child is a person with rights right from the moment of conception. The elderly are considered in terms of quality of life, isolation and meaning making. Psychospiritual dimensions are touched upon and a theology of action explicated.

Keywords: The other, domination, discrimination, girl child, elderly

When we consider "the other," it means there is a difference; either two persons or two groups. It could be a majority group, minority or smaller groups, groups with more voice, money, power and those with less. The understanding of "the other" has been studied across various scientific disciplines including, anthropology, sociology, psychology, neuroscience, medicine, and theology. All these disciplines have their definitions, approaches and understandings. In considering groups as separate, elements of domination,

discrimination and exclusivity arise, in opposition to values of equality, unity and inclusivity. Noort and Noort (2012) give us an understanding of the relationship between the “I” and “the other.” They state: “Our uniqueness, defines our personal and social identity. But it is in the social relation that the “other” defines me, and “I” define the “other.” By recognizing difference and setting boundaries we construct the identity both of the other as well as ourselves” (p. 503)

Social sciences’ expanded understanding notwithstanding; theological understandings of the “I” and “the other” too have crossed borders. Scientific and empirical research has expanded this understanding by going beyond traditional and conservative understandings. Also, the human personality is dynamic, constantly evolving, whether emotionally, physically, mentally, or spiritually. Religious and spiritual affiliations define a lot of who the person is and how a human functions in the world. In a world where more and more people are making choices of their form of religion and spirituality, these understandings are being expanded and explored.

In the Christian understanding, a term for the “other” would be the *anawim*. The *anawim*, are many, and include women (Lk 8:1-3, NRSV), children (Lk 18: 15-17, NRSV), widows (Mk 12:41-44, NRSV), the poor (Lk 13:10-17, NRSV), the Samaritan (Jn 4:1-45, NRSV), the gentiles (Mt 4: 15, NRSV), and orphans (Jas 1: 27, NRSV). In today’s world, with a broader understanding of the context, we add immigrants (Esses, Medianu, Hamilton, & Lapshina, 2015), homeless (Ahmed, Chaudhry, Afzal, Farooq, 2015), LGBTQ (Johnson, Amella, 2014), persons with disability (Swinton, 2011), and the elderly (Das, 2011). This presentation is in light of the expanding understandings of the “I” and “the other,” utilizing biblical understandings of *anawim*, in the light of scientific research and “sensitivity” (“Pope Francis,” 2013). This is so that the *anawim* might have a clearer voice, face less

discrimination and have an equal status, in a multicultural and diverse world.

1. Multiculturalism and Diversity

Some issues of multiculturalism and diversity are not easily spoken about in mainstream society. Most considerations take place with the majority in mind. Whether it be human right abuses, marginalization, or biases with regard to skin color, caste groups, age or economic backgrounds; the majority, the dominant, powerful, those with voice, men become the bases for examining these issues. These issues need to be addressed not only to build awareness but also from the point of societal integration.

In India gender-based violence is one such issue. It includes foeticide, rapes, honor killings and sexual abuse. These have taken on insidious forms that are justified in the name of faith, community, even development. Intolerance of other faiths, through attacks on places of worship is significantly on the rise. The target groups include Christians, and Muslims who are among the religious minorities in India. People of alternate sexuality too are prone to violence in a society not open to persons of diverse sexualities and orientations. Similarly, there is a profound shift in the understanding of what is happening to older Indians—in the context of changing family relationships, values and severely limited old-age income support.

This article examines some questions that arise out of these now common issues in society. This article is restricted to two of “the other”- the ‘missing’ girl child, and the elderly. Psychospiritual dimensions are touched upon. The questions considered are (1) Who is the “other” for us today? (b) What is the understanding of the “other?” (c) How can “the other” be understood and integrated better in society today? These questions are examined, and a theology of action explicated.

2. The ‘Missing’ Girl Child

This section is on the unborn child, or the newborn child. It situates the violence done to women, not just from the time the girl child is born, but while even in the womb. Rights of the unborn are trampled upon; they have no voice. Giving voice to the voiceless, to those who are not even born, is something that is not considered in a country, where value is placed on the male child. Patriarchal religious traditions celebrate girls as young wives and mothers, not as the girls they are and is a key component of girls’ disempowerment (Stith, 2015). There is a triple injustice here - to the unborn, the girl child, and to the voiceless.

Globally an estimated 100 million women have been eliminated from population statistics (Stith, 2015). Survival chances of girls in parts of south and East Asia have been adverse. Female feticide, infanticide, abandonment, under-reporting of female births, and selective neglect of girls leading to higher death rates have contributed to this adversity. Female feticide has increased by 49.2% in India between 1999-2000, (“National Crime Records Bureau”) especially in the north and north western parts of India (Dey, Nambiar, Lakshmi, Sheikh, & Reddy, 2003). The United Nations Children’s Fund, estimated that upto 50 million girls and women are ‘missing’ from India’s population because of termination of the female fetus or high mortality of the girl child due to lack of proper care and that as many as 10 million female fetuses were aborted in India over the past two decades (Chunga, & Das, 2011). Punjab epitomizes the growing phenomenon of feticide, and sex-selective abortion of girls (Sarkaria, 2009). In India, the most plausible explanation for fewer female than male births seems to be prenatal sex determination (Sahni, Verma, Narula, Varghese, Sreenivas, & Puliyeel, 2008) followed by induced abortion of female fetuses. The differences in sex ratios between slum and elite areas is also significant (Bhardwaj,

Nagargoje, Jadhao, & Khadse, 2011). The question that arises is how to give voice to those who cannot speak.

Much has been written about the girl child in scriptures. In the Old Testament, this discrimination, domination and inequality is evident. We see an apparent preferential option given to the girl child in Exodus 1: 16, which is not really a preferential option, as the Egyptians did not want Hebrew male children, and so would kill them. They let the girl child live, as girls and women, were not considered of any importance then. We do hear the prophet Zechariah express positivity when he says “The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there (Zech 8:5, NRSV).” The Old Testament also presents a strong woman like Naomi, who put the welfare of her daughters-in-law ahead of her own and Ruth her daughter-in-law, who stood by her (Ruth 1:16, NIV). There are also examples of strong wives like Sarah (Gen 21:26), Rachel and Leah (Gen 21:26).

More and more equality and concern is brought in by Jesus, and his option for the *anawin* is seen when he raises the dead girl (Mat 9:18, NRSV). That women had a voice and spoke directly with men and even confronted them is seen in Mt 26: 69, and Mat 26:71, when Peter was confronted by the servant girls. The role of the Marys’ and other women in the New Testament, cannot be underestimated e.g. Mary the mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14, NRSV), Mary of Magdalena (Mk 16:1, NRSV), and Mary the sister of Lazarus (Jn 11:1, NRSV). Jesus did not reduce women to the background, he portrayed them as strong. Similarities and dissimilarities notwithstanding, power needs to be given to the *anawim*, for a more real status in a world that Jesus conceived.

We as Christians need to remove any boundaries that have been created through patriarchal structures, and bring in thinking more in line with Jesus’ way of living. That is important for a healthy spiritual health and development.

We also need to recognize that men and women understand and express their love for God differently (Hoffman, Knight, Boscoe-Huffman, & Stewart, 2008), and that elements of superiority and inferiority are present. Experientially, females perceive God as loving and caring, and men as a God who is dominating and controlling (Hoffman, Knight, Boscoe-Huffman, & Stewart, 2008).

Jesus went beyond cultural, ethnic and gender barriers. He did not treat anyone based on what others say, their accomplishments, possessions, or appearance. For Jesus, gender was irrelevant in his offer of salvation. In terms of spiritual authority all God's people are equal (Stith, 2015). Society in general, and some Indian states in particular, need to learn to value the girl child so that we do not have any more 'missing' girl children. They need to acknowledge that the girl child is a full person with rights, from the moment of conception. She is a child of God, part of his kingdom of love, peace and hope.

3. The Elderly

The size of the elderly population is increasing over time. By 2050 there will be almost 2 billion people over 60, around 22% of the forecasted total world population (Flynn, 2009). In India from 5.6% in 1961 it is projected to rise to 12.4% of population by the year 2026. The problems and issues of its grey population have not been given serious consideration (Das, 2011), although the government has come out with a number of acts and policies with regard to the aging population. One of them is "The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007" which provides for,

maintenance of Parents/ senior citizens by children/ relatives made obligatory and justiciable through Tribunals, revocation of transfer of property by senior citizens in case of negligence by relatives, penal provision for abandonment of senior citizens, establishment of Old

Age Homes for Indigent Senior Citizens, and adequate medical facilities and security for Senior Citizens.

Also, the National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP), 1999, envisages “state support to ensure financial and food security, health care, shelter and other needs of older persons, equitable share in development, protection against abuse and exploitation, and availability of services to improve the quality of their lives.” These two acts and policies among the many others address some of the problems that confront the elderly in India, today. They set the tone for what the government is doing; the rest needs to be done at the grassroots level. A significant consideration is the mental health of older adults.

Ignorance, loneliness, negligence and social isolation in older adults are major problems these days (Ahmed, Chaudhry, Afzal, & Farooq, 2015). Transitions can significantly affect quality of life. Participation in some sort of activity is crucial for psychosocial health and well-being as they help improve life satisfaction, social isolation, and loneliness. This results in greater life satisfaction and lower levels of social isolation. Forming alliances and group identities is the key for building new relationships and maintaining relationships in the community (Winstead, Yost, Cotton, Berkowsky, & Anderson, 2014). There is a need to identify the positive aspects of growing old and what is gained during this time period rather than what is lost. This is necessary to avoid disease, maintain high cognitive and physical function, and active engagement with life (Aldwin, & Igarashi, 2015). This would result in an improved quality of life (Winstead, Yost, Cotten, Berkowsky, & Anderson, 2014).

The Old and New Testaments are quite clear about the roles of the elderly in society and family. They talk about the need for the elderly, the needs of the elderly and of fertility (Gen 5:32; 21:5, NRSV) of the elderly. That respect has to be given to the elderly, is clearly stated in Lev 19:32 and that a long

life brings understanding (Job 12:12, NRSV). In the book of Proverbs, we read that children's children are a crown to the aged, and that parents are the pride of their children (Prov 17:6, NRSV). The difficulties and infirmities of the elderly are addressed in Matthew 8:17. The role that the elderly played in the early Church is emphasized and thus their importance, as is heard in the letter to James (5:14-16, NRSV):

Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

4. Discussion

When considering the "other" it is necessary to reflect on "who is the other is for me?" It makes us consider the relationship between the "I" and the "other." This is related to the question, "who is the God we worship?" The answer is revealed to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Swinton, 2011) and in this revelation from Him, we realize his options. Having thus considered this relationship, we check for prejudicial understandings, considerations that need to be worked at, or understandings that have changed, with regard to the 'missing' girl child and the elderly. It implies an explicit and implicit response to include the "other" into the very fabric of society; not as an afterthought, but fully.

An acknowledgement of prejudices is necessary in order to respond after reflection. With regard to the 'missing' girl child and the elderly, it brings up the need for giving voice to the voiceless, power, dependencies and the absence of equality. If Jesus came for all peoples, then it must be Society, including Christian society that imposes conditions, sets in barriers,

so that groups get separated from each other. Differences exist and although it is not necessary to agree with another's worldview, it is important to recognize the tension between different world views and belief systems and the imposition of one on the other (Hoffman, Knight, Boscoe-Huffman, & Stewart, 2008). This occurs only through the creation of equal structures and the realization that openness works better than self-centeredness. Thus issues of equality (as opposed to discrimination), unity (as opposed to domination) and inclusivity (as opposed to exclusivity) need to be addressed.

a. Women

The role of women in history has been constructed and reconstructed. At one time it was thought that women were originally for the purpose of reproduction and survival of the species. Later on other aspects of relationships and intimacy also began to be considered. This process has been paralleled in the Catholic Church's understanding. At times during the history of Christianity, sex was considered to be solely for reproductive purposes. The church has now placed sex in the context of a broader relational understanding. For married couples, sex is now understood to be, part of a healthy intimate relationship and enhances mental health. It is only when one affirms that women are an essential part of society, not just sex objects or objects for procreation, will their full worth in society be realized, and the killings of the girl child stopped.

The critical areas of concern are the human rights of women, specifically the girl child. This has been spoken of globally at the UN as well as nationally, to ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice. The drop in the sex ratio of girls in India, in the 0-6 age group from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, indicates that the preference of society is sons. This means that parents and their partners are actively involved in not allowing the girl child to be born, especially in certain communities in India. There are very specific laws

framed to prevent such crimes. Some of the laws are: crime against children – murder (“Indian Penal Code” Section 302), infanticide (“Indian Penal Code” Section 315), and feticide (“Indian Penal Code” Section 315, 316). In considering the ‘missing’ girl child, women, advocates, families, health professionals and researchers need to rethink and improve existing protocols and interventions for children (Bonilla, 2005). Protective measure like the pre-natal diagnostic techniques act (PCPNDT), 1994 and the medical termination of pregnancy act (MTP), 1971, should be strictly implemented with regard to their regulation and prevention of misuse.

b. The Elderly

Successful aging is meaning related. It involves self-acceptance, self-contentment and engagement with life. Self-acceptance includes “realistic self-appraisal, a review of one’s life, and focusing on the present, and engagement with life including openness to experience, generativity, social interactions, and positivity” (Aldwin, & Igarashi, 2015). Although healthy individuals would be more likely to participate in community activities, even those who believe that they are less healthy have greater life satisfaction when they do participate. This is what Pope John Paul II in his address to the 2nd World Assembly on Aging, 3 April, 2002, said:

The elderly should never be considered a burden on society, but a resource which can contribute to society’s well-being. Not only do they show that there are aspects of life—human, cultural, moral and social values—which cannot be judged in terms of economic efficiency, but they can also make an effective contribution in the work-place and in leadership roles. In short, it is not just a question of doing something for older people, but also of accepting them in a realistic way as partners in shared projects—at the level of thought, dialogue and action.

With the elderly population increasing it is important that their maintenance and welfare be considered. The health care, shelter and other needs of older persons need to be looked after so that they have an equitable share in development, protection against abuse and exploitation. Services to improve the quality of their lives might have to include care of the elderly by children and relatives under pain of the law. Property transfers might have to be revoked in case of negligence, and abandonment should result in penal provisions. These areas of concern are necessary so that financial and food security of the elderly are ensured. For the aged, interventions to promote optimal aging, cognizant of the characteristics of the target audience must be considered. Life review, wisdom enhancement, and mindfulness-based interventions may be effective in promoting greater well-being. A combination of therapies that include wisdom enhancement therapy should be developed for application (Aldwin, & Igarashi, 2015). Spirituality, and other spiritually related coping strategies should be considered for those with relevant spiritual and religious concerns along with the resources that spirituality may offer.

5. Conclusion

Minority groups offer opportunities to challenge theological and political perspectives and actions that cause pain and distress (El-Khoury, Dutton, Goodman, Engel, Belamaric, & Murphy, 2004). The bible clearly states that God sent his only son for “all peoples” to complete his work, and the work of Gods people is, “to believe in the one he has sent.” This belief implies, that Jesus came for all kinds of people, children, (Lk 19: 15-17, NRSV) the poor, and the Samaritan (Jn 4: 1- 45, NRSV), the girl child, the elderly and that all groups and peoples have access to him. There are many *anawim* today. These oppressed groups welcome interaction with those with greater voice, money and who are dominant. Interaction,

dialogue, and listening are essential starting points for attitudinal changes. They help in breaking down subtleties of behavior, action and thought.

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Walking, Meditating and Rising in Friendship with the Other: Transforming the Subjective and the Objective and the Calling of Transpositional Subjectobjectivity

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Abstract: Befriending the other is a complex process of walking, meditating and further actions, reflections and transformations. It in turn calls for appropriate cultivation of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, transsubjectivity and objectivity. Friendship is not just a spontaneous overflow of feelings. It calls for works of love, labor and mutual learning involving epistemic and ontological works, meditations and transformations. It also calls for transpositional movements, for example, from self to other and other to self and creative, critical and transformative movements in between and across. It also calls for transforming the subjectivity of the self and the other and the structures of objectivity which produce us. In my essay, I bring both these concerns, transpositional movements as well as transforming subjectivity and objectivity as a companion and contribution to our engagement with friendship.

Walking and meditating with self and other calls for experience of new wisdom about self and other as well as wisdom of relationship and the world. Transpositional movements give birth to such wisdoms which help us in cultivating transformative friendship with self and the other. Transformative friendship is different from acquiescent friendship where we just adjust to existing status quo

even if it is not expressive of creative potential of all concerned. In transformative friendship we challenge each other to be more truthful, giving and capacious and generous.

Keywords: Walking, meditating, Transpositional Subjectobjectivity, friendship, togetherness.

“Objectivity does not mean detachment, it means respect; that is, the ability not to distort and to falsify things, persons and oneself [...] To be objective is possible only if we respect the things we observe; that is, if we are capable of seeing them in their uniqueness and interconnectedness.” Eric Fromm (1950), Man for Himself p. 105-104.

“Observations are unavoidably position-based, but scientific reasoning need not, of course, be based on observational information from one specific position only. There is need for what may be called “trans-positional” assessment—drawing on but going beyond different positional observations. The constructed “view from no where” would then be based on synthesizing different views from distinct positions. The positional objectivity of the respective observations would still remain important but not in itself adequate. A trans-positional scrutiny would also demand some kind of coherence between different positional views.” Amartya Sen (1994), “Positional Objectivity,” p. 130.

“What we receive in contemplation, we give out in love.” Meister Eckhart.

“If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal domain but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.” Ludwig Wittgenstein.

“What is it namely, that connects the temporal and eternity, what else but love, which for that very reason is before everything and remains after everything is gone.” Soren Kierkegaard

Introduction and Invitation

Befriending the other calls for being with the other not only in static positions but also in dynamic and meditative

movements--walking and meditating. Walking and meditating with the other we arise in friendship with other but we may not as well as we might meet some unsurmountable and intractable differences in our journey. We can embrace the challenges of such differences and further walk and meditate instead of turning these into an excuse for a condition of permanent withdrawal, escape or enmity. Befriending the other is a complex process of walking, meditating and further actions, reflections and transformations. It in turn calls for appropriate cultivation of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, transsubjectivity and objectivity. Friendship is not just a spontaneous overflow of feelings. It calls for works of love, labor and mutual learning which involves epistemic and ontological works, meditations and transformations. It also calls for transpositional movements, for example, from self to other and other to self and creative, critical and transformative movements in between and across. It also calls for transforming the subjectivity of the self and the other and the structures of objectivity which produce us. In my essay, I bring both these concerns, transpositional movements as well as transforming subjectivity and objectivity as a companion and contribution to our engagement with friendship.

1. Walking and Meditating with Self and the Other: Transforming the Subjective

Arising in friendship in the context of challenges of life calls for walking and meditating not only with the other but also with the self as one can become a friend to oneself and the same way as one can be one's enemy.¹ Walking and meditating with the other, we discover unexplored layers and dimensions of both self and other which can be a source of emergent mutuality or emergent disdain of hatred. In our mutual walk and meditation, we can not put our subjectivity aside as if it does not exist. If as Gadamer tells us that our initial cultural prejudices can not be wished away, similarly our initial subjective

biases can not be put under the carpet. They are with us and for a journey of togetherness which involves both communication as well disjunction, commonalty and conflict, we need to work with our subjectivity and cultivate it appropriately.

Subjectivity has a dimension of ego as well as self. In both critical theory and spiritual traditions, there is a distinction between ego and self which is nurtured by the cultivation of a post-conventional self which is not an uncritical reproduction of the existing conventions of society and which has not lost its capacity for creative, critical, autonomous and responsible moral reflections (cf. Habermas 1990). Our subjectivity has a reality and possibility of post-conventional which is not bound to existing conventions of ego, self, culture and science and this becomes a helpful companion in our striving for objectivity. In a related way, Sri Aurobindo also challenges us to understand that subjective is not reproduction of the typical conventions of society nor is it a case of reproduction of one's egotistic standpoint. In his *Human Cycles*, Sri Aurobindo (1962) characterizes the modern age as the rise of the subjective which goes beyond the typical conventions of society, not only of traditional social order but also of the modern ones which is dominated by conventions of science and society. The subjective in both Sri Aurobindo and Habermas is animated by a post-typical and post-conventional movement which also finds a creative resonance in the work of Alain Touraine who looks at the subjective in terms of a process of critique, creativity and transformation what he calls *subjectivation* (Touraine 2000).

Subjectivation in Touraine is different from looking at subjects as just subjected to regimes of subjection as it seems to happen in certain aspects of works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler and is characterized by the desire, aspiration, capacity and creativity to say no to existing conventions of self, science and society which hinders fuller self-realization.

Thus the subjective as subjectivation of saying no to taken-for-granted idols of method, science, epistemology and ontology² is crucial for our striving towards our journey of being with others which does not have a fixed *apriori* formula but is a dynamic formation. Walking and meditating with both self and other become multi-dimensional formations and verbs of co-realizations of self, other and the world. Our verbs of togetherness, however, are not only activistic but also meditative; they embody what I have elsewhere called meditative verbs of co-realizations (cf. Giri 2012; 2013).

2. Transforming the Objective

Being with self and other which becomes the ground and sky of arising in friendship or falling from grace grapples with not only the challenge of transforming the subjective but also the objective. We relate to both self and other many a time with a naïve sense of objectified social categories: both belonging to objectified structural categories such as caste, race, gender or the so-called personality types. Being imprisoned within such objectifying and objectivistic categories does not help us in starting our journey with self and the other. We need to move beyond objectifying categories which produces us as stones and move towards ways of being together and realizations which co-create us as flows. This thus calls for transforming objectivity as we conventionally know and practice and cultivate a new mode of objectivation in our journey and mediation of togetherness.

Here we can build upon some contemporary rethinking of objectivity. Pierre Bourdieu talks (2003) about participant objectivation where the key question is how an observer observes himself or herself and this is a helpful capacity in our journey of togetherness. Though Bourdieu asks this question he does not really address this as he does not cultivate an appropriate subjectivity where one can simultaneously take part in an

activity and observe with some kind of needed distancing. In Indian spiritual traditions this has been spoken of as developing a witnessing consciousness which while taking part in life nonetheless has a capacity to witness with detachment as evident in the metaphor and realization of two birds sitting on a tree, one eating fruits and the other witnessing.³ Bourdieu is silent about these issues as he is primarily within a valorized epistemological mode here and does not feel the need to cultivate an appropriate ontological mode.⁴ Bourdieu, like Habermas, does not cultivate an appropriate ontological mode as both of them look at ontology primarily from the point of view of limitations of political ontology of Martin Heidegger and their justified critique of Heidegger's early association with Nazism and his subsequent silence over the Holocaust (cf. Bourdieu 1991). But ontological is a multi-dimensional journey of reality and realization and we need to cultivate it further drawing inspiration from both critical philosophy and spiritual traditions. For example, Foucault talks about an ontology of the present and Vattimo (2011) talks about an ontology of actuality⁵ which also resonates with what I have called on ontological epistemology of participation. Transforming objectivity as part of a journey of togetherness involves a creative ontological epistemology of participation. In fact, our journey of togetherness can be viewed as a dynamic movement of ontological epistemology of participation in which we strive to know each other truthfully and be together authentically. Such truthful knowing, authentic being and inter-being and loving can help us in our journey of friendship with the other.

3. Transforming the Epistemological and Ontological in our Journey of Togetherness and Transpositional Movements

Our journey of togetherness has an epistemological dimension as well as ontological dimension but here epistemology is

not one of conventional epistemology of certainty and ontology one of mastery. Our journey of togetherness here is related to contemporary post-epistemological movements which go beyond conventional epistemology and links epistemology to hermeneutics (Capurro 2000). Post-epistemological movements are accompanied by transformations of conventional epistemology through movements such as practical epistemology⁶ in which aesthetics plays an important role and virtue epistemology. In the last half century we have witnessed important moves beyond positivism and these post-positivist moves are discernible in linguistic, feminist and ecological turns (cf. Sunder Rajan 1998). But these post-positivist turns are not necessarily aware of the limits of the modernistic primacy of the epistemic and they need to acknowledge the link between epistemology and violence more head on. This then calls us to go beyond epistemology of violence and epistemology as violence in our relations and cultivate non-violence in relations and non-injury in modes of thinking.⁷

Post-epistemological movements are also accompanied by post-ontological movements which take ontology beyond the dualism of subjectivism and objectivity and make it part of a journey of love, care, labor and learning. In moves such as practical ontology characterized by love, labor and learning (cf. Dallmayr 1987) and practical epistemology we find nurturing support for the interlinked movement of ontological epistemology of participation. Ontological epistemology of participation calls for a multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration and an aesthetics of discovering threads of connections which helps us in our needed journey of the transpositional, for example moving beyond our fixed positions of ontology and epistemology. Walking and meditating together with self and other calls for such movements.

4. Transpositional Movements

Transpositional movements build upon movements with and beyond positions and call for multi-dimensional transformative movements in both theory and practice. It calls for a new pragmatics of transpositionality and social communication where subjects from different positions come together and communicate with each other in a spirit of compassion and confrontation. It calls for a new poetics and aesthetics of transpositionality where poetics and aesthetics help us in border crossing between different positions. It also needs a new pragmatics of transpositionality as part of a new aesthetic ethics of responsibility which involves both ethical and aesthetic works, imaginations and meditations. It also calls for a new politics of transpositionality. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008), for example, talks about trans-conflictual moves while in forums such as World Social Forum participating organizations and individuals move beyond their positions with agreement, disagreement and an emergent trans-conflictual move.

In transpositional movements, there is creative and critical work of a different art of transpositional subjectivation as well as transpositional objectivation. Transpositional subjectivation builds on positional subjectivation which is different from positional subjectivity which is most of the time a positioned subjectivity. Positional subjectivation can be much more than positional subjectivity as it is not just a logic of reproduction. Transpositional subjectivation builds upon positional subjectivation. But our positions are embedded in socio-psychic structures of constitution. Our positions are embedded in psychic and social histories, many time in histories of production of domination, pain and suffering. Moving beyond such positional subjectivity thus calls for courage, *karuna* and mutual adventures. It also calls for transformative forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and forgetting. This is both an act of soul as well as creative institutional experimentation and constitution

making in society which is part of transpositional subjectivation.

Like transpositional subjectivation, we also need transpositional objectivation. This builds upon both Bourdieu's concept of participant objectivation discussed earlier as well as Amartya Sen's idea of positional objectivity. For Sen, "[...] positionally dependent observations, beliefs, and actions are central to our knowledge and practical reason. The nature of objectivity in epistemology, decision theory and ethics has to take note of the parametric dependence of observation and observation on the position of the observer" (1994: 126). But the objectivity here is that of an observer but as co-walkers in our journey, we are not only observers but also participants but even beyond our conventional understanding of participation—we are co-walkers and co-meditators. Sen talks about the need for transpositional scrutiny but transpositional scrutiny is not adequate for the challenges at hand, we need to cultivate transpositional movements.

Sen talks about the need for positional objectivity but once the agents are not only observers but also participants the objectivity that emerges is not only objective but also intersubjective and transsubjective. So in our journey with self and other, we need to cultivate *transpositional subjectobjectivity*—one which emerges out of pluralization of the subjects, border-crossing transmutations among positions and transformative cultivation of the objective and the subjective including intersubjective and transsubjective. It calls for transformation of the subjectivity and objectivity as we know including transformation of these from nouns to verbs—meditative verbs of pluralization. It also involves transformation of epistemological and the ontological including work of what I have elsewhere called ontological epistemology of participation and what Bruno Latour (2013) calls post-epistemological moves. But transpositional subjectobjectivity also calls for a new prag-

matics of social communication, social dialogues and contestations. These are also part of our walking and meditating with self and other which is the ground of emergence of friendship.

Walking and meditating with self and other calls for experience of new wisdom about self and other as well as wisdom of relationship and the world. Transpositional movements give birth to such wisdoms which help us in cultivating transformative friendship with self and the other.⁸ Transformative friendship is different from acquiescent friendship where we just adjust to existing status quo even if it not expressing of creative potential of all concerned. In transformative friendship we challenge each other to be more truthful, giving and capacious and generous.

Transpositional movements involve a new hermeneutics of self, culture and society where we walk and meditate with not only with self but also with the other. Building upon Raimundo Panikkar and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, we can call this diatopical hermeneutics where we put one foot in one topoi and the other in another. But walking and meditating with self and other also needs to go beyond the double contingency of self and other and embrace the triple contingency and the multiple contingencies of the world. Hermeneutics here is thus multi-topial and such a multi-topial hermeneutics helps us in self-realizations, co-realizations and world realizations in creative ways.⁹

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Notes

1. This is written in Bhagvad Gita. One can also read Paul Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* in a related way.
2. This resonates with Foucault’s (2005) hermeneutics of the subject where to be a subject means to be critically reflective upon the models of individualization offered by the state.
3. These two may not be two separate birds; they may be two parts of the same bird—one part not only witnessing but meditating and the other eating which is a metaphor for engagement in action.
4. Strydom (2011) also draws our attention to foundational limitations of Bourdieu’s approach to objectivity as he seems not to question dominant models and methods of science.

5. Vattimo (2011) writes: “I will use ontology in a sense I take from Heidegger for whom it denotes the thought of Being in both senses, subjective and objective, of the genitive. This is different from “most ontologists, who reduce ontology to a theory of objects. As for actuality, I use the term to refer to the common condition of our life at present.”

Vattimo (2011: 139-140) also links ontology of actuality to a quest for charity and solidarity: “At the horizon line of the near future toward which we gaze, pragmatically assessing the utility of truth, there lies a more distant future that we can never really forget. Rorty alludes to this with the term solidarity, which I propose to read directly in the sense of charity, and not just as the means of achieving consensus but as an end in itself. Christian dogma teaches that *Deus Caritas est*, charity is God himself. From a Hegelian viewpoint, we may take the horizon to be that absolute spirit which never allows itself to be entirely set aside but becomes the final horizon of history that legitimates all our near-term choices.”

6. In his book, *Aesthetic Experience in Science Education*, Wickman tells us about practical epistemology in the following way: “[...] Practical epistemology is not a description of how people should go about to find the right answers in life. Rather, it should be understood in a situated sense as a description of the actions usually used by people to deal with the events of life and to pursue their goals. [...] by calling it a practical epistemology, the intention is to stress that there are no cognitivist or deterministic assumptions made, and that the unit of analysis is not the individual mental capacities but the activities of individuals as participants in social practice (Wickman 2006: 52).”

Wickman also argues how practical epistemology has an aesthetic dimension as in the works of John Dewey and Leo Vygotsky.

7. Patomaki & Wright (2000) urge us to understand the link between epistemology and violence. Here what Alessandra Tanesini writes about Wittgenstein, feminism and epistemology shows us how feminist turn is still very much bound within

the epistemic frame and it needs to be part of a transformative movement of ontological epistemology of participation.

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein does not characterize the notion of the subject in epistemic terms. The subject is not born out of the Cartesian search for certainty. Rather, it is the result of the need to transcend the contingent empirical world in order to create a place for meaning in one's lives. Recent feminist theorists, instead have often described the subject in epistemic terms (Tanesini 2004: 55).

About linguistic turn, Stephen D. Long tells us that "[...] the methodological nominalism of the linguistic turn must be *exceeded*" (Long 2012: 34).

8. Elisabeth S. Fiorenza talks about wisdom emerging from dance of positions.
9. The vision and pathways of multi-*topical* hermeneutics builds upon the idea of *diatopical* hermeneutics proposed by Raimundo Panikkar. Building upon the seminal work of Raimundo Panikkar, Boaventura de Sousa Santos elaborates *diatopical* hermeneutics thus:

The aim of *diatopical* hermeneutics is to maximize the awareness of the reciprocal incompleteness of cultures by engaging in a dialogue, as it were, with one foot in one culture and the other in another—hence its *diatopical* character. *Diatopical* hermeneutics is an exercise in reciprocity among cultures that consists in transforming the premises of argumentation in a given culture into intelligible and credible arguments in another (2014: 92).

Santos here talks about putting one's feet in cultures which resonates with my idea of footwork, footwork in landscapes of self, culture and society as part of creative research (cf. Giri 2012). Hermeneutics does not mean only reading of texts and cultures as texts but also foot-walking with texts and cultures as foot walks and foot works resonating with Heidegger calls a hermeneutics of *facticity* (cf. Mehta 2004). Santos talks about *diatopical* hermeneutics but this need not be confined to our feet only in two cultures; it needs to move beyond two cultures and embrace many cultures. Spiritual traditions also can

help us realize that though we have physically two feet, we can realize that we have many feet. In the Vedas it is considered that Divine has million feet and similarly we can realize that humans also have million feet and with our million feet we can engage ourselves with not only creative foot work but also heart work (*Herzwerk* as it is called in German) in our acts of gathering of knowledge, self and the world. Supplementing Santos's *diatopical* hermeneutics, we can cultivate *multi-topial* hermeneutics which is accompanied by a multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration going beyond either-or logic. Art and aesthetics play an important role in both multi-topial hermeneutics and multi-valued logic as they help us to take gentle and careful artistic steps in difficult journeys across terrains and domains and making connections across fields usually constructed isolated and separate (see Giri).

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An Indian Worldview: Secularism in Plurality

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Abstract: The 'Indian' lives in a land of diverse traditions and histories. The 'we' as a collective, inclusive of multiple identities, both regional and religious, is one that, rooted in the particular, celebrates plurality. Indian secularism is the ideal tool to allow for integration, and poses a challenge to fundamentalism.

However, there are divisive forces that bring to fore the question of the possibility of a diverse people co-existing in free, respectful spaces. It shakes our foundations and leaves citizens questioning the future and the validity of ideals they believed they practiced as a nation. This paper shall explore *an* Indian worldview of secularism in plurality and the threats that are posed to it. An Indian worldview of secularism in plurality, in the final analysis depends on the definition that its citizens, as participatory agents, give to itself.

Keywords: Secularism, National identity, Nehru, Amartya Sen, Threats to Indian Secularism.

Introduction

No one is born in a vacuum. The Indian is born into, and socialized within a multicultural environment, that also carries within it the riches of a civilization over five thousand years old. Multiple ways of being, understanding, experiencing and searching for meaning present themselves to the Indian. This space, within which the Indian forms his/her identity and

worldviews, engages him/her with diverse beliefs, languages, literatures, cultural and social traditions and value systems. Sen writes that, “We are not unique in being diverse, but there is something quite special in the tremendous extent of diversity in our traditions” (“Indian Pluralism” 41). The ‘we’ as a collective, inclusive of multiple identities, both regional and religious, is one that, rooted in the particular, celebrates plurality. This paper shall explore *an* Indian worldview of secularism in plurality and the threats that are posed to it.

1. The Indian as Secular

Hart defines worldviews as, “cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps that people continuously use to make sense of the social landscape and to find their ways to whatever goals they seek” (Hart 2010: 2). The Indian in his/her evolution towards a worldview that is both regional and religious, modern and traditional, is constantly challenged and called to reinvent himself/herself. The Indian mind has not been exposed to just one religion and way of life, but is nurtured to accept, respect and accommodate difference. It is an enriching, enlivening exchange of heterogeneous ideas and ways of being. It is in and through dialogue and debate, that is both respectful and inclusive of the other that we can piece together the fragments of who we are and how we see ourselves as a nation. This is a vision that derives from the past, but is born in the present and shapes the future. Her citizens evolve a collective, shared responsibility of her destiny that requires building, in the community, a sense of who they can be.

It is the ideals and ideas that her people hold that take a country forward. One of these ideals is that of a secular nation. India’s diversity socially enriches her citizens, she offers multicultural possibilities and in her evolution is a living attempt at secular plurality. The Indian collective unconsciousness allows for secularism to be upheld in a plural

landscape. Transcending the straightjacket of the fixed, India has always been fluid, open and inclusive. She has welcomed into her haven new peoples, religions, and possibilities. To the theist and the atheist, the Hindu and the Muslim, the trader and the colonialist, she has given of her resources and philosophies. Parekh explains that “By and large, ... the Indian civilization was plural, and included different currents of moral and philosophical thought... In spite of their occasional quarrels and periods of intolerance, these bodies of ideas enjoyed considerable freedom of expression, engaged in a critical dialogue, challenged or borrowed each other’s ideas to create a distinct and internally differentiated composite culture” (Defining India’s Identity 2). It is this way of being, that the Indian inherits.

Smith states that, “The religion of the majority in India is Hinduism, a faith which is on the whole favourable to the development of the secular state” (222). Hinduism allows for multiple ways of reaching and experiencing truth. It allows the seeker to journey in search of wisdom and truth, without outlining a prescriptive path; it is open to debate and plural perspectives. “Swami Vivekananda, in his wisdom taught not that everyone must adopt the same worldview, but rather, that we all need to learn from one another: holding fast, each of us, to our respective worldviews, while simultaneously permitting these views to be transformed through the process of dialogue” (Long 17). Dialogue allows for insights, questions and an enriching search for truth. Nandy elaborates on the non-western meaning of secularism stating that “in the ultimate analysis, each major faith in the region includes *within* it an in-house version of the other faiths, both as an internal criticism and as a reminder of the diversity of the theory of transcendence” (327). It is this vision of secularism that guides Indians towards deeper understanding and integration.

2. Secularism: An Indian Ideology

Secularism “is not Indian ideology, but there is an Indian ideology of secularism” (“Images of the World,” Madan 76). The postcolonial notion and practice of Indian secularism is an enabling factor in India’s integration of diverse beliefs, languages, cultural and social traditions. Rather than a strict separation of state and religion it embraces the idea of religious pluralism and extends equal respect to all. Madan reminds us that, “It is important to note that the Hindi version of the constitution uses *panth nirpeksha*, ‘neutral in relation to religious denominations’ (that is, non-sectarian) as the equivalent for ‘secular’” (“Images of the World,” 85). In India, there is no civil religion and the head-of-state takes an oath on the Indian Constitution or on a universal God without referring in any way to any particular religious denomination.

Our constitution strongly upholds the secular state. The state will not give priority to one religion or religious place over the other. Further, the state becomes the protector of all religious communities and is responsible for settling conflicts that may arise. In such cases the state works *with* and *for* religious communities safeguarding their rights. At the same time, the state is expected not to dictate to the individual what faith to practice, what beliefs to hold and what religion to profess and instead gives individuals the freedom and space to make their own choices in these matters. The Indian constitution safeguards the right to freely profess, practice and propagate one’s religion subject to state control in the interest of public order, morality and health. (Constitution of India - Article 25)

3. Creating a Secular State

At the time of envisioning an identity for our nation, both Nehru and Gandhi strived to create an inclusive, integrative secular India that could be collectively owned. While Nehru

remained an atheist, Gandhi's very existence revolved around his search for truth. However, they both knew that religious diversity could be accommodated only through even-handed neutrality. "Gandhi proclaimed: 'I swear by my religion and I will die for it, but it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it'" (Gandhi quoted in Tambiah 421). They hoped that this land of many cultures, ethnicities and religions would honour and respect each other while coming together to embrace a shared vision, identity and outlook. Nehru knew that this would be challenging and so, "During the constitutional assembly debates, Nehru held that the establishment of a secular state in this sense was an act of faith; an act of faith above all for the majority community because they will have to demonstrate that they can behave towards other (religions) minorities in a generous, fair, and just manner" (Tambiah 422).

After Gandhi, it was Nehru who dominated the India political scene into the 1950s. Nehru's vision of secularism in India was not one that rejected the metaphysical claims of religion or disrespected religious institutions claiming to create a secular society that was irreligious. Rather, it recognized different religions to be an integral part of the fabric of Indian society and that they were both meaningful and valid. Nehru however, was guarded against politics that propagated religious aims. He saw this as divisive and threatening to the fabric of Indian plurality. "In Nehru's eyes, 'communalism' was 'anti-national'; he declared that a committee member of the Congress could not simultaneously be a member of the committee of a communal organization such as the Hindu Mahasabha or the RSS" (Nehru quoted in Tambiah, 426). However, Nehru focused more on the dangers of communalism rather on elaborating on secularism's *possibilities*.

"Eleven years after independence, and eight years after the adoption of the Constitution, Nehru was visited by Andre Malraux in Delhi and asked what his greatest problem had

been during his years of power. Nehru replied, ‘Creating a just state by just means’, and, after a pause, ‘Perhaps, too, creating a secular state in a religious society.’” (Nehru quoted in Madan, 87).

4. Indian Secularism Challenged

Tambiah begins his article on a somber note by stating that, “In India today, it is widely said in academic and journalistic writing...that the country is experiencing...a ‘crisis of secularism’, by which he meant a challenge to the Indian state’s responsibility and mandate to preserve its ‘Secular character’” (418). There are a number of critics that challenge the Indian ideal of secularism and claim it to be inadequate and partial. Two of these critiques shall be briefly dealt with.

a. Critique 1: Favoritism

These critics equate Indian secularism with minoritarianism. For example, it has been claimed that the “the Indian Constitution and political and legal traditions really favour the minority community of Muslims, giving them a privileged status, not enjoyed by the majority community of Hindus” (Sen, “Secularism and Its Discontents” 458). These critics equate Indian secularism with minoritarianism. They demonstrate that Muslims were given special freedom in being allowed to have their own ‘personal’ laws and ‘special privileges’. Nehru in an attempt at cleansing Hindu society of its ills prohibited certain inequality Hindu practices, while he remained large hearted in his refraining from infringing upon inequality Muslim practices.

Rajeev Bhargava responds to this charge by holding that, “to promote religious liberty and equal citizenship the state may have to treat different religious communities differently. Indian secularism is committed to the notion of equal respect, which does not always entail equal treatment; rather it means

treating individuals or groups as equals. Equal respect, it follows, may entail differential treatment” (531).

b. Critique 2: Disrespecting the Cultural Heritage

Hindu Nationalism calls Nehruvian secularism a ‘pseudo – secularism’, out of touch with the people’s religious, cultural and social traditions (Tambiah 418). It holds that Indian secularism ignores the belief that “India is, in essence, a ‘Hindu’ country... it would be culturally quite wrong to treat Hinduism as simply one of the various religions of India. It is Hinduism, in this view that makes India what it is” (Sen, “Secularism and Its Discontents” 460).

Here we realize that a number of arguments could be put forward to challenge the inherent inadequacies in this line of thought. Such a stand is confronted with the task of defining what it means to be a ‘Hindu’. We know that a number of different beliefs, worldviews, value systems and traditions, theism, atheism and pantheism are included under the umbrella of Hinduism. A Hindu identity, although disputed upon, could possibly be inconclusive. Smith adds, “Furthermore, Hinduism lacks the ecclesiastical organization and centralized authority that would be essential for any kind of theocratic challenge to the secular state” (Sen, “Secularism and Its Discontents” 223). Additionally, claiming to call India a Hindu nation would be blatantly claiming to ignoring and disrespecting our historical and cultural heritage. Sen writes, “The cultural inheritance of contemporary India from its past combines Islamic influences with Hindu and other traditions, and the results of their interaction can be seen plentifully in literature, music, painting, architecture, and many other fields” (“Secularism and Its Discontents” 482). Thus, our cultural heritage displays influences from different religious traditions and diverse groups of people and secularism in the Indian context, recognizes and upholds these traditions.

5. Threats to Indian Secularism

The opposite of pluralism is fundamentalism that seeks to destroy possibilities and harmonious coexistence. It works in subtle and not so subtle ways, cajoling minds to follow divisive and communal agendas. The ‘clear stream of reason’ (Tagore in *Gitanjali*) meets with an impasse and what follows is bloodshed and destruction of the unified whole. In a country like India, there are bound to be differences and clashes in beliefs and value-systems. Rather, than looking at ways to bring communities together, some politicians seek to gain personally from these differences, highlighting and encouraging conflict. Religion becomes politicized and is made a tool to achieve political ends.

“Gandhi thus concurred with the need to separate the state from the patronage or support of the temple, church, and other institutions of worship” (Tambiah 439). Yet, in the name of Hindutva crowds demolished the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya on 6th Dec 1992 in defiance of the stay order of the supreme court in allowing the building of a Shri Ram Mandir on the site of the mosque. The “RSS, VHP, and Bajrang Dal, which, along with the BJP, had mobilized the *kar sevaks* to assemble in Ayodhya in the days preceding the demolition” (Tambiah 445). Today, RSS volunteers are encouraged to think of themselves as a brotherhood dedicated to the eventual creation of a Hindu *rashtra* or a Hindu nation.

Nandy writes, “two ministers of the central cabinet in India and a number of individuals in the higher echelons of the ruling party have been accused of not only encouraging, organizing and running a communal riot, but also of protecting the guilty” (331-332). Such divisive forces bring to fore the question of the possibility of a diverse people co-existing in free, respectful spaces. It shakes foundations and leaves citizens questioning the future and the validity of ideals they believed they practiced as a nation. Yet, we know that it is

not religious differences in themselves that cause strife and discontent, but some politicians who work on building divides that are used to achieve their own interests. Madan highlights Nehru's insightful comment, "As long ago as 1936 he said, 'The communal problem is not a religious problem, it has nothing to do with religion'" (301).

Dealing with the Babri Masjid demolition case, in a landmark judgment, the supreme court stated that, "No political party can simultaneously be a religious party. Politics and religion cannot be mixed. Any state government which pursues unsecular policies or unsecular course of action acts contrary to the constitutional mandate and renders itself amendable to action under Art. 356" (Justice S. C. Agarwal & Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy)" (Tambiah 449). Today BJP is in power on the development mandate, can it be forgotten however that it grew in popularity and won its first elections on the Hindutva agenda? Will the BJP allow the separation of religion from its politics? Madan ends his essay on *Secularism in India, Predicaments and Prospects* on a grave note stating that; "The future of India as a civic society, and the character of its polity in the years to come, are as yet far from settled issues. All those who cherish the values of democracy and cultural pluralism – of human freedom and dignity- can hardly afford to be complacent" (104-05).

Indian secularism is the ideal tool to allow for integration, and challenge fundamentalism. However, in the face of a relatively rigid social order and an "inegalitarian and hierarchical self-consciousness" there is an emotional disconnect between people and an uneasiness to be identified as similar ("An Alternative Vision" Parekh). A shared Indian identity and worldview that we can be proud of becomes a challenge in the face of gaping dissimilarities and inequalities. Madan writes that, "A Nehruvian answer to the question why secularism has run into difficulties in India, would then be that

the people are not yet ready for it. It requires a level of general education that is yet beyond them, and a liberal outlook on life and scientific temper which unfortunately they lack” (“Images of the World,” 88).

6. Conclusion

Secularism in plurality remains just ‘*an*’ Indian worldview, one of many ‘Indian worldviews’, an ideal that fails to take flight. Like a human person, a country too is shackled by her own ‘givens’, haunted by her own memories and limited in her own possibilities. Parekh states that “Like personal identity, national identity involves a delicate and judicious balance of continuity and change” (“Defining India’s Identity,” 2). A country’s worldview is also formed when its citizens allow for practices and definitions of who they are, to be accepted without critical engagement. It is enlightened citizens who become the guardians of secularism. Parekh states that political “freedom is not just a choice between available alternatives; it is also about determining the range of these alternatives. We must reclaim the country from those who seek to hijack it allegedly in our interest” (Defining India’s Identity 14). An Indian worldview in the final analysis depends on the definition that its citizens, as participatory, give to it.

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Intellectual Challenges to Christianity

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Abstract: In this article, the author explores the intellectual challenges facing Christianity today. According to Ernst Troeltsch, the most important intellectual challenge to Christianity was the growing lack of appreciation of the essential content of the Christian message: the ethos of love, the view of the human person, the communitarian cult, and the centrality of Jesus Christ. If we reformulate these challenges for today's secularized and secularizing world, they are: the intellectual hegemony of values and cognitive assumptions that make the love ethos of Christianity unintelligible; an understanding of personality that contradicts the Christian understanding of the uniqueness of the person; an increasingly individualistic perception of spirituality; and the loss of the idea of Transcendence without which the notion of Jesus Christ as mediator between human and divine is impossible.

The author holds that the Catholic Church is best equipped to face all these challenges. But for that it must come out of its defences which is the case in many countries or it has withdrawn from public life. The Church must show that it can articulate its message afresh, the message about the Holy, the Messiah, the Prophet, etc. Only then will it continue to be relevant morally and spiritually. If the task of the Church is to accompany people on their pilgrimage as they search for the True, the Good and the Beautiful, in every age and place, there is no way of doing this without believing in reason,

and reasoning together, posing difficult questions and searching for new answers.

Keywords: Ernst Troeltsch, *intellige ut credas*, Love ethos, human dignity, Transcendence.

The Roman historian Tacitus called Christianity “one more contemptible superstition, an additional evidence of the sad capacity of human beings to believe strange things.”¹ But Christianity turned out to be something quite different, in fact, a substantial astonishment for everyone. That a movement beginning with a breakaway group within Judaism should end by capturing the imperial palace could hardly have been foreseen by anyone. One reason for it was the intellectual power of Christianity which the great Fathers of the Church convincingly proved to their contemporaries. As the great theologian Origen maintained, there is a precise distinction between the *dogmata* of the Church’s tradition which had to be maintained and the *problemata* which needed to be discussed.² The intimate relationship between faith and reason was summed up by Augustine’s famous sayings: *crede ut intelligas*, because understanding was a reward of faith, and *intellige ut credas*, for one is not able to believe without reason.³ No one in fact believes “if he has not first thought it necessary to believe. It is reason which shows “who is to be believed” and thus “even faith has eyes with which it sees that what it does not yet see is nevertheless true.”⁴ Therefore, in *De Trinitate* Augustine defined theology as “the science which generates, nourishes, defends and fortifies faith... for it is one thing to know only that which must be believed in order to obtain the blessed life... and another to know it in such a way as to be able to place it at the service of the good and to defend it against the bad.”⁵ So a fundamental principle of Augustine’s theological method was the ardent desire to arrive at an understanding of the faith and the employment towards this end of all human resources. The history of theology is the

history of the attempt to understand the faith and enjoyment of the Truth, which constitutes the highest good for human beings.

That it is an important task today is clearly stated by Pope Francis: “Proclaiming the Gospel message to different cultures also involves proclaiming it to professional, scientific and academic circles. This means an encounter between faith, reason and the sciences with a view to developing new approaches and arguments on the issue of credibility, a creative apologetics which would encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all. A theology – and not simply a pastoral theology – which is in dialogue with other sciences and human experiences is most important for our discernment on how best to bring the Gospel message to different cultural contexts and groups.”⁶

Everybody will agree that the world has changed, and so has the Church’s place in the world; to dream of a return of the world and the Church of the “good old days” is a decoy, an illusion, and it rests on the sacralization of one historical form of the Catholic Church. During the Synod of Bishops on New Evangelization, 2012, one of the participants said: “Our beautiful Christian faith is too complicated: the terms, their content and their explanation. We bathe in an ensemble of dogmas, of mysteries: the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, Redemption, the Sacraments...These dogmas must be interpreted in a form capable of touching upon daily life, human aspirations, happiness and prosperity, the daily realities of our faithful.”⁷

In many Catholic and Christian countries, to the question, “to what Church do you belong,” one gets increasingly the answer, “none.” Many people have come to believe that what they learned as children about the nature of God can be erased as fairy tales. The culture that surrounds us focuses on science, growing out of the long history of Copernicus, Darwin, Freud,

Einstein and Hawking. Still, most people are not atheists but agnostics, still searching even as they entertain doubts about God. There is need for a new conversation about God, one that shows people that God is not an old man with a long white beard. God is infinite and unlimited. God is incomprehensible to our finite minds. This is not easy to grasp. We surmise that God is spirit, straddling the universe and parallel universes. At the same time God is intimate to each of us. We cannot prove his existence by reason, nor can science disprove God's existence.

Many people say that they relate to God personally and do not need a Church. We applaud this personal relationship, but it is also truly human to do things in community. But there is a reason for the rejection of the Church. They ask what caused the Church over the centuries to underestimate the Gospel's core messages, love and compassion. People also have other serious issues that loom large on their horizon: the morality of world economics, spiritual life, human sexuality, peace and war, the poor and their suffering, etc. So the main challenge the Church faces today is to relearn how to communicate a deeper, more intelligent and more relevant religion that leads to a life of love, compassion, justice and peace. How to remain in contact with the millions of people who look for God but not come to Church? This is the background of my reflection on the intellectual challenges to Christianity today.

A century ago, the German Philosopher Ernst Troeltsch published an article about the future of Christianity.⁸ In fact, he spoke not only about the future of Christianity but of religion in general. Against all pessimism, Troeltsch saw the possibility of a reformed and revitalized Christianity provided it addressed the intellectual challenges facing it. According to him, the most important intellectual challenge to Christianity was the growing lack of appreciation of the essential content

of the Christian message: the ethos of love, the view of the human person, the communitarian cult, and the centrality of Jesus Christ. If we reformulate these challenges for today's secularized and secularizing world, they are: the intellectual hegemony of values and cognitive assumptions that make the love ethos of Christianity unintelligible; an understanding of personality that contradicts the Christian understanding of the uniqueness of the person; an increasingly individualistic perception of spirituality; and the loss of the idea of Transcendence without which the notion of Jesus Christ as mediator between human and divine is impossible.⁹ A few words about each of these would be in order.

1. The Love Ethos of Christianity

The world today is characterized by increasing individualism and there are mainly two types of individualism. The first is "utilitarian individualism" which is a utility-oriented understanding of life and relationships. Everything is judged by its utility for immediate and often material profit and personal enjoyment, and therefore, life is basically making clever choices and developing strategies to achieve these goals. The second type of individualism is "expressive individualism" which maintains that the goal of life is self-expression and self-realization of the individual and the satisfaction of one's material and emotional needs. According to the American Sociologist Robert Bellah, the two sociological types that symbolize these two types of individualism are the American "Manager" and "Therapist."¹⁰ According to him, there can be serious conflicts between these two types of individualism. One example was the revolt of the 1960s and 1970s by the expressive young generation in the West against the utility oriented worldview of their fathers. Another option is not to make a choice between the two types of individualism but to try to harmonize them, symbolized by the "Yuppie Culture" of the 1980s. Self absorbed, rich, given

to demonstrably high consumption, they are out of touch with most of the challenges and concerns of others and live their life unperturbed, concerned only with the fulfilment of their desires. The entire financial system of the capitalist world, its business philosophy and strategies, its banking system, and indeed, the whole science of economics are dominated by these types of individualism. The crises in the financial markets during the last few years did offer some occasion for a rethink, but now, business is as usual once again.

As against these two types of egocentric or even narcissistic individualism Robert Bellah proposed two other types of individualism, the “Republican” and the “Biblical.” The word “Republican” has nothing to do with the political party with that name, but refers to a political tradition which goes back to the city-state republics of Athens and Rome and the Italian city states of the Middle Ages. The citizens played an active role in political life and had a say in its affairs. It was expected from them that they act virtuously which meant they should not do anything which goes against the common good, because the common good is more important than personal benefits and individual self-realization. Although such an attitude was very commendable, it was unmistakably clear that the common good of my republic was more important than that of the other.

The alternative to this is the biblical notion, which has its origin in the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to the biblical tradition, human beings are morally obliged in their decisions to look beyond their family, city, republic, country, religion or class. That is what the Bible means by “love your neighbour as yourself,” irrespective of whether one belongs to one’s group, class, religion, family or country. That is the core of Christian morality. Of course it is yet to be demonstrated satisfactorily why human beings should be motivated to act in this way in order to live a morally correct life or why one is not acting morally when one acts in pure self-interest. It is also not

shown why one should be sensitive to the sufferings of others, which does not belong to the sphere of rational arguments.

Herein lies the superiority of the Christian love ethics over other moral systems and the different forms of individualism discussed above. But it is an intellectual challenge to show to the utilitarian, egocentric and expressive individualisms their limits, to the republican individualism its parochialism and to a purely rational global ethical system its irrelevance for concrete human life. No discussion on morality will be able to avoid the discussion on justice and love as its central components and both are foundations of the Christian moral teaching. The Christian concepts of unconditional love and justice are based on the concept of a God who loves human beings unconditionally and acts justly. The intellectual challenge to Christians today is to present all these as matters of great relevance and urgency for the globalized world today, and show that Christians are not, in the words of Max Weber, representatives of an “a-cosmic” love ethos. They believe in love and justice in the here and now, and both are indispensable for a new social and political order.¹¹ But it is a difficult task today to prove the superiority of Christian morality when the credibility of the Church’s teaching on moral goodness is questioned on many counts.

2. The Human Person

Perhaps the most spectacular intellectual challenge to Christianity today is confronting the reductionist naturalism that is propagated vigorously. Researches in Neurosciences, Genetics, Socio-biology, etc. claim to establish that there is no difference between human and animal behaviour, that human life is a purely biological and chemical phenomenon, thus challenging the religious world view of the vast majority of human beings. This reductionist naturalism rejects such concepts such as freedom, symbolization, etc. The debate

has been with us since the nineteenth century but now it finds greater echo in the public.¹²

Such a worldview has consequences for the Church and its understanding of the human person. There is need for a new articulation of the Christian understanding of personality. Christianity believes in the unique dignity of the human person who is created in the image and likeness of God and is endowed with an immortal soul. Unfortunately, history shows that respect for the human person and his dignity were the fruits of hard struggles by other institutions than the Church. The human person was not the yardstick of the Church's actions, which is clearly shown in its opposition to democracy, human rights, etc. for centuries. These were the achievements of anti-Christian movements like the French Revolution, the American War of Independence, etc. It is good to ask what role the Churches played in the history of human rights, abolition of torture, abolition of slavery, discrimination against women, discrimination against sexual minorities, etc. Did not Christianity justify the upholding of structures which were against the Christian understanding of the human person? This is a major secular criticism against Christianity. The idea of the person as unique, created in the image of God, with dignity and inalienable rights is not what we see in the history of the Church with its brutal suppression of the rights of people in the name of truth, authority and obedience. The intellectual challenge for the Church today is to investigate self-critically and objectively the inter-relationship between Christianity and the sacralisation of the human person and draw appropriate conclusions for our engagement in the world today and put the dignity of the human person at the centre of its teaching and ministry.

3. Spirituality

Modern person has an understanding of spirituality that is at odds with that of the Church. Many people candidly confess that they have spiritual experiences where we least suspect it: in art, aesthetics, erotic love, confrontation with existential crises, like illness, death, loss of loved ones, etc. Modern person spares no energy in his/her search for exotic spiritual experiences and rituals. S/he believes that spirituality is a very personal affair and the Church is nowhere in their scheme of things. The Church is even seen as a hindrance to spiritual growth.

Believing and practicing Christians, in fact, encounter the incomprehension of their contemporaries for their continuance in the Church in spite of their having serious problems with it. This incomprehension is the result of the view that is almost taken for granted today that social organizations must be based on free association of the members, and therefore, anything that places the institution before or above the individual should be rejected. The claim of the Church that it is a supra-personal reality capable of leading people to faith and self-realization contradicts the individualistic tendencies of our age.

Those who hold this view do not understand what the Church is, that it is not a “cultic club,” an organization merely meant for the communal celebration of rituals, and that it has a transpersonal character. It is true that even within Christianity, there are different understandings of community, with some, like the Catholics, Anglicans and Orthodox Christians having a more universal community consciousness, while some Protestants, like the Free Churches and Congregationalists have less of it. Let us take the Catholic Church. Historically it stressed for a long time an authoritarian, hierarchical and excessively centralized form, although the theological core of the Church as a community of agape or love was not totally forgotten. The Christian Creed speaks of the Church as “one,

holy, catholic and apostolic,” one but not uniform, holy but also sinful and so in need of reform, missionary like the apostles and catholic which means trans-cultural, transnational and so concretely universal. In spite of all the differences, the Christians have something in common.¹³ Charles Taylor, in his book *A Secular Age* called the Church a *Network of Agape*. According to him, the lifeblood of the Church is agape and not a set of rules and regulations. It is nourished by relationships and when it is extended to the other a network is established. In this sense, the Church is a Network-society, but of a special kind, because the relationship that its members share is not that of a family, clan or tribe. In the Church, relationships exist that transcend familiar categories, like the family, clan or tribe. The only basis of relationships in the Church is agape. It is a special experience that binds the members together in the community.¹⁴ The challenge before the Church today is to make this community attractive once again, as a place of spiritual experience which satisfies the individual and does justice to the community and show that spirituality and community do not exclude each other as many people tend to think today, that spirituality in its different hues and colours is possible also in a community, particularly in the Church.

4. Transcendence

The next challenge is to face the loss of the idea of Transcendence, not the watered down understanding of Transcendence by which we mean anything that goes beyond the ordinary, but the Judeo-Christian understanding, the total otherness of divinity, a radical desacralization of the present and its political and social structures, as the Prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed it which the Christian faith continues to uphold. This understanding of Transcendence is integral to the Christian faith. Here we are faced with two challenges: the first is the conflict between the specifically Christian understanding of Transcendence in the form of the Trinity and the Jewish and

Islamic understanding of pure monotheism and the need for a dialogue which calls for great intellectual acumen; the second is to go behind the open and conscious assault of philosophy, culture and politics to de-transcendentalize reality and to offer possibilities of human self-realization in political and cultural ideologies as we experienced in National Socialism, post-revolutionary Communism, etc. That such ideologies are at work again is clear to everyone and it is the task of a post-totalitarian Christianity to confront such trends intellectually.

Karl Jaspers has traced the origin of the idea of Transcendence to the so-called Axial Age, the period between 800 and 200 BC.¹⁵ Its potential for challenging a one-sided anthropocentrism and absolutisation of this worldly structures and institutions was emphasized by the Prophets of the Old Testament. The Abrahamic religions have continued this tradition. He also discussed the similarities and differences between Semitic and Eastern religions, like Buddhism and Confucianism. So in spite of the popularity of the theory of the “Clash of Civilizations” which the present day context tends to endorse, there is still need for a rediscovery of the commonalities of all religions and an alliance of all of them against all forms of narrow-mindedness and exclusivism, including the blanket rejection of Transcendence. The political and moral potential of this idea in the contemporary world for resisting political, religious and cultural ideologies and in combating radicalism, fanaticism and fundamentalism needs to be explored and that is an intellectual challenge addressed to the Church.

Of course there are other challenges, too, but these touch upon the core of the Christian message. The ecological crisis, the grave danger posed by an unregulated financial market, the immensely destructive potential of science and technology, the scandal of world hunger and malnutrition, the injustice

inherent in international politics, etc. should concern the Church, indeed all religions and all human beings.

One could ask why the whole question of sexual morality is not presented as one of the serious challenges before the Church. If Christianity takes the love commandment seriously, all problems of sexual morality can be resolved. When the law of love takes the backstage and questionable anthropological and legal postulates take the centre stage problems crop up. Then in sexuality procreation of children will be given a false priority to expression of love. Homosexuality will become a sin instead of an expression of love between two human beings. Celibacy of priests will not be misunderstood as enmity towards sex but as liberative asceticism for the service of others.

Then there is another alleged challenge, the so-called dictatorship of relativism popularized by Pope Benedict XVI. It is to be genuinely doubted whether there is such a danger as dictatorship of relativism. The number of people who theoretically profess an epistemological or moral relativism is arguably very small and so a dictatorship of this small group over the vast majority of human beings is not a serious danger. What is true is that pluralism of philosophical, epistemological and moral systems is a fact of reality. There will be competition among them in their claim to truth. In this context it must be said that the Church also has the duty to critically analyse its own truth claims. The standpoint of the Church for a long time that faith is equal to obedience to a set of doctrines of a highly institutional and authoritarian Church was a mistake. This sacralisation of institutions instead of measuring everything against the holiness of God cost the Church dearly. The Church has to face the challenges from competing ideologies and religions through the attractive and convincing power of the Good News of Jesus. This is a serious intellectual challenge. The church cannot function like a quasi

state and still lack the guarantees of a constitutional state. It is not transparent, is bureaucratically top heavy, without many of the guarantees for the protection of individual rights and structures of institutional self-reform.¹⁶ This has cost the Church much in terms of credibility in recent times.¹⁷

5. Conclusion

The Catholic Church is best equipped to face these challenges. In order to do so, it must come out of its defences which is the case in many countries or it has withdrawn from public life. The Church must show that it can articulate its message afresh, the message about the Holy, the Messiah, the Prophet, etc. Only then will it continue to be relevant morally and spiritually. If the task of the Church is to accompany people on their pilgrimage as they search for the True, the Good and the Beautiful, in every age and place, there is no way of doing this without believing in reason, and reasoning together, posing difficult questions and searching for new answers.

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