ISSN 972-33315

jnanadeepa

PuneJournalofReligiousStudies

Sin and Guilt

Volume 11 No. 2 July 2008

Jnanadeepa:
Journal of Religious Studies

Vol.11 No. 2 July 2008

Jnanadeepa (="Light of Wisdom" pronounced as *Jñanadeepa*) is a biannual interdisciplinary journal of religious studies from an Indian Christian perspective. It is closely associated with Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune 411014, India.

Jnanadeepa is published biannually, in January and July. Views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the editors. Manuscripts submitted for publication should be original and cannot be returned (writers' style sheet is available on request); they could be sent (preferrably as a text or RTF file) in a computer diskette or through E-mail as file attachment.

All correspondence (requests for subscription, manuscripts, books for review – two copies, please – exchange copies of journals, advertisements, etc.) to:
The Editor, *Jnanadeepa*, Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune 411014, India Tel (office): +91-20-27034968, (res): +91-20-27034169 Fax: +91-20-27034491
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Subscriptions could be sent from India either by Money Order or Demand Draft. From foreign countries International Money Order or Crossed Cheque is preferred. From Commonwealth countries British Postal Order is preferred. All payments are to be made in the name of ***Jnanadeepa Journal***.

Typeset & print: JDV Computer Centre
Publisher: Kurien Kunnumpuram for Jnana Deepa Publications.
ISSN: 0972-33315

Subscription Rates

Country	*One year*	*Three years*
India	Ind. Rs. 80	Ind. Rs. 200
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Individual Life Subscription	Rs 3,000(India)	US $ 400/Euro 350
	US $ 300 (SAARC countries only)	

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Editorial

It is undeniable that notions of sin and guilt play a significant role in human life and human thought. That is why we have chosen sin and guilt as the theme of this issue of *Jnanadeepa.*

In order to gain a broader understanding of sin and guilt we shall discuss them from interdisciplinary perspectives. We shall not only examine the meaning sin and guilt have in different traditions and disciplines but also investigate the role they play in different world-views.

There is an article in this issue which seeks to develop psychological perspectives on sin and guilt. For a long time most psychologists were reluctant to explore sin since it seemed to be closely related to religion and theology. In recent years a number of psychologists have been showing some interest in the study of sin. Guilt is a favourite theme in psychoanalysis. It is true that an exaggerated sense of guilt can lead to depression. And yet the lack of a sense of guilt can result in the formation of an antisocial personality. But a healthy sense of guilt has many pro-social benefits.

Another article deals with the meaning and function of sin in the Islamic world-view. The Islamic concept of sin is similar to the Jewish view. Islam sees sin as anything that goes against the will of God. Words like transgression and disobedience are also used to denote sin. Islam also deals with repentance and forgiveness of sin. Repentance is more than asking for God's forgiveness, it is turning to God with sincere love and devotion. For the Moslems Allah is merciful forgiving. But he is also a judge who punishes. In Islam offences against human beings are regarded as offences against God. Hence it is necessary to repent of one's sins before God and offer compensation to the injured party. Islam teaches that human relations should be based on love and forgiveness. It also calls for forgiveness of one's enemies.

Yet another article seeks to articulate a functional approach to the Christian doctrine of sin. It endeavours to answer the question: what specific function dos the doctrine of sin fulfil in the Christian religion?

The article asserts that the function of sin is to reveal the human person to himself / herself by offering a mirror image of the person. It reveals the disfigurement and disintegration of the person that result from sin. From this understanding of the function of sin the article draws some valuable conclusions for theology and Christian living.

Included in this issue is an article which discusses the understanding of sin in the Theology of Karl Rahner. Rahner's notion of sin is based on his understanding of the human person. Human persons are creatures of God who are dependent on God for their being and final fulfilment. At the same time, they are endowed with true and radical freedom so that they can accept or reject God's offer of communion and eternal bliss. In the last analysis, our exercise of freedom is either a self-realization in the direction of God or a radical self-refusal towards God. Herein lies the possibility of sin. In the Christian scheme of things, sin has to be seen in the context of God's offer of forgiving love.

There is another article in this issue which discusses the notion of good and evil in tribal societies. The tribal approach to good and evil is based on concrete life experiences. Thus the idea of good is inseparably tied up with what is good for the tribal people in the physical order of the world. They experience happiness in good health, sufficient wealth, good crops, many cattle and children with whom the performance of ritual offerings to God and the ancestor spirits is guaranteed. For the well-being of humans depends on the good pleasure of these supernatural beings. For the tribal people, evil is physical suffering such as sickness, death, the loss of livestock and property. They have an understanding of moral evil. An action is judged to be right or wrong in reference to the good of the individual and all the members of the community. Tribal morality places great emphasis on the community and the tribe. The goal of life is the good of the community and the continuity of the tribe, for herein lies the good of one and all.

Included in this issue is an article on sin in some contemporary western philosophers. It deals mainly with some existentialist and postermodernist thinkers. Thus for Albert Camus sin is to turn one's back on the struggle against injustice, hypocrisy and tyranny. For Sartre sin is bad faith, that is, insincerity or hypocrisy. It is to abdicate the demands of the responsibility of one's freedom and to trot out all manner of excuses to cover up one's cowardice. But the great 'sin' that

postmodernism lays bare is what we might call 'strucutural sin': those unjust structures and false values upon which international and intra-national networks are built and which serve as effective brakes on the development of the oppressed peoples, ensuring that the dominant groups maintain successfully their stranglehold on world economy and culture.

There are two articles in this issue which are not directly related to our main theme. The first one deals with human dignity and the freedom of research. After a lengthy discussion of the different aspects of human embryonic stem cells research, the article examines the ethical issues involved in it. It maintains that using embryos for any purpose other than to allow it grow into babies is highly controversial and unethical. It is a violation of human dignity. Destroying a human embryo in order to provide a cure for a disease is wholly unacceptable because it is morally evil.

The second deals with Catholic colleges and social transformation. It calls into question the conventional view that education can bring about a significant change in the consciousness of a society, which in turn can transform its social, economic and political structures. It also disagrees with the opposite view that education does not, indeed cannot, transform society. The article favours a third view which holds that, while education as a process of socialization tends to make individuals conform to the norms and values of the existing society, thus dominating and domesticating them, it has the capacity to generate a spirit of inquiry and questioning of accepted truths and values, thereby leading to a change in society. It also spells out some of the ways in which Catholic colleges can contribute to social transformation.

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Psychological Perspectives On Sin and Guilt

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Abstract: Though Psychology in general has neglected the exploration of sin per se, some attempt has been made to address the nature of evil, particularly in the Jungian tradition. The views of some contemporary psychologists, especially on the origins of evil, and reasons for its perpetuation are outlined . Guilt is presented as a self-conscious emotion, linked to but distinct from shame. The psychoanalytic understanding of guilt as an unconscious force at work in most neurosis is highlighted. Guilt is also addressed as a component of grief and mourning as well as a major contributor to depression. The consequences of excessive feelings of guilt and of its absence are presented.

Key words: Psychology. Sin. Evil. Guilt. Scrupulosity. Moral Disengagement

Exploration of the psychological perspectives on sin and guilt is a challenge. There are very few references to the two concepts in psychological theory and research. Index pages of books on psychology make almost no mention of sin. Only a few of these books carry reference to guilt, and these few references are mostly in relation to psychoanalysis, depression or mourning.

One major reason for this lacuna is that the discipline of psychology considers sin to be a religious construct. For years psychology had very deliberately chosen to distance itself from religion, if not take an adversarial stance toward it (Post, 1992). It is only very recently that the psychological and psychiatric establishments have begun to take an active interest in religion and spirituality. In fact today there is a good deal of research done in regard to the health benefits of the

practice of religion and spirituality (Koenig, 1998; Pargament, 1997; Silberman, 2005). Yet, sin remains a concept that psychologists want little to do with. One reason for this is psychology's effort to be recognised and accepted as a science. Science is considered to be a value-free activity. Study of sin requires a priori value assumptions about what is good and evil, and that is not permissible under traditional science (Peck, 1988a).

What is most surprising is that even publications on the psychology of religion do not explore sin or guilt. The great classic in psychology of religion, William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1978) has only a few passing references to sin. Some of the more recent and well-received publications on the psychology of religion (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger & Gorsuch, 1996; Paloutzian & Park, 2005), or those on the role of religion in mental health (Koenig ,1998; Shafranske ,1996) do not carry chapters on sin or guilt. Even their index pages make very few references to sin or guilt.

Shafranske (1996), though a large book (617 pages) devotes less than half a page, just two paragraphs, to "Sin and Suffering." The term guilt does not appear in its index. In Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger and Gorsuch (1996), sin receives brief mention on five pages. One reference is in regard to the functionality of sin within fundamentalism and sin's role in religious conversion. Another is to religion's concern with sin and the impact of this concern on mental health. The third reference is to the fear of sin contributing to scrupulosity. Guilt is mentioned in the book on five pages in very similar contexts, mostly in conjunction with sin. Koenig (1998) has four brief references to sin in Catholic and Jewish traditions.

Sin and guilt receive a little more attention in Paloutzian and Park (2005), but not much more. They discuss the role of indulgence in sin and restraining from it in the regulation of negative affect. They show how preoccupation with sin can result in what they describe as the pathology of ritual. "Normal uses of ritual can shade into obsession, compulsivity, and a dogmatic rigidity that takes over one's daily life" (p. 369). An extreme example of such pathology is the disorder of scrupulosity in which one suffers from recurrent and severe doubts as to whether one has sinned. The individual develops obsessive rituals

both to counter such thoughts or as atonement for sins thought to have been committed.

Paloutzian and Park (2005) also address the relationship between sin and virtuous striving. They discuss how individuals can respond in healthy ways to the reality of their sinfulness. Punitive feelings toward the self consequent to sin can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. Willingness to acknowledge one's sins and open oneself to God's love and forgiveness can facilitate self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, both of which have beneficial effect on well-being.

O. Hobart Mowrer, himself a distinguished psychologist, challenged the reluctance and the aversion of the psychological community to address the reality of sin. In an article published in the American Psychological Association's flagship journal, the *American Psychologist,* Mowrer (1960) suggested that it would be more appropriate and helpful for psychologists and psychotherapists to consider the states of mind and being that lead to neurosis "sin" rather than "sickness."

Mowrer began the article (1960) citing his experience after presenting a paper at the 1959 APA Convention on "Constructive Aspects of the Concept of Sin in Psychotherapy." Psychologists and psychiatrists asked him: "But *why* must you use that awful word 'sin,' instead of some more neutral term such as 'wrongdoing,' 'irresponsibility,' or 'immorality'?" He described how toward the end of a summer term of teaching at a prestigious University, a student in his class on Personality Theory said to him: "Did you know that near the beginning of this course you created a kind of scandal on this campus?" The student explained that Mowrer had once used the word "sin" without saying "so called" or making a joke about it. The student went on to say that such a reference to sin "was virtually unheard-of in a psychology professor and had occasioned considerable dismay and perplexity" (p. 301).

Mowrer (1960) suggested that it would serve psychology better to consider a "neurotic" as one who is "sinful" rather than as one who is "sick." He particularly castigated the Freudian hypothesis that the "neurotic" person is not responsible for his/her suffering, that it is

only the result of a too severe superego. He considered the term "sin" the lesser of two evils than "sickness." He also suggested a "closer and friendlier relationship ...with religion and theology." (p. 303).

The comments from other reputed psychologists published in the *American Psychologist* following Mowrer's (1960) article were mostly unfavourable, indicating his suggestions were not very welcome in the psychological community. Albert Ellis (1960) found fault with the syllogism Mowrer used and observed that using the religiously neutral concepts of "wrongdoing" and "irresponsibility" that Mower had abandoned in favour of "sin" would actually be more effective in helping the "neurotic" address his/her difficulties.

Goodhue Livingston (1960) expressed strong opposition to Mowrer's argument for introducing the concept of sin into psychotherapy. He observed that clinicians are not concerned with "guilt" as a theological problem, but "the poisonous, corrosive guilt which destroys the patient's soul, leads him to suicide, murder, self-destruction...No better term exists for this phenomenon than sickness—sickness of the mind, perhaps, but sickness nonetheless" (p. 714).

Hans Strupp's (1960) comment focused more on Mowrer's "persistent and egregious misinterpretation of Freud's conception of neurosis" (p. 714) than on Mowrer's observations on sin. Strupp concluded his comment stating that the "hope for psychology as a science... does not lie in an alliance with religion or theology; it lies in a willingness to look at facts without moralizing about them..." (p. 715).

George H. Frank (1960) also took objection to what he saw as Mowrer's misrepresentation of psychoanalysis and his dismissive attitude toward it. He defended the validity and usefulness of understanding neurosis as sickness rather than sin: "the 'original sin' of the neurotic would seem to be to have been born with a nervous and/or metabolic system that predisposes the individual to undue anxiety under stress" (p. 716).

Daniel N. Wiener, another reputed psychologist, expressed a different view (1961). He critiqued the four previous comments and saw some validity in Mowrer's suggestions. He admitted that Mowrer

caused a "a ruckus by using the word 'sin' because of its religious connotations...," but went on to add that by using it, Mowrer had "brought into far clearer focus than anyone else in our profession currently our need as therapists and patients for a guiding sense of values and humanity" (p. 260).

Mowrer is not the only one who saw the impoverishment of the field of psychology by its aversion to the use of the term 'sin." In his classic work, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (1973) the eminent psychoanalyst Karl Menninger lamented the disappearance of sin– "a word once in everyone's mind, but now rarely if ever heard" (p. 13)— from social as well as intellectual discourse. He defined sin as "behaviour that violates the moral code or the individual conscience or both; behaviour which pains or harms or destroys my neighbour— or me, myself." (p. 17). He believed "there is 'sin' which is expressed in ways which cannot be subsumed under the verbal artefacts such as 'crime,' disease,' delinquency,' or deviancy.' There is immorality; there is unethical behaviour; there is wrongdoing." And he demonstrated "that there is usefulness in retaining the concept, and indeed the word SIN..." (p. 46). Making theologian Paul Tillich's words his own, Menninger declared "There are no substitutes for words like 'sin' and 'grace'." (p. 47)

Menninger (1973) bemoaned the tendency of psychologists to explain away what was considered sin as disorder. He believed that mental health and moral health were identical and that the recognition of the pervasive reality of sin and guilt would offer suffering humanity real hope and comfort. He gave a clarion call to consider moral values an essential aspect of psychiatric and psychological enterprise, for there are some individuals, he declared, "whose sins are greater than their symptoms." (p. 49). His call, however, did not evoke any appreciable positive response. The psychological and psychiatric community continued to resist incorporation of religious and spiritual values, and particularly the notion of sin, into psychotherapy.

Sin as Evil

While sin is not a concept popular with psychologists they have shown some interest in the exploration of evil. Carl Jung especially has devoted much attention to evil. Evil, especially in its manifestation

as shadow, is recurrent theme in his writings. The final chapter of his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963) entitled *Late Thoughts* is mostly about evil. His *Answer to Job* (1973), "the most controversial book he has ever written" (Adler, 1973, p. v) is an attempt on Jung's part to formulate his answers to the questions of evil and its relationship to God. Jung presented evil as the dark side – the shadow — of God.

Rejecting the doctrine of evil as the *privatio boni* (absence of good), Jung (1973) asserted that evil is a determinant of reality and something that cannot be dismissed from the world. Evil is not just the accidental lack of perfection, but an entity in itself with its own reality. However he did not see evil and good as opposite entitites, but aspects of the whole. It is the nature of the self to unite good and evil. He posits such a unity to the being of the Godhead itself. For Jung, the doctrine of *privatio boni* dilutes the power and reality of evil and evokes a distorted, one-sided image of wholeness as being wholly light. Denial of the reality of evil has had nefarious consequences.

Jung not only asserted the reality of evil; he also saw evil as capable of producing good. He believed that evil had a mysterious role to play in delivering people from darkness and suffering (Jung, 1963). At the same time he also knew that evil had its characteristic psychological consequences: "the wrong we have done, thought, or intended will wreak its vengeance on our souls" (p. 329). The issue of evil is something he struggled to understand and come to terms with throughout his life.

One contemporary psychologist who has devoted a good deal of attention to the exploration of evil is M. Scot Peck. His *People of the Lie* (1983) is an exploration of evil committed by individuals. In *The Road less Travelled* (1978) too he explored sin and evil and also grace under the non-spiritual label "serendipity" (Peck, 1988b). A major chapter in that book is entitled *Toward a Psychology of Evil.* That was his effort, he said, toward the creation of a body of scientific knowledge about the subject of human evil, since there wasn't at that time any such body of knowledge that could be considered "worthy of being dignified by the name of psychology" (1988a, p. 205).

Peck (1988a) suggested that there might be a genetic base to human evil. If this is found to be true, it opens up new avenues to explore

Original Sin not only as a theological concept but a biological and psychological reality. In fact, new research in neuroscience (Newberg & D'Aquili, 1998; Gazzaniga, 2000; Siever & Frucht, 1997) is suggesting that so much of our behaviour and experience have their sources in our genes. Hence it is not too far fetched to conclude that both good and evil inherent in human behaviour may also be dependent on our genes, on our biology. This has profound implications for our understanding of free will, of grace, of sin and guilt.

Roy Baumeister is another contemporary psychologist who explores the nature of evil. His book on *Evil* (1997) is a fascinating study of evil inherent in human violence and cruelty. He explodes the myth that evil is perpetrated by inhuman psychopaths, and demonstrates how ordinary men and women, driven by circumstances, are capable of perpetrating terrible evil. He too suggests some genetic element in the human inclination toward evil, while not discounting the contribution of culture.

Baumeister defined evil as "actions that intentionally harm other people" (1997, p. 8), and provided some answers as to why humans are led to commit evil. His definition excludes accidental or unintended harm, even though it may appear as evil to the victim. Though his focus is on aggression and violence, his exploration provides insights that help us understand evil in general.

Baumeister presented victimisation as the essence of evil and categorised the question of evil as "a victim's question" (p. 1). Evil is in the eye of the beholder. This is not a denial of the objective reality of evil, but that often the individual who perpetrates it does not recognise it as evil, rather finds all kinds of seemingly justifiable reasons for the deed, even presenting it as beneficial for the victim or society. Most perpetrators of evil consider themselves as good people trying to defend themselves or their group against the forces of evil. They see no evil in what they do.

Often perpetrators consider their evil action as something ordinary and unremarkable. Even though, the first time an evil action, say killing someone, is committed, it might be upsetting or even traumatic, somehow perpetrators get used to the killing, and take the killing in their stride as though it was something ordinary.

Baumeister presented egotism—the desire to consider oneself important, more powerful than others—as another pervasive cause of evil. Perpetrators of evil are often people who think very highly of themselves, and want to be recognised for the power they wield. Greed, lust and ambition— in other words, the dynamics of self-promotion— drive people to evil.

Baumeister presented failures in self-control as the immediate or proximate cause of evil: "regardless of the root causes of violence, the immediate cause is often a breakdown of self-control" (1997, p. 14). What is needed for people to commit evil is having the reasons to restrain themselves taken away, rather than having reasons to commit the evil.

The Psychological Cost of Evil

Janoff Bulman's (1992) understanding of the dynamics of trauma has implications also for the psychological understanding of evil and its consequences. Evil, like trauma, shatters some basic assumptions about the self and the world.

Janoff-Bulman (1992) described the experience of trauma as the shattering of three basic assumptions which people make to construct a coherent cognitive framework to maintain a sense of well-being and significance. These are: (a) the world is benevolent; (b) the world is meaningful; and (c) the self is worthy. People in general believe that they live in a benevolent and safe world rather than a malevolent and hostile one. A meaningful world is one in which they perceive a relationship between action and outcome. Such a perception enables them to believe that misfortune is not haphazard and arbitrary, and that they can control what happens to them. The assumption of self-worth involves a global evaluation of the self in which people perceive themselves as good, capable and moral individuals.

These basic assumptions provide individuals with a sense of invulnerability, a sense of confidence and trust, a general optimism that things will work out well, that they are safe and protected. Even though there is "a powerful tendency to maintain rather than change the fundamental beliefs that have enabled us to make sense of ourselves and our world," Janoff-Bulman observed, some events are so powerful

that they destroy these assumptions (1992, p. 40). Any event that shatters these assumptions leads to an intense psychological crisis through "the disintegration of one's inner world" (p. 63).

Evil, particularly of the heinous kind, can be described as a traumatic experience for the victim; and like trauma, evil shatters the victim's basic assumptions about life, self and others and disintegrates the inner world, leading to a variety of painful psychological consequences, including severe mental illness.

Evil and Moral Disengagement

Pioneering social psychologist Albert Bandura provides some explanations as to why evil continues unabated. He places the blame on the moral disengagement in the perception of evil. In his recent invited address at the American Psychological Association's Annual Convention in San Francisco (2007) he described the dynamics of moral disengagement. Baumeister (1997) also presented similar dynamics.

Moral disengagement was Bandura's (2007) explanation for large scale inhumanity perpetrated by people who are benevolent and even compassionate in other areas of their lives – good people doing bad things. He outlined four mechanisms of moral disengagement: moral justification; minimising consequences; non-responsibility; and de-humanisation.

Moral Justification: Perpetrators numb themselves morally by finding justifications for their evil deeds. Mass killings, for example, are often carried out under religious motives. We are familiar with holy wars of today where killing is legitimised by recourse to sacred scriptures and religious injunctions. This however is not a new phenomenon. The Crusades were a killing spree sanctified by the religious imperative.

Minimising: Sanitisation of language or euphemistic labelling is an effective means to minimise the perception of evil. Sanitisation helps to minimise the the enormity and crassness of evil. Perpetrators of evil can play games with words, making the horrible appear as mundane and innocent. In war, brutality can be disguised by using such innocent sounding euphemisms as "coercive diplomacy" for carpet

bombing; and "collateral damage" for killing of innocent civilians. Genocide can be sanitised by using such euphemisms as "final solution" as in Nazi Germany or "bush clearing" as in Rwanda, and mass killings for political gain as "ethnic cleansing," as in Bosnia. A classic, and somewhat laughable, attempt at euphemistic labelling is that of a US Senator who proudly declared: "Capital punishment is our society's recognition of the sanctity of human life" (Bandura, 2007).

Non-Responsibility: Perpetrators can engage in dubious cognitive distortions to reduce or deny personal responsibility. They can, for example, present themselves as dutiful functionaries, honouring their obligations by blindly carrying out orders such as the Nazis did and feel no personal responsibilities for the harm they cause. Those who issued orders can absolves themselves attributing responsibility to groupthink.

Division of labour and the distance between initial and end process can make individual tasks performed in detached isolation look harmless, even though the end result of the combined actions by different people is horrendous. Bandura (2007) cited mass production and sale of weapons of destruction as an example. The entire arms industry, "a death industry," is divided into several independent sections. People engaged in one section has no links with others. For example, there are several intermediaries between the design of weapon and their end use in killing innocent people, such as people involved in manufacture, marketing, shipping and so on. Those engaged in design, for example, are far removed from those who actually use the weapons they have designed and can feel no responsibility in the killing. Fractioning the enterprise, those involved see themselves as guiltless, while promoting a death industry. The arms seller, for example, can claim he or she is just doing a business; the designer can claim he or she is being creative and promoting science. Both can eschew responsibility for the killing they have facilitated.

The death in the gas chambers of Nazi concentration camps was the end result of a series of decisions and actions by different people. The woman who betrayed the Jewish family to the Nazi authorities can say she just did her duty. The man who drove the death train can say he just did his duty. Both can claim they were not responsible for what happened

in the gas chambers. And so on and on. Each person in the chain of events can disown responsibility and claim immunity.

So also in war, the one who gives the command to carpet bomb innocent civilians thousands of miles away from his or her command and control centre does not see or hear the destruction caused on the ground and can be numb to the consequences as to his or her own role. The gulf between decision makers and executioners helps to dissipate responsibility and guilt. Destruction inflicted remotely by computers (e.g., smart bombs controlled from the USA and dropped thousands of miles away in Iraq by pilot-less drones) is another example of dissipation of responsibility which enables easy perpetration of evil. (For further description of mechanisms of denial and self-absolution of war atrocities, see also Menninger, 1973, pp. 101-107).

Dehumanising: Labelling victims as subhuman is one strategy used to distance oneself from them and hence making it easier to perpetrate evil on them. Labelling the enemy as something other than human is a crafty yet subtle means of justifying evil. One avoids guilt by ejecting the victims from the human community, and thus denying any social bonds with them. Demonising one's enemy such as labelling countries and organisations or individuals as "evil empire," "axis of evil" or "Satan" makes it easier to legitimise attacking or killing them.

Labelling one's enemy as the "other" is another strategy. People feel less empathy toward those they consider as not part of the in-group. Labelling victims as other reduces social bonds and helps to eliminate guilt. It is hard to experience empathy without social bonds. Lack of empathy results in lack of guilt. And without guilt coming in the way, it is much easier to perpetrate evil.

Guilt

While sin does not get very much attention in psychological literature, guilt fares better. Since guilt is an emotion and there is much interest in emotions in psychology, guilt elicits a good deal of interest and attention. Since imbalances in emotions are major features of depression and mourning, guilt is explored mostly in relation to these two human experiences. Guilt has also been of great interest to psychoanalysts, who speak of the unconscious need for self-punishment.

According to Michael Lewis (1993), the eminent researcher in the field of emotions, guilt is a self-conscious emotion. These are emotions that emerge later in life than emotions in general and require certain cognitive abilities for their elicitation. Unlike emotions that appear early such as joy, sadness, fear and anger, these do not have clear, specific elicitors. Self-conscious emotions require classes of events that can be identified only by the individuals themselves. Their elicitation "involves elaborate cognitive processes that have, at their heart, the notion of self..." (p. 563). "Self-conscious evaluative emotions first involve a set of standards, rules or goals (SRGs). These SRGs are inventions of the culture that are transmitted to children and involve their learning of, and willingness to consider, these SRGs as their own" (p. 564). Secondly, there is self-evaluation of one's actions in regard to these SRGs.

Guilt and Shame

Often guilt and shame are confused conceptually. Though both guilt and shame are self-conscious emotions, there are significant theoretical differences between the two. Guilt arises from behaviour and shame from one's sense of self.

In guilt one believes one has done something wrong. It is related to behaviour and is accompanied by feelings of regret and negative self-evaluation and a desire for atonement. One berates oneself for what one has done. Guilt, thus, is related to one's action and not to the whole self. It is a specific and focused response to a moral transgression. The sense of transgression is stronger when one feels one has wronged or harmed an innocent other. There is no need for actual transgression for one to experience guilt, a fantasised wrong is sufficient (Lazarus, 1991; Lewis, 1993).

Shame, on the other hand, has to do with how one feels about oneself. Shame involves a sense of inadequacy, a feeling one has blundered, and is accompanied by embarrassment and wish to disappear, not to be seen. One feels disgraced especially in the eyes of someone whose opinion is very important. The core relational theme, the central meaning and harm-benefit appraisal pattern, in shame is failure to live up to an ego-ideal. Shame is an insult to one's self-image (Lazarus, 1991).

In guilt the cognitive-attributional process focuses on the action of the self while in shame the focus is on the totality of the self. Moreover, since in guilt the focus is on the specific, individuals are able to rid themselves of this emotional state through corrective action. Consequently the intensity of the negative emotion in guilt is less than in shame and more capable of dissipation. However, if one is not able to take corrective action to repair the transgression or its consequences, the guilt experience can be converted into one of shame (Lewis, 1993).

In guilt one fears punishment; in shame one fears exposure, alienation and rejection.

Roots of Guilt

Although there are many sources of guilt, they can all be subsumed under one major dynamic, namely, violation of a personal standard. One judges oneself as having done something that leads to a sense of badness which lowers self-esteem. This sense of badness is also accompanied by a fear or expectation of punishment and a feeling that one should make retribution (Rando, 1993). Not only does one feel accountable for the transgression, but also believes that it was in one's power to have acted otherwise and that one should have. "The core relational theme for guilt is self-blame for a moral transgression, even though it may have occurred only in fantasy or imagination" (Lazarus, 1993, p. 32).

Psychoanalytic Understanding

The personal standards whose violation leads to guilt derive from the super ego–the mechanism by which the standards of the parents are incorporated into the self, specifically via the child's fear that the parents will respond to transgression, particularly to their hostile and sexual impulse gratification, by withdrawal of love or even by punishment. The stronger the superego injunctions, the greater the feelings of guilt. This is the psychoanalytic understanding of the source of guilt (Freud 1961; Lazarus, 1991; Lewis, 1993)

For Freud, guilt is "The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it" and which "expresses itself as a need for punishment" (1961). In infancy, guilt arises from fear of an authority, and particularly the fear of loss of love of that authority figure. Later,

it results from the fear of the super ego— the internalised parental injunctions in childhood and in later development the internalised societal injunctions. For this, the structure of the superego has to achieve a certain level of maturity that will evoke conflict between it and the ego. Freud equated the superego with the conscience.

Freud (1961) fixed the origin of guilt from the evolutionary perspective in the Oedipus Complex – the inherited desire to kill the father to possess the love of the mother: "We cannot get away from the assumption," Freud asserted, "that man's sense of guilt springs from the Oedipus Complex and was acquired at the killing of the father by the brothers banded together" (p. 78). In this view, it is the aggressive impulse, even if not acted out, directed against the father that is the source of guilt. An action carried out or merely intended can produce guilt.

Freud considered guilt to be a neurotic obsession rather than a reality-based self perception. It remains to a large extent unconscious, appearing as a sort *malaise,* an underlying dissatisfaction.

A real transgression evokes not guilt, but remorse: "When one has a sense of guilt after having committed a misdeed, and because of it, the feeling should more properly be called remorse. It relates only to a deed that has been done..." (1961, p. 79). In the case of remorse, the feeling of guilt makes itself clearly perceptible to consciousness. For Freud, guilt due to remorse, though frequent and important in its consequences, is outside the purview of psychoanalysis.

For religiously oriented persons, the superego injunctions exert a greater force, and consequently, they experience guilt more intensely: "For the more virtuous a man is, the more severe and distrustful is its [superego's] behaviour, so that ultimately it is precisely those people who have carried saintliness furthest who reproach themselves with the worst sinfulness" (Freud, 1961, p. 73)

Erik Erikson (1950/1963; 1959/1980) expanded the Freudian psychoanalytic understanding of guilt by adding psychosocial elements to the psychosexual. Erikson counterpoised guilt against initiative at stage 3 (Locomotor-Genital) of his eight-stage developmental framework. For Erikson guilt at this stage is not just about the forbidden sexual desires and impulses that make up the Oedipal Complex. He

posited guilt in the broader context of the child's new capacities as well, such as for independent and vigorous movement; for language and imagination; for aggressive play and experimentation; and the child's new motivational drives such as struggles for autonomy over parental figures, and conflict between defiance and obedience in interpersonal relationships. Guilt arises when the child's initiatives are met with disapproval or ridicule.

Guilt in Grief and Mourning

Guilt is one of the emotional areas in which one can most commonly get trapped in the grieving process (Tatelbaum, 1980). Guilt is often the result of anger and ambivalence that a survivor feels following the death of a loved one (Rando, 1993). In complicated mourning, guilt can take destructive dimensions.

Suicidal thoughts are quite common during grieving the death of someone, especially when the death was sudden or unexpected. Often suicidal ideation and attempts result from excessive guilt and serve as self-punishment. It is very easy for the survivor to turn any thought or feeling into guilt. One can feel guilty about things done or undone, words spoken or unspoken, and even about thoughts one entertained in regard to the dead person. One can feel guilty for not feeling what one believes is to be an appropriate level of sadness. Survivors tend to recall everything negative on their part in their relationship and fail to remember their more positive contributions.

Guilt can arise if one feels some relief at the death of the loved one for some reason or other. Especially in cases where the person might have been in someway a burden, or the relationship had been a difficult or conflicted one, death sometimes can be a relief. This feeling of relief then can turn to guilt. One blames oneself for such feelings, considering them as expressions of disloyalty or lack of love.

Many kinds of unfinished business with the deceased person can appear later in the form of guilt, in the form of "if only's" and "should haves." Survivors can torment themselves endlessly with these unfinished issues. This is especially true in regard to the feeling "if only" they had done something or refrained from doing something they could have somehow prevented their loved one from dying. They burden

ourselves with unnatural responsibility for the death, convinced that their behaviour would have altered reality. (Rando, 1993; Tatelbaum, 1980; Worden, 1982).

Often people who have survived others in similar circumstances, such as the concentration camp, or atomic bombing, or even an accident, feel guilty because they survived, and others did not.

Guilt and Depression

Guilt has its painful and dysfunctional consequences. Guilt is often a major contributor to depression (*DSM_IV*, American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Preoccupations or ruminations over minor past failings are common among individuals who are depressed. They consider their condition as punishment for some wrong done in the past or something for which they feel they are to be blamed. Often their feelings of guilt are baseless, excessive and/or inappropriate. Their guilt may reach delusional proportions.

Guilt is the symptom that most discriminates between anxiety states and major depressive states (Bech, 1992). Individuals who are anxious do not experience guilt, while for depressed individuals guilt is a major source of distress and worry.

Guilt and Prosocial Behaviour

Guilt feelings can cause considerable pain and distress, and some people suffer needlessly from excessive and unreasonable guilt. However guilt also has its benefits. For example, guilt can make people behave in socially appropriate ways. As Lazarus & Lazarus (1994) pointed out,

guilt can be a very useful emotion because it helps promote socially desirable behaviour. In short, guilt is a prosocial emotion. It does this because we learn to avoid socially forbidden actions to avoid guilt feelings and social criticism or rejection. If members of society want to behave well, there is less need to police their actions compared with those who care little about social morality. People with strong guilt feelings are good to have around because they are more apt than others to be fair in their dealings. If they are extremely upright, however,

they may constrain the extent to which others could indulge themselves in disapproved pleasures. (p. 56)

In his exploration of human evil, Baumeister (1997; Baumeister, Stillwell & Heatherton, 1994) also addressed the issue of guilt. He too found a prosocial (interpersonal) benefit arising from guilt. One source of guilt is empathic consideration: the degree of guilt is often proportional to how much one cares for people. The other source, very much in keeping with the psychoanalytic understanding, is fear of losing relationships. Guilt, evoked by empathic concern and fear of losing relationships, can lead one to refrain from committing evil and to make reparation for past evil. Guilt helps to restore and strengthen the bonds between people.

Absence of Guilt

While excessive guilt causes much distress and anxiety, the inability to feel guilt too has its pathological consequences. Lack of guilt is a prominent feature of the antisocial personality disorder (*DSM-IV*, APA, 1994; Sperry, 1995). Because of the absence of guilt feelings, these individuals, usually labelled psychopaths, are much more likely than the general public to break the rules and laws of society, and to perpetrate evil. They lie, cheat and steal without any scruple. They are deceitful and manipulative. They repeatedly fail to honour their obligations. They manifest reckless disregard for the feelings, needs, rights and safety of others. They can be callous and sadistic to an extreme degree, engage in criminal activities and feel no remorse. It is not uncommon to find such antisocial and sadistic personalities even among professional religious who are normally expected to be benign and empathetic.

Sin, Guilt and Scrupulosity

Very many religiously inclined individuals suffer from scrupulosity — an excessive and inappropriate preoccupation with sin and guilt. Such preoccupation is sometimes severe enough to be labelled Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (DSM-IV, APA, 1994). These individuals tend to be over conscientious and excessively moralistic.

Even when they intellectually pay lip service to an unconditionally loving God, deep down scrupulous individuals experience God as

punitive, as one who would not brook even the slightest moral failure. Hence their energies are devoted to the avoidance of sin, and in case they sin, they are plagued by thoughts of punishment, and despairing of forgiveness.

This scrupulosity is more especially experienced in regard to sexuality. As psychiatrist Paul Tournier (1966) has observed, many people regard sin that has to do with sex as being in a class by itself, a sin that is outside the pale of forgiveness. They interpret as sinful many normal human experiences. As an example, a religious woman was extremely scrupulous in regard to sexuality. On one occasion when touching her breasts while showering she experienced some sexual pleasure. She felt she had committed a serious sin and was convinced that God would never forgive her and that her religious life had become a lie. That pathological feeling of guilt haunted her and influenced her subsequent life style and spirituality.

The negative images of God instilled in childhood and a sexually repressed environment which presents even slightest experience of sexual pleasure as a grave sin have been the cause of much human misery, especially among religiously oriented individuals. These individuals experience excessivè guilt feelings because of their internalised images of a punitive God. Fear of sin and the consequent punishment exerts a tyrannical influence on them. They live a very controlled existence and are chronically anxious and tense.

"A real sin" observed psychiatrist Paul Tournier (1966), "can lead a person to the liberating experience of grace, whereas a fictitious sin, a suggested guilt, has no such religious result" (p. 154). Instead, it blocks the action of grace.

Conclusion

Psychology has shown some aversion to the exploration of sin. A major reason for this is psychology's desire to separate itself from religion and theology. Another is the desire to be recognised as a scientific discipline. However, some attention has been given to the exploration of sin's twin brother, evil, particularly in Jungian psychology. Guilt is a favourite theme in psychoanalysis. Theory and research in grief and mourning give considerable attention to guilt.

While excessive and inappropriate guilt can result in depression, a lack of guilt can lead to the formation of the antisocial personality. While a healthy sense of guilt has prosocial benefits, inappropriate guilt leads to scrupulosity, a psychological and spiritual disorder that is destructive to the life of the soul.

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JPJRS 11/2 ISSN 0972-33315. July 2008 27-39

Sin and Some Contemporary Western Philosophers

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Introduction

"Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion"[1]. These sobering words of Vatican II afford us plenty of food for thought.

In traditional circles, 'atheist' was taken to be synonymous with an evil person. Recall the words of that character in Dostoevsky's epic *The Brothers Karamazov,* who affirms, "If God did not exist, anything would be permitted." The drama of atheistic humanism[2] assures us that atheists can be very moral people, indeed. As a matter of fact, atheists like Camus (whose views we will be going into a moment) might even say that religious belief is, if anything, 'an easy way out', in the face of the contemporary disturbing scenario. In other words, some people are atheists because they want to follow higher and nobler values. This, at least, is how they would see it.

In this brief paper, I want to examine how some well-known contemporary atheists have a place for moral life and nobler values and how they even entertain some kind of concept of sin, even though they would never employ the term. I'll take some representatives of the atheistic trend in Existentialism and Postmodernism that are not yet spent forces by a long chalk!

A. Some Existentialists

Existentialism is not necessarily atheist. Even Sartre recognized Marcel and Jaspers as religious believers[3], but when he went on to claim Heidegger as a fellow-atheist[4], the latter was swift and peremptory in his rejection of that name[5]. We'll come back to Sartre in a moment.

Albert Camus (1913-1960)

Algerian born, Camus fought his way to the top of the literary world from very humble, impoverished beginnings, winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. If the whole western world mourned his death in a road accident barely three years later, it was not merely because he was so young and gifted. Rather, people had come to see, in his writings, a certain nobility of spirit and a courageous resolve against totalitarianism, injustice and those perplexities that seemed to be clouding up people's horizons everywhere. Some would even go as far as to brand him 'an atheist saint'.

Now, from one point of view, this is all rather odd. After all, the works of the atheistic Camus represent a rather dark and hopeless kind of pessimism, a pessimism that stems from the fact that the world is basically meaningless and ruthless, for there is no God, no guiding spirit that is able to bring a sense of overall purposivenss into the sorry scheme of things. Everything is ruled by a 'cruel mathematics' whereby the forces of injustice and hatred are numerically stronger and more powerful than those of justice and love; hence, in the last analysis, all that is good and true and beautiful will be swallowed up in a vast all destroying barbarism and chaos will exult in a mocking *danse macabre* on the graves of all utopian dreams and plans.

But now comes the greatness of Camus' vision. Precisely because there is no God to fight on our side, precisely because there is no retributive afterlife to restore some semblance of balance in things, precisely for these reasons, it is humans who must boldly and defiantly strike a blow for harmony and peace...even if we know this would ultimately be a forlorn and futile gesture. Humans must not cow before the 'Absurd'. Since there is no God to take care of the 'little ones', the poor, the widow, the dispossessed and the orphan, *I* must: there is no one else; this recalls those disturbing words of Levinas, which would

come much later: 'we are all responsible (for each other), but I most of all.' Derrida was to avow that these words made him tremble in fear.

The Stranger (1942) and *The Fall* (1957) with their long monologues could hardly be cited as evidence in favour of such a vision, though some critics have tried hard to do so. It was rather novels, like *The Plague* (1947), and reflective pieces like *The Rebel* (1951) and *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), which advocated it so powerfully and compellingy. One could see in Dr. Rieux, who alone struggles to assist the plague-stricken people, not having much to offer and knowing that he is fighting a losing battle (even if he is able to somehow save them from the clutches of the fatal illness, isn't he but postponing the inevitable – death?), as a symbol of, or a spokesperson for, Camus? When asked why he does all this self-sacrificing noble service, since he doesn't believe in God or eternal reward, his answer – in a nutshell – is that is precisely the reason he does this. This is all the life we have and there is no God to come to our aid, so it's up to us to do the best we can to make the *lacryma rerum* a little more bearable, a little less agonising[6]. And it is in his provocative and challenging reflection on *The Rebel* that Camus points out that the most radical of all is the 'metaphysical rebel'[7] – the one who revolts against the whole metaphysical order of the Absurd. For Camus, the human person must not capitulate before the Absurd, humans must not be abandoned to their pitiful metaphysical condition. Even if it's an 'unbeatable foe' that we know we are fighting, we still must fight. In the last analysis, it is Sisyphus[8] who emerges as our model, the symbol of the indomitable human spirit that labours on to realise a goal that he knows he will never be able to achieve, yet he sees that surrender would be the greatest defeat of all. As long as we battle on, the Absurd cannot claim to have won.

Sin, then, in Camus vocabulary (though he spells it out in so many terms) would be to turn one's back on the struggle against injustice, hypocrisy and tyranny. Sin is to throw in the sponge and surrender before the forces of evil and destruction arrayed against us. Virtue would be to fight on the last, to go down fighting before an invincible foe, to deny to Evil the satisfaction of hearing my admission to defeat. This is assuredly a noble vision – something that could, at times, make us alleged religious believers ashamed to think of how easily we get

discouraged. I think this is akin to Bonhoeffer's calling us to 'live before God as if there were no God'[9].

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

Jean-Paul Sartre became something of a cult figure in the 1960s. Frequenting the famous bistro Aux Deux Magots, just opposite the church of Ste. Germaine des Pres, along with Simone de Beauvoir, and enjoying the adulation he received from leftist student groups in the heady days of 'May 68'. When Gabriel Marcel learnt that Sartre had purloined the term existentialism to describe his rather dogmatic atheistic nihilism (Marcel had coined the term to indicate the focus of his own manner of thinking), Marcel dropped the word and declared that he should be called a 'christian socratist'. He had no wish to have his views classified under the same rubric of his contemporary, Sartre.

I have qualified Sartre's brand of atheism (and nihilism) as dogmatic. In doing this I am not overlooking the somewhat questionable metaphysics he proffers us in *Being and Nothingness*[10]. There, quite arbitrarily he tells us that there are but two types of beings in his ontology – *être en soi* (being in itself) and *être pour-soi* (being for itself). The former comprises all those beings that are objects (as opposed to conscious subjects – which are *être pour-soi*). The former imply a certain fixity, no scope for spontaneity, freedom or development: these are static beings. They *are*: they have attained a certain stability and state of finishedness. Subjects (*être pour-soi*) are not so much being but *becoming*: they are dynamic. Since they have no fixed nature, they must 'make themselves'. Since they have no in-written or preordained nature they must freely decide what they want to be, through their carefully chosen actions.

Thus, in one fell (and whimsically arbitrary) swoop, Sartre has defined God out of existence. Because for God to exist, he would have to combine in himself two impossible sets of qualities. He would have to be conscious (*être pour-soi*) as well as stable – for inasmuch as he would have to be a perfect being, God would be incapable of further development – and that would make him an *être en-soi*. But by decree of the *Maître*, Jean-Paul Sartre, all that is must be either *en-soi* or *pour-soi*: you can't have it both ways. So God can't exist. Q.E.D.!

Denis O'Brien has interestingly called Sartre 'the first serious atheist of the Christian tradition'[11]. Atheists there had been before Sartre, but each had invariably come up with an alternative to function as a kind of Supreme Being and give meaning and value to life and existence: nature, humanity, the State, Love and so on. But Sartre is quite adamant: only a Necessary being could give life a meaning, a purpose and a significance. In the face of that absence, we must admit that life is meaningless, absurd and pointless.

The consequence of this is a terrible and frightening sense of loneliness and abandonment. As Orestes, in *The Flies,* puts it: " . . . alone, like a leper. I felt all alone, in the middle of my benign little world, like someone who has lost his shadow'[12]. Or, as Matthieu cries out, in *The Reprieve*, "Cast out. Cast out of the world. Cast out from the past. Cast out from my own past."[13]

But suddenly there appears what seems to be a ray of hope. True, all is contingent and absurd, neither humans nor sub-humans have any essence which might justify their existence. Yet, as the same Orestes, observes in an initially exuberant moment of discovery, "I am free...freedom has broken upon me like a thunderbolt." More soberly (and, hence, all the more alarmingly), Sartre declares in his 800-page 'phenomenological ontology', *Being and Nothingness*, 'I am my liberty'[14]. (Emphasis added). As he goes on to clarify it: "freedom coincides at its roots with the non-being which is at the heart of man"[15]. At every moment it is our responsibility to invent values and give meaning to a meaningless world. The terrifying thing is that each of us must do this in isolation, without seeking for guidelines or essences: there aren't any.

So relentless and so exhausting are the demands of the responsibility of freedom that most of us abdicate this burden and, to make matters worse, trot out all manner of bogus justifications and excuses to cover up our cowardice. This is what Sartre calls *mauvaise foi* (literally, bad faith, that is, insincerity or hypocrisy) and this, according to me, is Sartrean sin!

Freedom brings anxiety (*angoisse*) and this is a terrifying onus: we must choose, we don't know how to choose (for there are no criteria to guide us) and every choice we make somehow suggests to others

that they follow our example (they shouldn't, but humans being such...). Anxiety upsets us and 'we can only escape this upsetting thought by a kind of bad faith'[16].

Now the most common loophole out of which to construct our insincere escapes from the burden of freedom is through human relationships. We imagine we have found our meaning in life through friendship or love affairs. But, given the Sarteran understanding of freedom, all interpersonal relationships are doomed or, to be more precise, totally impossible. Given the fact that each person is freedom, when two people meet two independent worlds collide. The only way for relationships to succeed in such a context is for one freedom to capitulate before the other (or be annihilated by it). In other words, as Sartre likes to put it, every friendship is either a disguised form of sadism or of masochism. If one allows the others freedom to eclipse or suffocate one's own, he is masochist (claiming to have found meaning in self-immolation); if one simply goes ahead and dominates and destroys another's freedom or self, he is a sadist (claiming to have found fulfilment in the destruction of another). The first are cowards (*lâches*) for they give way before the other; the latter are bastards (*salauds*) because they have no scruples about overwhelming and wiping out their 'friend'! "Those who will hide, either with full intent or by pleas of determinism, their total liberty, I call cowards. Those who try to show their existence was necessary, though contingence envelopes the appearance of man on the earth, I call bastards."[17]

There is no way out of *mauvaise foi* in Sartre's philosophy. Once you grant him his questionable understanding of freedom, a monstrous thing. For Sartre freedom exists as long as I say, "No!". once I say 'Yes!' I have lost my freedom. Sarterean sin could also be defined as the act of saying, 'yes'. Thus freedom, for Sartre, isolates us from each other more and more. As someone in his controversial play *Huis Clos*[18] puts it, "*L'enfer c'est l'autre*!' (Hell is the Other). Paul Ricoeur offers us a valuable corrective, here: he reminds us that ours is an incarnate freedom; it is rooted (like us) in the world and, though it is a genuine freedom, it cannot be totally independent of nature and nurture, heredity and environment[19]. Indeed, the climatic act of freedom is to say a humble 'yes' in an authentic community. Only when we can do that do we really attain the fullness of freedom.

B: Postmodernism

At the outset, let me observe, in passing, that there is no hyphen in *postmodernism*, unlike post-colonialism, post-industrialism and similar indicates some measure of temporal posterity: for instance, post-colonialism implies a time when colonialism was dead and buried and post-industrialism implies that post-industrialism entered the scene after industrialism had breathed its last. Postmodernism, however, points to an attitude, a climate of thinking, that had its origins prior to modernism and often ran concurrent with it.

The name *modernism* is associated with Descartes and those of his ilk who came, more or less, after the Enlightenment of fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe. They wanted to distinguish themselves from the 'Dark' or 'Middle' Ages, which they tended to disparage as dominated by superstition and intolerance. The great redeeming feature of their times, of which many 'moderns' were immensely proud, was that the age of science, of experiement and observation, was part of their era. René Descartes (1596 – 1650) was the father of rationalism: reason, not faith, would be *the* characteristic of the next two centuries. Science, not philosophy or theology (or religion), would offer humans a solution for all their ills, and it would be the scientist who would take over the role of the priest as humankind's great liberating figure.

We were not long into the next two centuries – the nineteenth and the twentieth – than a series of events added fuel to the fires of doubt and suspicion with which many had begun to view proud reason and the apparently tall claims of science. Some form of anti-rationalism has always been part and parcel of human history and postmodernism was its legitimate offspring. A number of developments in science suddenly made it abundantly clear that reason had its limitations (some would even call it a fraud) and scientists were forced to admit that they weren't so cocksure of their findings. Einstein's Theory of Relativity, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Theory, Quantum Mechanics and a host of other scientific breakthroughs seemed to expose the hollowness of the pretensions of pure reason and the until-then epistemological certainties that had been trundled out by the scientist began to totter and collapse. Post-modernism could now take centre stage: no longer had it to be content with the role of an irritable gadfly, sitting in the wings or haunting the background. No discipline can give us certainty

it began to proclaim, loudly and boldly: neither philosophy nor religion, not even science. Everything is up for grabs, everything is relative.

Postmodernism was first bandied about as a very moral attitude. It was touted as the great philosophy of liberation that all oppressed minorities had been waiting for. The main thesis of one of its most prophetic voices, whose *The Postmodern Condition*[20] – often hailed as 'the Bible of Postmodernism' – was that "postmodernism is nothing more than incredulity towards mentanarratives". This term which its creator Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924 – 1998) bequeathed to posterity and was snapped up by social activists and would be liberators everywhere referred to any universal or grand theory that was put forward as a kind of universal panacea to the human condition, irrespective of time and place: Christianity, Marxism, Islam, Humanism and so on. Lyotard's anti-authoritarianism and anti-foundationalism are all the more evident by the way he presented the legitimation of power and authority in his work. Contrary to the popular conviction, he pointed out, metanarratives justified their position not so much by argumentation and proof based on pure reason – as was claimed and believed – but simply by the manipulation of money and power: capitalism and weapons of mass destruction. Yes, America with its almighty dollars and ranking as the world's only superpower was the villain of the piece. Conquerors wrote the first colonial histories and presented themselves as doing a favour to the natives they brought under their sway, depicting them as immoral and uncultured savages to whom they brought the benefits of religion and civilisation. The Great White Mother – England, France, Spain, Holland or Portugal – would bleed exploit indigenous people and, to add insult to injury, would say that all this was for their own good.

Postmodernism sought to unveil the hypocrisy and unjust structures upon which international set-ups were built and, as anyone who knows the history of colonised nations and their colonial masters, will agree, it was easy to find abundant evidence in favour of this hypothesis. Many fledgling liberative movements – those concerning women[21], homosexuals[22] and indigenous people[23] found the words of Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard a kind of shot-in-the-arm to revitalise their membership and activities. The great 'sin' that post-modernism was so boldly and cleverly laying bare was what we might call 'structural

sin' those unjust structures and false values upon which international and intra-national networks are built and which serve as effective and efficient brakes for the development of oppressed people, ensuring that the dominant groups maintain successfully their stranglehold on world economy and culture, while yet posing as the great and universal benefactors of the human race.

But suddenly, all the hope and promise turned to dust and ashes. Oppressed minorities, rejuvenated at first by the insights and encouraging message of postmodernism, suddenly found that their would-be champions had pulled away the carpet under their feet and they were lying abandoned once again. And this for metaphysical and epistemological reasons. They had trained their guns so successfully on the inadequacies of Cartesian reason and Cartesian subjectivism – caricatures of the genuine article, if ever there were such – that a most destructive and nihilistic relativism (which Benedict XVI is ever inveighing against) and splintering fragmentation could only result. If everything is equally true (or false) and there is no way to establish any criteria of truth or beauty or morality, what other way would there be to win an argument but brute force and capital? Which reinstates the very people and forces we had begun to campaign against. And if there is nothing that can have universal application (because any common human nature or whatever would partake of a metanarrative) then no group – be it women, dalits or homosexuals – could have any basis to rally around and unite themselves about. Nor could one explain why democracy should seek to overthrow racism or male chauvinism: there is no criterion to decide which is bad and which is good.

All this is not to deny the fact that postmodernism has some very salutary truths for all of us to reflect upon. Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984) showed, through his painstaking research on hospitals and the way they work, how there is some amount of truth in his startling assertion that humans have a morbid fascination for locking some target people up and spying upon their behaviour[24]. Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004) showed that many of our dogmatic and glib assertions are based on false value, 'constructs' that very often can be dismantled into nigh nothingness, as one goes on peeling an onion[25]. Jean Baudrillard (1929 -), for all his shallow eclecticism, has forcibly brought to our attention how the media is making an artificial world (simulacra) replace the

real world for many unthinking and uncritical people[26]. All these contemporary sins of our IT world need to be highlighted, lest we barter away our liberty for a mess of pottage and cheap bagatelle. Every error is an exaggerated truth!

Conclusion

We have exposed how some contemporary philosophers view the human construct of evil and injustice in the world – 'sin' for them. I have deliberately confined myself to the more striking insights of atheistic thinkers to show that the traditional identification of the atheist with immorality is as foolish and out-dated as the equally traditional equation of religious belief with naivety and ignorance . This may now be something of a hackneyed truism but for all that it keeps coming back in a myriad of guises so it is not out of place to repeat it.

The proper response to the deficiencies of Cartesian modernism is not the response of the extreme view of postmodernism, but a rehabilitation of authentic reason as per the work of Habermas[27] as well as that of authentic subjectivism as per the research of Ken Wilber[28]. I have delved deep enough into this elsewhere and this is neither the time nor the place to rehearse that effort[29].

Notes and References

1 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 19. Its official Latin title is Gaudium et Spes and it was voted through by the Council Fathers on December 7, 1965, at St. Peter's under the papacy of Paul VI.

2 This is the title of the famous work by Henri de Lubac, sj (transl. by Edith M. Riley, New Work, Sheed & Ward, 1950). Though written long before the age of the dialogue launched by Vatican II, it is both a critical and sympathetic study and acknowledges that atheists 'even at their most blasphemous...advance criticisms whose justice (the Christian) is bound to admit.' (cf. the Preface)

3 In his Existentialism and Humanism (trsl. Bernard Frechtman), New York, the Philosophical Library, 1957). This is the text of a lecture given in 1946, short and to the point. The French title reads Existentialism is a Humanism and better expresses the intent of Sartre as regards this work: a response to his critics who had dubbed his brand of existentialism anti-human.

4 Ibid

5 This was and over hasty conclusion drawn from Heidegger's Sein und Zeit, published just the year before Sartre's Existentialism and Humanism. In his Letter on Humanism Heidegger points out that in the work referred to he had neither affirmed nor denied God. He goes on to write, 'thus it is not only rash but also an error in procedure to maintain that the interpretation of the essence of man from the relation of his essence to the truth of Being is atheism". And he reminds us that he had said the same thing in his The Essence of Reasons (trsl. Terrence Mallick), Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1969: the German original dates from 40 years earlier!

6 Albert Camus, The Plague (trsl. Stuart Gilbert), New York. Alfred A. Kopf Inc., 1948.

7 Cf. his The Rebel (trsl. Anthony Power, with a Preface by Sir Herbert Read), New York, Alfred A. Kopf Inc., 1958.

8 Cf. his The Myth of Sisyphus (trsl. Justin O'Brien), New York, Alfred A. Kopf Inc., 1955.

9 Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (ed. Eberhard Bethge; trsl. Reginald Fuller), London: SCM Press, 1967 (3rd ed.). in this controversial work, Bonhoeffer urges the prophetic person to 'live before God as if there were no God' or, as he puts it in Latin 'etsi Deus non daretur': meaning, at least, according to my reading – that when we speak up or act for justice, we should not expect God to intervene to save us or make our sufferings any less, when the powers that be attack us, torture us and, perhaps even, put us to a terrible and lonely death. Though we live, in faith, 'before God', in the hour of crisis we should not be scandalised if God does not come to deliver us: at such times we have to live 'as if there were no God'. This means that, in practice, Bonhoeffer's prophet and Camus' rebel, at the existential level, experience the same situation, phenomenologically speaking.

10 (trsl. Hazel Barnes), New York, Washington Square Press, 1967. As everyone knows, a more readable (and shorter!) version of this tome is Sartre's La Nausee, Paris, Gallimard, 1938 (which somewhat predated the more abstract work).

11 In an interesting article in Commonweal, July 4, 1980.

12 Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit and Three Other Plays (trsl. Stuart Gilbert and others), New York, Random House, Vintage Books, 1949. One of the 'Other Plays' printed here is The Flies, which dates from 1943 – during the Nazi occupation of Paris – and uses the myth of Orestes to propound Sartre's views on freedom.

13 Jean-Paul Sartre, The Reprieve (trsl. Eric Sutton). Hammondsworth, Penguins, 1970. This is the second volume of a trilogy – the first part is entitled

The Age of Reason and the last Iron in the Soul. Begun in 1945, it is a study of the life of Matthieu Delarue, a hero who emerges from the back streets of Paris and is slowly drawn into the awesomeness of commitment when World War II breaks out and France faces war and ignoble defeat. Matthieu and his friends keep hoping that war will be averted and they'd be spared from having to make terrible commitments, but this is not to be.

14 Being and Nothingness.

15 Ibid

16 In Existentialism and Humanism.

17 Ibid.

18 Cf. No Exit and Three Other Plays. Another English translation of the same play calls it In Camera.

19 Paul Ricoeur, Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary (trasl. Erazim Kohak), Evanstion, Northwestern University Press, 1965. The last chapter is especially relevant, in this connection.

20 In 1979, the University of Quebec commissioned him to write La Condition Postmoderne, which was republished in English as The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, in 1984.

21 Women's Liberation activists were among the first to turn to postmodernism to recharge their arsenal. Almost all of them are French nationals. There is Julia Kristeva (Bulgarian born), Luce Irigay, Helene Cixous.

22 Michel Foucault was homosexual, himself. Though openly gay within his own circle, he never really 'came out of the closest' to the public at large. He was quite active in gay politics, but was never strident about it. When he died in 1984 his family, at first, refused to admit that he had succumbed to AIDS.

23 The most famous of all these was Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian activist. Cf., especially his Things Fall Apart.24 When on a stint teaching French at Upsala, Sweden, he chanced upon a library of medical works from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. Thence he gathered most of the material he would use in his later writings on the history of the hospitals in general and of how we treat 'insane' and 'abnormal' persons. His 600-page study Folie et deraison was published in 1961, followed by two volumes in 1984. The English title was Madness and Civilisation. The next study came out in 1963. The English title is The Birth of the Clinic and has the sub-title "The Archaeology of the Medical Gaze". "This book", Foucault informs us in the opening pages, "is about space, about language and about death; it is about the act of seeing the gaze." In short, it treats about our alleged morbid fascination to lock up deviants and then watch how they behave –

culminating in the panopticum, the all-seeing eye, which contemporary technology makes possible.

25 This is a fair image of Derrida's process of deconstruction.

26 Baudrillard takes delight in coming out with all manner of outlandish and shocking phrases, such as "The Gulf War Never Took Place!" What he means is that the Gulf War that we know if is what CNN and the media showed us: a far cry from the real thing. Again, he tells us that the great myth of "The American Way of Life" is only incarnate in Disneyland!

27 Juergen Hebarmas of the Frankfurt school, great rehabilitator of Reason against the caricature of it by Descartes and the attacks on it by the postmodernists who, unkeknowst to them were but flinging stones at a caricature of it, which is what the Cartesian version of it was!

28 The Chicagoan Ken Wilbur is an excellent rehabilitat or of the authentic human subject, from the ravages of Descartes.

29 I would refer the interested reader to my Postmodernism, Pune, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001 where, making use of both Habermas and Wilber, I have a critique of the postmodern thinkers and a summary of what we can gain from them in the last chapter.

JPJRS 11/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2008 40-59

The Meaning and Function of Sin in the Islamic World-view

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Introduction

Sin is a term used mainly in a religious context to describe an act that violates a moral code, or the state of having committed such a violation. Commonly, the moral code of conduct is decreed by a divine entity. The root meaning of the English word ***sin*** is actually, "He is guilty as charged." This in turn implies that the person committing the offence knew, or ought to have known, that his act would be an offence before he committed it. This word actually captures the meaning that many religious traditions ascribe to sin. Sin is often used to mean an action that is prohibited or considered wrong; in some religions (notably in some Christian sects) sin can refer to a state of mind rather than a specific action. Colloquially, any thought, word, or act considered immoral, shameful, harmful, or alienating might be termed "sinful".

Buddhism does not recognise the idea behind sin because in Buddhism, instead, there is a "Cause-Effect Theory", known as Karma, or action. In general, Buddhism, illustrates intentions as the cause of Karma, either good or bad. Furthermore, most thoughts in any being's mind can be negative. Vipaka, the result of one's Karma, may create low quality living, hardships, destruction and all means of disharmony in life and it may create healthy living, easiness, and harmony in life. Good deeds produce good results while bad deeds produce bad results. Karma and Vipaka are one's action and its result. Panchasila is the fundamental code of Buddhist ethics, willingly undertaken by lay followers of Gautama Buddha. It is a basic understanding of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is a Buddhist teaching on ways to stop suffering. Sin is a concept used primarily in the Abrahamic religions, (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) describing a transgression against the will of God, which calls for repentance and at times penance. Judaism regards

the breaking of the commandments or the Jewish Law to be a sin. Judaism teaches that sin is an act, and not a state of being. Humankind was not created with an inclination to do evil, but has that inclination "from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). People do have the ability to master this inclination (Genesis 4:7) and choose good over evil (Psalm 37:27). Judaism uses the term "sin" to include violations of the Jewish law that are not necessarily a lapse in morality. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, "Man is responsible for sin because he is endowed with free will ("behirah"); yet he is by nature frail, and the tendency of the mind is to evil: "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. Viii, 21; Yoma 20a; Sanhy. 105a). Therefore God in His mercy allowed people to repent and be forgiven". [1] The Jews believe that all people sin at various points in their lives, and hold that the divine justice is tempered with divine mercy. According to them, a state of sin does not condemn a person to damnation; only one or two truly grievous sins lead to anything like the Christian idea of hell. Their liturgy of "the Days of Awe" states that prayer, repentance and charity are the means of atonement for sin.

As for Protestant Christians use the term 'sin' primarily to refer to what they see as "humanity's inherently sinful nature". This is while the Catholics mostly use the word for actual instances of sin, calling "the sinful nature of humans" as concupiscence", in the sense of 'an innate tendency of human beings to do evil'. Most denominations of Christianity hold the belief that the sin of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God is passed on to their descendants and thus the whole humankind is accursed with that Original Sin, from which no salvation is possible unless one believes in the atoning death on the cross of the Son of God. The concept of sin in Islam is different from that in most, if not all other religions. According to Islam, a sin is an action which constitutes the violation of Islamic teachings. Any action or word, which runs counter to the will of Allah is a sin. In Islam, sin is simply an act, never a state of being. This essay will aim to bring out the meaning and function of sin in Islam.

Concept of Sin in Islam:

Foundational Motifs

The foundational source in the gradual codification of Islamic understanding of sin was the Muslim understanding and interpretations of the Quran and practices of Muhammad. Its meaning has always been in the context of active submission to God (Arabic: Allah), performed by the community in unison. The motif force in Islamic understanding of sin is the notion that every human being is called to "command the good and forbid the evil" in all spheres of life. Muslims understand the role of Muhammad as attempting to facilitate this submission. Another key factor in the field of Islamic understanding of sin is the belief that humankind has been granted the faculty to discern God's will and to abide by it. This faculty most crucially involves reflecting over the meaning of existence, which, as John Kelsay in the *Encyclopedia of Ethics* phrases, "ultimately points to the reality of God". Therefore, regardless of their environment, humans are believed to have a moral responsibility to submit to God's will and to follow Islam (Quran 7:172). Our discussion on the understanding of sin in Islam will follow this foundational motif.

Sin and Islam

To begin with, the Islamic concept of sin is similar to the Jewish view. In fact, the religion of Islam is the natural culmination of the progressive revelation of God from the very first prophet to the last one, Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, Islam believes in all the prophets of God, from Adam to Muhammad, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. According to the Islamic creed, the original religion taught by all these prophets was and is always Islam, which is the peaceful submission to the One and Only God. Thus, the concept of sin as taught by all the prophets of God ought to be the same. The closeness between Judaism and Islam in this regard is obvious; but in Christianity we find a great difference, which results from the influence of Saul of Tarsus, who is later known as St. Paul. He introduced into Christianity the ideas of 'God becoming a man' and 'God dying for the sins of humans'. Such concepts are entirely alien to the Semitic religious tradition and considered 'pagan', according to the Islamic view. Islam sees sin (dhanb, thanb) as anything that goes against the will of God. Another strong

word used to denote sin is *ma'siyah* which literally means transgression or disobedience. Anything that violates the commands of Allah is transgression or sin. According to Islamic theology unbelief and polytheism are the biggest of all sins. We have the ability to abide by His will and this is the meaning of the word Islam. Still we have the ability to ignore His will or deliberately oppose it due to the fact that God has given us freedom – though within limits. Islam is our conscious and peaceful submission to the will of Allah. The purpose of our existence as human beings is to worship and serve Allah – or to fulfil His will. A solid foundation of worshipping Allah is to show gratitude to Him for the great gifts He has granted us. Following this will bring us the greatest benefits in this life and the next. It is in trying to do this that our intentions are purified and it is by our intentions that we are judged. The Quran teaches that "the human soul is certainly prone to evil, unless the Lord does bestow His Mercy" and that even the prophets do not absolve themselves of blame (Quran 12:53).

In contrast to the traditional Christian teaching that human nature is basically evil owing to Original Sin, Islam teaches that human being is essentially good. There are many elements to human nature and each one has the potential to bring benefits. So there is no "Original Sin" in Islam. It is in this connection that Islam strongly rejects the idea of God begetting a son to redeem the world from the Original Sin. For Islam believes that God is one only; He does not beget, nor is He begotten; and there is no one like God. Hence, sin, from the point of Islam, is a conscious and wilful act that violates a commandment of God or the right of a fellow being. We cannot consider a person to be a sinner if he or she acts under duress or out of ignorance. For human accountability is an important aspect of justice as envisaged in Islam. No one can be truly held accountable for an action that he has no power to avoid. It is that when a human being contradicts God's commandments or His will, he commits sins. Islam teaches that sin is an avoidable act that harms the perpetrator's own soul. This means that there is no innate or inherited nature that prompts a person to disobey God. That is to say, it is a person's free choice whether to sin or not; and one's disposition to sin is only as much as, if not less than, their inclination to do well. Islam teaches that a person's motive should be taken into consideration when we judge his or her actions. We know that motive is something that is in the mind of the people and even if they speak out why they have acted in a particular

way, we have no means of verifying their claim. Adam committed such a sin, which led to his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. But Adam repented and prayed to God for forgiveness, which God granted him, as mentioned in Surah (Chapter) 2, verse (ayat) 35-37: "Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord turned towards him; for He is Oft-returning, Most Merciful". This means that unlike Christianity, which teaches that all the children of Adam are sinful because of Adam's sin, Islam teaches that all humans are innocent by birth and they become sinful only when they consciously commit a sin. Islam regards the concept of "original sin" and the need for atonement by God Himself – via dying on the Cross- as a pure invention of Christians. Adam and Eve lived and walked with God while in the Garden of Eden. When they disobeyed the commandment of God, they were denied access to the Garden and a personal relationship with God. The act of defiance by Adam and Eve changed humans' perception of reality. They now understood that they could act on their own and do exactly what they wanted. The act of disobedience caused an irrevocable change in the outlook of humans. It has nothing to do with punishing future children but the changing of reality.

Islam recognises five degrees of sin, in order of severity:

1. *Sayyia, khatia*: mistakes (Quran 7:168, 17:31, 40:45, 47:19, 48:2)
2. *Itada, junah, dhanb*: immoralilty (Quran 2:190, 17:17, 33:55)
3. *Haram:* transgressions (Quran 5:4, 6:146)
4. *Ithm, dhulam, fujur, su, sasad, fisk, kufr*: wickedness and depravity (Quran 2:99, 205, 4:50, 12:79, 38:62, 82:14)
5. *Shirk*: ascribing a partner to God (Quran 4:48)

There is considerable difference among scholars as to which sins are Al-Kaba'r (major sins). According to Sahih Bukhari there are seven Al-Kaba'r (major sins) according to this tradition.[2]

"Avoid the seven noxious things" – and after having said this, the prophet (saw) mentioned them: "associating anything with Allah; magic (Equivalent to Witchcraft and Sorcery); killing one whom Allah has declared inviolate without just cause, consuming the property of an orphan, devouring usury, turning back when the army advances, and

slandering chaste women who are believers but indiscreet."Abdullah ibn Abbas said: "Seventy is closer to their number than seven" [3]

It is believed that *Iblis* (Satan) has a significant role in tempting humankind towards sin. Thus, Islamic theology identifies and warns of an external enemy of humankind who leads humankind towards sin (Quran 7:27, 4:199, 3:55, 2:30, 7:11, 20:116). Muslims believe that Allah is angered by sin and punishes some sinners with the fires of *jahannam* (hell), but that He is also *ar-rahman* (the Merciful) and *al-ghaffar* (the Oft-Forgiving). It is believed that the *jahannam* fire has purification functionality and that after purification, an individual who has been condemned to enter *jahannam* is eligible to go to *jannah* (the Garden), if he "had an atom's worth of faith" Some Quranic commentaries such as Allameh Tabatabaei state that the fire is nothing but a transformed form of the human's sin itself:

"Those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans, eat up a Fire into their own bodies: They will soon be enduring a Blazing Fire!" (Quran 4:10).

"Those who conceal Allah's revelations in the Book (The Bible), and purchase for them a miserable profit – they swallow into themselves naught but Fire!" (Quran 2:174).

While discussing the concept of sin in Islam it has to be noted that one man's sin cannot be transferred to another; nor can the reward due to a person be transferred either. Every individual is responsible only for his or her actions, for God is never unjust. This is made clear in Quran, Chapter 17:25: "Who receives guidance, receives it for his own benefit: who goes astray does so to his own loss. No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another: nor would We (God) punish until We had sent a messenger to give warning". Every individual is an independent person who is responsible for his or her actions alone. There is no need for salvation from sin, for there is no original burden. One's success in the Hereafter lies in his living a righteous life in this world.

Islamic conceptions of atonement for sin

Quran teaches that the main way back to Allah is through genuine *tawbah* (repentance) which literally means 'to return'. While legally it signifies turning to God for forgiveness of a sin or an act of

disobedience, its primary sense of turning to God as a personal act of love and devotion, and not necessarily from a state of sin, is a more exalted and deeper level of repentance. The Prophet Muhammad, for example, whom Muslims believe to have been protected from all sin by God, is said to have declared 'I turn to God every day seventy times'. Repentance is more than just asking for forgiveness, it is a turning to God with sincere love and devotion. The change of heart, as the Quran makes clear, can itself only be achieved by divine grace. Two other Arabic words used for repentance emphasize this wider meaning. *Awbah* has the sense of repeated returning to God with humility, devotion and praise and *inabah* signifies turning to God for help in total submission to his will.

The Quran has more than ninety words for sin or offences against God or fellow human beings. Yet, there is no doctrine of original sin as we have discussed earlier, although the human propensity to do evil is clearly recognised. As a just and moral sovereign, God is severe in punishment, but more important his mercy is repeatedly affirmed. "God is Oft-Forgiving and Most-Merciful" (5:98). To despair of God's infinite mercy is itself a grave sin. God says in the Quran, "O my servants, who have transgressed against their souls, despair not of the Mercy of Allah, for Allah forgives all sins" (39:53). God's mercy is affirmed in the *Hadith* or traditions. It is said that, "When God created the creation, He prescribed with His own hand for Himself, "my mercy shall overcome my wrath".

One of the traditional stories in Islam speaks of God seeking the sinner and rejoicing at his repentance. On one occasion Muhammad, according to one of the Companions, Anas, said , Allah says: "When a servant of Mine advances to me by a foot, I advance to him by a yard and when he advances to me a yard, I advance towards him the length of his arms' spread. When he comes to me walking, I go to him running". [4]

Repentance or turning to God is prominent in the Sufi tradition. For the famous Persian Sufi master Hujwiri (1077), it is the first station of the traveller on the way to truth. For Sufi, the mystical life is a journey from God to the world of created things and back to God the creator of all things. This journey consists of acts of worship and obedience and a turning from carnal and worldly temptations. There is an ascetic strain in Sufism but also a deep sense of the love and mercy of God. Repentance

is the means by which one is turned towards God. [5] As Shaykh Ibrahim al-Daqqaq (1015-1021) said, "Repentance means that you should be to God a face without a back even as you have formerly been unto him a back without a face".[6]

The Shi'ite tradition with its more pessimistic view of human life sees sin as a primary cause of life's troubles. Repentance, as Mahmoud Ayoub says, has therefore a redemptive significance and can help to lessen the evils in the world. Repentance should be expressed publicly through penitential liturgies.[7]

The following texts explicate the concept of repentance vividly.

"Say: O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Turn ye to our Lord in repentance and bow to His will, before the Penalty comes on you: after that ye shall not be helped (Quran 39:53)."

"Verily, Allah accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards, to them Allah will turn in Mercy, for Allah is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom. And of no effect is the repentance of those who continue to do evil until death faces one of them and he says "now have I repented indeed", nor of those who die rejecting faith: for them have we prepared a chastisement most grievous (Quran 4:17)."

'Islam' in Arabic represents two basic concepts: One is 'submission' and the other is 'peace'. As the name of the religion, it stands for 'the peace we can attain in this world and the next by submitting to the One and Only God of the universe'. Except two chapters the rest of the 112 Chapters of Quran begin with a verse: *Bimillah hir Rahman nir Rahim* (God is most compassionate and most merciful). God is ready to forgive the sins if one repents. Hence, Islam does not accept any blood sacrifice for sin. The Islamic understanding of forgiveness is that it is made on the basis of divine grace and repentance. According to Islam, no sacrifice can add to divine grace nor replace the necessity of repentance. In the Islamic theology, the animal sacrifice or blood are not directly linked to atonement (Quran 22:37). On the other hand, the sacrifice is done to help the poor, and in remembrance of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command. In many verses of Quran, Allah promises to forgive the sins of his creatures (Quran 47:2, 29:7, 14:23, 11:114).

The Islamic Personal Law (Sharia) specifies the atonement for particular sins. Depending on the sin, the atonement can range from repentance and compensation for sin if possible, feeding the poor, freeing slaves to even stoning to death or cutting hands.[8]

Sin and Forgiveness in Islam

Islam speaks about two aspects of forgiveness:

1. Allah's Forgiveness;
2. Human Forgiveness.

1. Allah's Forgiveness:

It is said that Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* is the most forgiving. There are many names of Allah given in the Quran. Some of these names are related to His mercy and forgiveness. Let us analyse the theological significance of these names to verify the concept of forgiveness in Islam:

1.1. Al-Ghafoor (The most forgiving):

This name occurs in the Quran more than seventy times. There are other names from the same root, such as *Ghafir* and *Ghaffar*. The meaning of the "*ghafara*" is to cover, to hide and from it comes the meaning "to excuse", "to pardon", "to remit" and "to forgive". Allah does all these things. In the Quran, it is mentioned that Allah does not forgive the Shirk (without repentance) but He may forgive every other sin for whomsoever He wills (al-Nisa 4:116).

1.2. Al-'Afuw:

This brings out another dimension of forgiveness. This name occurs in the Quran five times. Literally the word 'Afuw' means "to release" "to heal", "to restore', and "to remit". Thus, in relation to Allah it means "to release us from the burden of punishment due to our sins and mistakes" and subsequently, "to restore our honour after we have dishonoured ourselves by committing sins and making mistakes." Sometimes in the Quran both names: 'Afuw and Ghafoor come together.

1.3. Al-Tawwab:

The literal meaning of the word is 'the acceptor of repentance'. This name of Allah is mentioned in the Quran about 11 times. Allah accepts

the repentance of those who sincerely repent and turn to him. The word "*tawwab*" gives the sense of "oft-returning" which means that Allah again and again accepts repentance. We commit sins and mistakes then we repent, He accepts our repentance. Then again we commit sins and make mistakes and when we repent, He again very kindly accepts us and gives us another chance.

1.4. Al-Haleem (The Clement):

This name is mentioned fifteen times in the Quran. This means that Allah is not quick to judgement. He gives time. He patiently waits for his servants to return to Him.

1.5. Al-Rahman and al-Rahim (The most Merciful and most Compassionate):

These names are the most frequent in the Quran. Al-Rahman is mentioned 57 times and al-Rahim is mentioned 115 times. Al-Rahman indicates that Allah's mercy is abundant and plenty and al-Rahim indicates that this is always the case with Allah. He is full of love and mercy and He is ever Merciful.

The Quran teaches that Allah is a Judge and He also punishes, but Allah is not bound to punish. The justice of Allah, according to Quran, is that Allah does not and will not inflict undue punishment on any person. He will not ignore the good of any person. But if He wishes to forgive any sinner, He has full freedom to do that. His mercy is unlimited and His love is infinite.

B. Human Forgiveness:

Just as it is important to believe in the mercy and forgiveness of Allah, it is also necessary to base human relations on forgiveness. As in Christianity forgiving each other, even forgiving one's enemies is one of the most important of Islamic teachings. In the Quran Allah has described the Believers as "those who avoid major sins and acts of indecencies and when they are angry they forgive." (al-Sura 42:37). Later in the same Surah Allah says, "The reward of the evil is the evil thereof, but whosoever forgives and makes amends, his reward is upon Allah." (al-Sura 42:40). In another place the Quran says, "If you punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were afflicted. But if you

endure patiently, indeed it is better for you. Endure patiently. Your patience is not except through the help of Allah (al-Nahl, 16:126-127).

In one Hadith (Prophet's sayings) the Prophet said that Allah has commanded him about nine things. One of them he mentioned was "that I forgive those who do wrong to me".

The Prophet Muhammad was the most forgiving person. He was ever ready to forgive his enemies. When he went to Ta'if to preach the message of Allah, its people ill-treated him. They ridiculed him and hit him with stones.

He left the city humiliated and wounded. When he took shelter under a tree, the angel of Allah visited him and told him that Allah sent him to destroy the people of Ta'if because of their sin of mistreating their Prophet. The Prophet prayed to Allah to save the people of Ta'if, because what they did was out of their ignorance. He said, "Oh Allah, guide these people, because they did not know what they were doing." When he entered the city of Mecca after the victory, the Prophet had in front of him some of his staunchest enemies. Those who fought him for many years persecuted his followers and killed many of them. Now he had full power to do whatever he wanted to punish them for their crimes. It is reported that the Prophet asked them, "What do you think I shall do to you now?" They pleaded for mercy. The Prophet said, "Today I shall say to you what Joseph (referring to Prophet Yusuf as mentioned in the Quran, Yusuf 12:92) said to his brothers, "No blame on you today. Go, you are all free." Soon they all came and accepted Islam. He forgave even Hind who had caused the murder of his uncle Hamza. After killing his body he mutilated and chewed his liver. When she accepted Islam, the Prophet even forgave her.[9]

A very striking example of forgiveness we find in the Quran is in reference to the most unfortunate event of "Slander of Sayyidah Aisha" (wife of Muhammad). A few hypocrites of Madina accused her of her noble character. One of the slanderers turned out to be Mistah, the cousin of Aisha's father Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr used to give financial help to this young man. After he slandered his daughter, Abu Bakr vowed not to help him anymore. But Allah reminded Abu Bakr and through him all the Believers, "Let not those among you who are endowed with grace and amplitude of means resolve by oath against helping their kinsmen, those

in want and those who migrated in the path of Allah. Let them forgive you? Indeed Allah is oft-Forgiving, most Merciful." (Al-Nur 24:22) Abu Bakr came out of his home and said, "Yes, indeed, I want Allah's forgiveness. He not only continued to help him but he gave him more. Islam emphasizes mercy, kindness and love. Justice, law and order are necessary for the maintenance of a social order, but there is also a need for forgiveness to heal the wounds and to restore good relations between the people.[10]

Since God is Almighty, He does not need the charade concocted by other religious traditions in order to forgive our sins. In the Quran, God says we are all created in a state of goodness (30:30); He has not burdened us with any "original sin", having forgiven Adam and Eve ((2:36-38; 7:23, 24) as He forgives us (11:90; 39:53-56). As we are all personally responsible for our actions (2:286); 6:164) there is no need for a humanly concocted saviour in Islam; salvation comes from God alone (28:67).

Thus Islam seeks to restore true meaning to monotheism, for in the Quran God asks: "Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to God, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in faith?" (4:125); 41:33).

Although, as we have seen, there is much in Islam about God's mercy, there is also clear teaching about a day of Judgement, when each person's deeds will be weighed on an exact balance (7; 8:21, 47:23, 103f; 101:6-9) and the book of the record for each person will be opened (10; 61; 17; 13f). No one can help another person; each person is responsible for his own actions. Yet the possibility of intercession especially by Muhammad and later by angels and martyrs came to be accepted, and this modified such strict accounting.[11] One of the early Sufis, Rabi's of Basra (717-801) recognised that the vision of God was reward enough. "O my Lord", she wrote, "if I worship you from fear of hell, burn me in hell; and if I worship you from Hope of Paradise, exclude me thence; but if I worship you for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty." [12]

As for the wicked, the Quran says that they will burn 'as long as heaven and earth endure' (11, 106-7). There are two conditions attached to this. One is 'except as Allah wills' and the other, in the view of some

theologians, is that punishments are not eternal because the heavens and the earth as we see them are not eternal. Another verse says, 'Those who deny Our revelations, we will roast in a fire. As often as their skins are consumed we will give them fresh skins, so that they may taste the torment" (4, 56).

Both Christianity and Islam try to balance belief in both the justice and mercy of God. God's justice is important, although it is not perhaps given adequate attention in modern Christian circles. The justice of God emphasises our moral responsibility for our behaviour matters. It also suggests that there is redress in another world to the injustices and suffering of this world. Yet too easily pictures of God's punishment of sinners can give a picture of a God of vengeance, which is especially dangerous when humans take it upon themselves to be agents of that vengeance. Umar ibn Khattab told of the occasion when some prisoners of war were brought to the Prophet. Among them was a woman who ran all over the place looking for her child. When she lifted it close towards her and suckled it. The Prophet then asked, "Can you imagine this woman throwing her child into the fire?" When his companions said, "No", Muhammad said, "God is much more compassionate towards his servants that she is towards her child."[13]

The Quran suggests that those who appear before God after death are involved in deciding their own guilt or innocence. God will say to every person:

'Read your own record:
Sufficient is thy soul
This day to make out
An account against thee' (17,14).

According to one of the Islamic commentaries, "our true accusers are our own deeds".[14] The distinguished scholar Huston Smith explains, "What death burns away is self-serving defences, forcing one to see with total objectivity how one has lived one's life. In the uncompromising light of that vision, where no dark and hidden corners are allowed, it is one's own actions that rise up to accuse or confirm".[15] In St. John's Gospel Jesus says that he did not come to condemn the world. People condemn themselves by not coming to the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed (Jn. 3, 17-20 and 12, 47-8).

Sadly, the application of justice in some Islamic states does not reflect the compassion of God. As Farid Esack says, "The idea of an Allah who is compassionate and merciful is one that we need to retrieve in order to recapture Islam from those who insist that our faith and Allah are only about anger and vengeance". [16]

Most offences against another human being are also offences against God. This means that repentance addressed to God is necessary as well as compensation to the injured party. It is a debated question in Islam whether, when compensation has been made and repentance is genuine, punishment is still required. Maybe acceptance of punishment is a sign of contradiction. It is interesting to compare stories of how Muhammad and Jesus dealt with a woman who had committed adultery. It is said that woman who had committed this offence confessed to the Prophet and asked that she be duly punished, which meant being stoned. The woman was pregnant. The Prophet told her to go away and wait until the baby was born. In due course, she returned with the child in her arms and again asked for punishment. The Prophet sent her away again to nurse the child until it was weaned. The mother returned again leading her child who had a piece of bread in his mouth. Had the woman not returned and simply repented, she would have escaped punishment. But since she wished her sin to be expiated, the Prophet ordered that she be stoned to death. Afterwards he prayed over her and gave her an honourable burial. Umar B.al-Khattab, who was to become the second Caliph, protested that Muhammad had prayed over a woman who had committed adultery. Muhammad replied, "But she had performed such a sincere act of repentance which, if it were divided among seventy inhabitants of Madina, it would suffice for them. Is there anything nobler than her offering her life freely to God?"

In this connection it is important to recognise that cruel punishments such as stoning for adultery or amputation of a hand for theft, which are unacceptable to many cultures, are equally unacceptable to many Muslims. It is also helpful to remember that the Arab society in which Muhammad came to have political power was one of tribal rivalries. As Muhammad Siddiqi[17] makes clear the bonds of blood and kin-relationship were transformed into a faith-based unity with a single worship and command. The Quran sought to approve of private retaliation. Although it is still allowed, it insisted that revenge, if exacted,

must be strictly limited, and made clear that forgiveness or compounding for money were preferable (Quran 2, 178-9).

Legal systems based on the Quran tend to give greater weight to the injured party. Religious teaching focuses on the inner relation of the soul to God, which is known only to God. Legal systems have to focus on outward behaviour. Neglect of prayers out of laziness and apostasy are offences, but the law has to be satisfied by an outward show of repentance. God's verdict has to be left till the Day of Judgement. If punishment is carried out here on earth, the intention is to bring the recalcitrant person back to the community or to make him an example to others.[18]

Where injury is caused to another person, the first requirement of the wrongdoer is that he should compensate the victim. The prophet, however, urged victims to offer forgiveness:

Let them forgive and overlook,
Do you not wish
That Allah should forgive you? (Hadith 24)

According to an early tradition, Muhammad advised, "If anyone would like God to save him from the anxieties of Day of Resurrection, he should grant a respite to one who is in straitened circumstances or remit his debt' (Mishkat 12,9) Aisha (Wife of Prophet Muhammad) reported that the Prophet said, 'Avert the infliction of prescribed penalties on Muslims as much as you can, and let a man go if there is any way out, for it is better for a leader to make a mistake in forgiving than to make a mistake in punishing' (Mishkat 16,1).

Hence, in the Quran the emphasis is on the positive content of forgiveness and salvation. It is not conceived as a negation of pain and liberation from evil. It consists in the sense of fulfilment, the feeling of realization and the thrill of expansion. Human being is endowed with a number of potentialities. By developing these one reaches one's full stature and qualifies for still higher stages waiting him. One must discover in what direction his self can develop and then he must create the conditions, physical as well as social, which favour the development. God forgives the sinner and causes his self to grow (Quran 91:9-10).

Violence a Gravest sin!

Islam, as expounded in the classical books of theology and law, does not bear a message of violence or terrorism. In fact, *salaam* (peace and tranquillity) is a central tenet of Islamic belief. The absence of peace is identified in the Quran as a largely negative condition; it is variously described as a trial and tribulation, as a curse or punishment, or sometimes, as a necessary evil. The Quran asserts that if it had not been for divine benevolence, many mosques, churches, synagogues, and homes would have been destroyed because of the ignorance and pettiness of human beings (Quran 22:40).

The Islamic historical experience was primarily concerned not with war-making or terrorism but with civilization-building. Islamic theology instructs that an integral part of the divine covenant given to human beings is to occupy them with building and creating, not destroying life. The Quran teaches that the act of destroying or spreading ruin on this earth is one of the gravest of sins possible. *Fasd fi al-ard,* which means to corrupt the earth by destroying the beauty of creation, is considered an ultimate act of blasphemy against God (Quran 2:27, 5:32, 13:25). Those who corrupt the earth by destroying the earth, by destroying lives, property and nature are designated as *mufsidun* who, in effect, wage war against God by dismantling the very fabric of existence (2:27, 13:25). In addition, the Quran states that God has made people different and diverse, and that they will remain so until the final day. Accordingly, human diversity is part of the divine plan, and the challenge is for human beings to co-exist and interact despite their differences (Quran 11:118). The Quran proclaims it in an unequivocal fashion: "God has made you into many nations and tribes so that you will come to know one another. Those most honoured in the eyes of God are those who are most pious" (Quran 49:13). From this, classical Muslim scholars reached the reasonable conclusion that terrorism is not the means most conducive to getting "to know one another." Thus, they argued that the exchange of technology and merchandise is, in most cases, a superior course of action to warfare. In the opinion of most classical jurists, war, unless it is purely defensive, is not to be preferred, and must be treated as a last resort because war and terrorism are not superior moral virtues.[19]

Despite this rich doctrinal and historical background, the dilemmas of a modern Muslim intellectual persist. Many classical Muslim

scholars, for instance, insisted on a conception of the world that is bifurcated and dichotomous. Those scholars argued that the world is divided into the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and abode of war *dar al-harb*); the two can stop fighting for a while, but one must inevitably prevail over the other. According to these scholars, Muslims must give non-Muslims one of three options; either become a Muslim, pay a poll tax, or fight. These classical scholars were willing to tolerate differences as long as the existence of these differences did not challenge Muslim political supremacy and dominance. On the other hand, many classical scholars argued that instead of a two-part division of the world, one ought to recognise a third category, and that is the abode of non-belligerence or neutrality (*dar al-sulh* or *'ahd)* - an abode that is not Muslim, but that has a peaceful relationship with the Muslim world.[20]

But the fact that the Islamic scholastic tradition is not unitary, and that it is often diverse and multi-faceted is hardly surprising. What is surprising and often aggravating is the extent to which Islamic debates in the modern age have become politicized and polarized. The real challenge that confronts Islam is that political interests have come to dominate the public discourse, and to a large extent, moral discourses have become marginalized in modern Islam. In many ways, since the onslaught of colonialism and its aftermath, Muslims have become largely pre-occupied with the attempt to remedy a collective feeling of powerlessness and frustrating sense of political defeat, often by engaging in highly sensationalistic acts of power symbolism. The normative imperatives and intellectual subtleties of the Islamic moral tradition are not treated with the analytic and critical rigour that this tradition rightly deserves, but are rendered subservient to political expedience and symbolic displays of power. The events of September 11 grew out of the historic tensions between the civilizations we speak of as "Islam" and "the West".

This is what I like to call this contemporary doctrinal dynamic as the predominance of the theology of power in modern Islam, and it is this theology that is a direct contributor to the emergence of highly radicalised Islamic groups, such as the Islamic Jihad or al-Qa'ida. [21] Far from being authentic expressions of inherited Islamic paradigms, or a natural out-growth of the classical tradition, these are thoroughly a

by-product of colonialism and modernity. Such groups ignore the history of the Islamic civilization, with all its richness and diversity, and reduce Islam to a single dynamic - the dynamic of power. They tend to define Islam as an ideology of nationalistic defiance to the other –a vulgar form of obstructionism to the hegemony of the Western world. Usama bin Laden and others are radicals frustrated by the failure of existing governments to deliver on promises of economic and political development. Driven to despair by the failure of the international community to protect Muslims in Chechnya and Palestine, they find in Islam a convenient vocabulary for the articulation of grievances and the justification of acts of defiance.[1] In this regard Member of Parliament Mehmood Madani, who heads the India's largest party of clerics, the Jamiat Ullema-e-Islam openly expressed in his interview in Times of India on April 22, 2008: '*the terrorists are besmirching the name of Islam for attaining unaccountable power. It is a sinful act. These terrorists are not promoting either popular welfare or democratic rights of the people. But they constitute a threat that has to be met. Islamic terrorism is primarily a threat to Muslims and the need of the hour is to take action to get rid of this sin.*' Therefore, Islam, being a moral vision given to humanity, is constructed into the antithesis of the West. In essence what prevails is an aggravated siege mentality that suspends the moral principles of the religion in pursuit of political power. In fact, the Quran goes on to specify that if the enemy ceases hostilities and seeks peace, Muslims should seek peace as well. Failure to seek peace without a just cause is considered arrogant and sinful (Quran 4:90).

Conclusion

Islam, one of the major religions commanding the devotion of second largest community of the world's population, is actually a way of life. It is a living tradition engaging and in turn engaged by successive generations of believers. Motivated by the Quran and the example of the Prophet as depictions of that which is good, beautiful and true in human experience, such believers seek to increase the range of order and meaning in the world. It gives detailed rules on marriage, divorce and inheritance, etiquette of business transactions, punishment for crimes, and rules and norms of war. Islam not only moulds the beliefs but also moulds the daily behaviour and activities in the life of the

people. God has a plan for everyone and he guides us accordingly (Quran 17:25). In this context, in Islam, a sin is an act against the will of God. Every individual is responsible only for his or her actions. The effect of one's sin cannot be transferred to another. Human beings are innocent by birth and they consciously commit a sin and so sinfulness is never a state of being. Allah has left the door always open for repentance of one's sin. He has also committed Himself to turn with forgiveness to anyone who genuinely turns to Him in repentance.

Prophet Muhammad and those who followed him saw the world as a heedless place in which human beings ignored their duty to God. From the start, Muslims were at war with this milieu. Called to live as idol breakers, they carved out a political and geographic space in which human beings could live as "submitters" (Muslims) obedient to the will of God. They believed that it was their destiny to enlarge this space so as to make the entire world conform to the divine will. For much of the first millennium of Islamic history the progress of Islamic culture and the success of Islamic armies seemed to confirm this destiny. Like all believers, they are capable of the complete range of behaviours characteristic of human beings: love and hate, joy and sorrow, justice and injustice, creativity and destruction. How shall we speak of sin in Islam after September11, 2002? As a religion practised by millions of human beings. No more, and no less!

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JPJRS 11/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2008 60-75

Social Sanction and its Function in Tribal Societies

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Introduction

There are 67.8 million Scheduled Tribes people in India, constituting 8.74 % of the country's total population (Census 2001). Scheduled Tribes are those which are notified as such by the President of India under Article 342 of the Constitution. The tribals in India can be divided into two categories: (i) frontier tribes, and (ii) non-frontier tribes. The former are inhabitants of the North-East frontier states with 12.02% of India's Scheduled Tribes population at the borders of Burma, China, Tibbet and Bangladesh. They occupy a special position in the sphere of national politics. Different tribal groups together in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland form 64.22, 85.94, 94.46 and 89.15 percent of the state population respectively (Census 2001). Similarly, in Assam, Manipur and Tripura they form 12.41, 39.96 and 31.05 percent of the state population respectively (Ibid.). The rest of the 87.98% non-frontier tribes are distributed in most of the mainland states, though they are concentrated in large numbers in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. Their population ranges from 4.00 to 32.00 percent in these states (Census 2001).

Christian Dioceses in the North are working mostly among the frontier and non-frontier tribes. Both the tribal categories are known as tribes, *Adivasis* (original inhabitants), aboriginals, autochthons, etc. They have their own mother tongues, life styles, social structures, rites, rituals and values, differing in many ways from those of the non-tribal social groups in the country. Many of them are today settled agriculturists but forest still forms much of their economic resource base.

The greatest challenge for the tribals today is (a) to courageously confront the profound and inevitable changes taking place in their socio-economic and political situation and their culture-religious universe; and (b) to creatively and boldly 'reshape', 'reinvent' and 'recreate' their culture and even identity. This can only be done in an ongoing dialogue and deep collaboration with all relevant efforts, including those of various social movements, organizations and ideologies (Desrochers 2004: 5).

I Terms

Social Sanction

Broadly speaking, social sanction is any institution a consequence of which is to incline persons occupying certain roles to conform to the norms and expectations associated with those roles. A distinction has to be made between *norms* and *sanctions,* that is, between (i) institutionalized ways of doing things which themselves have certain implications for the maintenance of peace and good order in a society, and (ii) the consequences, themselves more or less institutionalized, which may follow from the violation of approved, normative behaviour (Beattie 1977: 165). With the distinction between (a) social institutions seen as systems of ideas and beliefs, and (b) social institutions regarded as components of systems of action, sanctions themselves may be regarded from two different viewpoints.

First, sanctions may be seen, at least in some degree, as the members of the society in the context see them as the possible or likely consequences of turning aside from socially approved norms. This is the sense in which they may be said to be more or less effective in preventing people from breaking the rules. It can be presumed that people will generally tend to avoid behaviour, which they believe will entail painful consequences for themselves. To understand social sanctions we have to conceive the social and cultural situations in which they operate and how people concerned understand them. Whether their understanding is scientifically 'true' or not is irrelevant here.

Secondly, the question to be asked is what actually happens when norms are violated. What new social activities are brought into play in such cases, and what consequences do these activities have? Sometimes

these consequences are not foreseen or even thought of by the members of the societies concerned. None the less they may be very important.

A complex social system can only be maintained when different people base their interrelationships upon agreements mutually arrived at. In traditional tribal societies, everybody does much the same kinds of things and produce much the same kinds of goods. Order is maintained through common submission to universally accepted rules. Reciprocity and mutual interdependence are important in these societies. They are probably more inclined than others to accept customary rules and beliefs that are prescribed by tradition. There is little room for skepticism or dissent in regard to established practices. By this I am not saying that custom is never violated or tradition is not criticized in tribal societies. With fast social changes affecting them, these societies also change.

In the above sense, social sanction is 'a reaction on the part of a society or of a considerable number of its members to a mode of behaviour which is thereby *approved* or *disapproved.* If a mode of behaviour is approved then the sanction is *positive* and if it is disapproved it is *negative.* The latter always entails the idea that something unpleasant will happen, such as the imposition of a penalty of some kind, if one does what one *ought not.* In most societies the stress is on the negative rather than on the positive aspect. Where there are organized negative sanctions backed by a constituted authority with the power to enforce its decisions, there are legal sanctions or 'law' in the strict sense.

In tribal societies, however, there is a traditional *panchayat* (council) in every village to express the *consensus* of the community there. Its decisions effectively backed by sanctions express *public opinion.* The village *panchayats* existed before the present day courts got legally established during the British rule. Today they co-exist with the public legal courts and operate at the lower *face-to-face* level of community relations. Disputes between fellow-villagers are often settled by the members of the above *panchayat* having the traditional right to impose a penalty on the party judged to be in the wrong. The penalty imposed on the accused is often in cash, a little of which is offered to the members in the *panchayat* as fee, which they may use for a drink in common and the balance is handed over to the injured party in the case. In a serious case, the accused party pays a heavy fine for an expensive *community meal* on an appointed day. Both the parties

to the dispute, as well as those neighbours who are concerned in the settlement, take part in the meal. It is clear that the aim of this way of proceeding is not so much to punish a wrongdoer as to *reconcile* the disputing parties and to *restore* the disrupted village *harmony.*

Ritual sanctions include many forms of religious belief, whether these imply reference to (i) a god or gods with the power to punish, either in this life or after it; (ii) the power of ancestors or other spirits which may cause injury on living persons who act in disapproved ways. Among the tribal people, the spirits of dead lineage ancestors are believed to attach high importance to the maintenance of good relations among the living members of the lineage. In this understanding, sickness is often diagnosed as being due to, (a) the failure of members to live near one another as they *ought,* (b) lineage members neglecting sacrifices to ancestors or other spirits at appropriate intervals. For a successful sacrifice, almost always it is a condition that the members should be on good terms with one another, and that none should be harbouring feelings of hostility or resentment towards anyone. In this way *joint participation* in sacrificial ritual may be an important ritual sanction for *good mutual relations* between the members of a lineage group.

Social Function

Associated with the notion of social function is the idea of social structure. The distinction between *function* and *structure* is really that of between *process* and *form.* When we speak of function we refer to the *causal implications* of certain kinds of events for other kinds of events, considered as *systems.* When we speak of structure we are attending to the *formal enduring aspects* of whatever it is that is said to have a structure. Its essential idea is that parts or components are arranged in an orderly way to constitute what may be comprehended as some kind of *systematic unity.* This unity may be an analytical synthesis, constructed to unify experience and to advance knowledge. By *social function* we mean the study of the causal implications of social institutions for other social institutions and systems of institutions in the same society. By *social structure* we mean those enduring aspects of social institutions which have appeared to be most important. In this *structural-functional* model, it is to be remembered that when it is

applied to communities of human beings, these beings are conscious, willing agents, having power of conceptual thinking, of representing their social and material universe to themselves, and of acting in accordance with these representations.

Context

Because of the marked differences and uniqueness of each tribal group in different parts of the country tribal reality is very complex. Any generalization of universal validity about tribal social life and moral behaviour would require a comparative study of representative samples of tribal peoples of the world. This is clearly beyond the scope of this essay. I propose merely to discuss certain forms of social and moral behaviour of some major tribal groups in eastern India. The points of this discussion may be applicable to other tribal groups also in the country because there are many socio-cultural elements which are common among them. In general, tribal people do not use the term 'sin' in their social-moral behaviour. What one does hear sometimes in their conversation is that there are some modes of social behaviour that are *good* and there are some others which are *not good.*

Systems of beliefs and values represent a distinct aspect of human social life, and their understanding calls for techniques different from those appropriate to the study of societies as systems of action. Social institutions have causal implications for other institutions, and the beliefs and values which people hold are important determinants of their institutionalized behaviour. However, the mechanical, cause-and-effect model is inadequate to the understanding of such conceptual systems in themselves. Cultures may be understood as systems of *symbols* and *meanings* understandable in other than causal terms. The discussion below follows from this understanding in the areas of the beliefs and values which the tribal people hold.

Almost in all tribal religious traditions *morality* bears imprints of mythical and cultic aspects. In them a state of perfection at the beginning of creation is recalled and cultic forms mark a connection between man's sinful state and creation of the universe. Generally, tribal ethical wisdom and moral sense is situated in the myth-tradition of a community. The myth[1] confirms how God has dealt and deals with

erring human beings. It also teaches what must be the standard of and rule for human actions.

The Mundas, Hos, Santals, Kha$,,r,ias and Uraons are the major tribal groups in Eastern India. In their traditional religious myths we find that there was only *water* in the beginning with its creatures. In creating this world God took voluntary help of the *crab, turtle, tortoise, crocodile, alligator, boarfish, prawn,* etc. in different accounts in bringing a little bit of *clay* to the Creator from the bottom of the sea. All of them failed in their task except the *earthworm* which succeeded in supplying the Creator with little bit of clay with which He created the *earth* with all its creatures.

In addition to this, one of the Kur,ukh (Uraon) accounts mentions that the *kingfisher[2]* dived into the sea till it reached its bottom where there were *earthworms* which gave a tiny *seed* of the earth to it. The bird swam back to *Dharmes* (Supreme Being) holding the seed in between its finger nail. God planted this seed in the sea by churning its water. It multiplied and formed into the present earth with its *seven* corners and got filled with all its creatures. In the Kha,r,ia account, a *crab* raises a pillar of clay in the sea to enjoy the sunshine on top of it. Seeing that *Ponomosor* (Supreme Being) was pleased with its work, the crab expanded the pillar to form the present earth with all its creatures.

Having formed the earth with its creatures as described above, the Creator finally made *human beings* with clay and when they were baked in the sun He gave them life and they multiplied and filled the earth. In the Munda account, when a *horse* kicked and destroyed the human clay figures before they could be baked in the sun, a large *Indian stork* laid two *eggs* and on hatching them there came forth a *boy* and a *girl* and from them *Singbonga* (Supreme Being) multiplied human beings and filled the earth. Similarly, the Santal account narrates that *Thakur Jiu* (Supreme Being) made a pair of *swans,* male and female, who laid two *eggs,* hatched them and there came out a *boy* and a *girl* from whom human beings multiplied and filled the earth. All of these can be called the *first creation* of the Supreme Being with deep *ecological* insights.

At this stage, the Munda and Ho accounts mention that human beings became very numerous and began to walk on *evil paths*. The Santal account makes it more specific by narrating that the human beings

became like *he-buffaloes* and *she-buffaloes*. They did not respect one another. In the Kha,r,ia account, human beings became *greedy* for more and more food from the Creator. They also became *proud* and *arrogant* before Him, and challenging Him they began to cut down fruit trees senselessly. The Kur,ukh account narrates that the Creator had made a beautiful world which the human beings *polluted* with their *excreta* everywhere! The human excreta is the most dirty and stinking object one could imagine. Its disgusting stench can cause vomiting. This strong symbolic language expresses in the clearest possible way the stench of *evil* which human beings are capable of committing against their Creator. In all of these accounts the Creator sends *rain-fire* to destroy the human beings who had turned evil in His sight. However, in everyone of these accounts it is mentioned that one pair of human beings, a *boy* and a *girl*, were saved. God made them *husband* and *wife* to each other and from them human beings were again born to fill the earth. He divided them into different *clans* and thus established *inter-clan* marriage to take place among them. This is the *second creation* from which the human beings were born down the ages.

From the above mythical accounts it is clear that the tribals have a strong sense of morality which does not permit *greed, pride, arrogance, and animal-like mean* behaviour before their Creator. This way of life offends Him seriously. They depend on Him totally for their life, survival and happiness in this world by walking on a path which pleases Him. The tribal religious myths are, therefore, exemplary and universally valid sources which direct and control tribal social, cultural and religious behaviour.

II Good and Evil

Good

The tribal approach to life and happiness is based on a *concrete* life experience. The tribals consider rich *crop*, numerous *cattle* and healthy *children* as their most cherished possessions and abundant blessings of God upon them. They experience happiness in *good health, sufficient wealth, good crops, many cattle* and *children* with whom performing of ritual and offerings to *God* and the *ancestor spirits* are guaranteed. For the wellbeing of human beings depends on the good pleasure of these supernatural beings with whose favour upon the tribals,

continuation of the *family, clan* and *tribe* is the greatest good desired by them. Thus, the idea of *good* in the final analysis is inseparably tied up with what is good for the tribals in the *physical* order of *this world.* However, the goal of life as eternal happiness rests in their belief that after this life they will join the community of their *ancestors* in the next world free from all forms of suffering and death. This is the *ultimate aim* of their life in this world. It is in the *ancestral community* that all their legitimate aspirations will be fulfilled. This community enjoys eternal happiness under the divine care and protection of God. The *value [3]* of the living tribal community in *communion* with its ancestors has its *roots* in Him as the source of all *life, goodness* and *happiness.*

Evil

Evil for a tribal is again a concrete experience. It is understood as a *physical* suffering, such as sickness, death, loss of livestock and property. At the mention of it a tribal begins to talk of the *sick* child, *loss* of the animal, *failure* of crops, etc., and expresses his/her utter *helplessness* and *inability* to handle the situation and to deal with the forces behind such happenings. This suffering is evil because it inflicts *pain, injury* and *harm* upon members in the community. The tribal *ethical rule,* therefore, holds works like causing suffering and pain on others as really *bad* and deals sternly with persons alleged to be indulging in them. Such anti-social enemies when detected may be punished very severely. Therefore, actions which *endanger* the *good* of *individuals, family, clan* or *tribe* are evil.

Moral Evil

An action is judged to be *right* or *wrong* in reference to the *good* of the individual and all the members of the community. The tribal *moral ideals* to be followed by all are *peacefulness, equality* and *kindness. Peace* with men/women and the supernatural beings is a *sign* of *order* and *harmony* in creation. *Equality* among all promotes, fortifies and sustains the intended order. *Kindness* to all is to be fostered in this social order. The object of public morality is the good of the tribe. Therefore, the greatest moral evil is the *failure* towards the wellbeing of and harm done to the *tribe.* Throwing into *disorder* what is religiously required is understood in terms of *violation* of tribal customs and breaking of some important taboos.[4] In doing so *disregard* is shown

for what has been determined and willed by God. Breaking of taboos is a violation of the profound reverence for the *value* protected by them.

Moral Law

Among the tribals, their *social custom* is regarded as having the *ultimate* power to *restrain, control* and *direct* individuals in their communities. Ethical understanding is shaped by aiming at the goal of life, that is, becoming a member of the community of ancestors in the next world after the life in this world. One's *moral conduct* is defined in terms of the idea of this good to be attained. The *norms* of conduct for a tribal are set in his/her *tradition* and *myth,* defined in the customs of the tribe and every tribal is bound to comply with them. Taboos are put forward to safeguard the *pure* form of the customs. For example, one is forbidden to associate with non-tribals in order not to endanger the *purity* of one's tribe and its *homogeneity.* That is why strict *social control* is applied and heavy punishment is enforced upon the erring person in the above matter. However, with changing times social customs too change without remaining static and yet retain their important function of social control in a modified manner.

Tribals hold that the conduct of an individual is of interest and concern for the *whole* community. Preserving and maintaining of *order* is their *collective* responsibility. They consider certain actions good and others bad depending upon what good and bad effect they have on their communities. A tribal receives the values of his/her community from childhood that govern his/her ways of life through myths, folklore, socio-religious rites, rituals and customs. One learns to be part of one's social environment and knows what is expected of him/her. Every tribal member has thus to behave in ways which are *approved* and *accepted* by his/her community.

Purity of the Tribe

Traditionally, no married tribal is allowed to dine with non-tribals because on him/her rests the responsibility and sacred duty to preserve and foster the *purity* of the tribe. It is because the tribe is understood to have taken its origin directly from God. The unmarried person may, however, not observe this restriction as he/she has not got as yet the full responsibility of the married members.

Sexual Conduct

Extra marital relations (adultery), fornication[5] and incest[6] destroy the ordered *family* or *clan structure* and poison the *intimate* relations within the family and lineage. Thus, if a man were to have an affair with a woman, the community would exact heavy fines from him and punish him, if need be by boycotting the culprit. Generally, strict measures are taken against the whole family of the person for not keeping the social norms by not permitting the family members to have free association with the village community. They say, '*no chuuna tamakhu, no beti-roti, no madait*' meaning, *no socializing* with the family members of the culprit, *no daughter* to be given in marriage to them and *no help* to be given to them in their agricultural and other household activities. Normal association with them may be restored only after a public meal has been served to the elders and others of the community in reparation for the offence committed.

Failing the tribe is a serious matter. Punishment for it is most severe. The offending person is expelled from the tribe temporarily or on a lifelong basis if he/she does not show any sign of repentance. Not observing the tribal customs is morally an evil action which may be put right by ritual *purification, reparation* and *reconciliation* with the tribe. It is a *breaking* of the order established and maintained by the Creator for the good of the tribe and its members. Enforcement of measures against any breaking of accepted norms and misconduct rests with the *panchayat[7]*. It has the duty to guard the tradition, to ensure the good of one and all. The *myth* is the *model* and *reference point* for their actions.

Marriage

As described above in the second creation account, marriage was *divinely* instituted by God. It is the sacred duty, therefore, of every adult tribal to get married in his/her own community and raise children so that the *family, clan* and *tribe* may continue. Thus, there will be members to offer sacrifices to God and the ancestors. Every family head is a sacrificer. In keeping with their inheritance law, non-tribals cannot inherit land from a tribal. Therefore, a tribal has to get married within his/her own tribe. Persons not observing this rule may be dismissed from their communities till they agree to observe the rule

which they had broken. Similarly, the community members may cut themselves off from the erring members in all social relations and activities till the latter correct their wrong social behaviour.

The tribals marry *within* their own *tribe* and *outside* their own *clan.* They practise adult marriage of one man to one woman (monogamy). It is the most common practice among them. *Widow* remarriage is allowed. *Divorce* is rare and allowed only in case of (a) partners not being faithful to each other, and (b) wife not bearing children. This is an indicator that their life of sexuality is both *unitive* as well as *procreative* in a healthy balance. *Cross cousin* marriage, that is, marriage between the children of a woman and those of her brother, may take place beyond *three generations.* Any marriage against this rule *offends* tribal feeling and fine taste for social life. Similarly, marriage within the same clan offends tribal sensibilities because the members of the same clan look at one another as brothers and sisters having *common ancestors* in the beginning. Both these forms of marriage therefore amount to *incestuous* relationship.[8]

There is a practice of giving *bride wealth* among the tribals consisting of livestock or cash. The payment of the bride wealth publicly *seals* the marriage contract, confers marital rights upon the spouses and legitimizes their children. There is no practice of *dowry* among them. A *widow* on the death of her husband may get married with the *younger brother* of her late husband (levirate). Similarly, a *widower* on the death of her wife may get married with the *younger sister* of his late wife (sororate). These forms of marriage are permitted because the members entering the marriage have *friendly* and *fun* relationship with each other in their respective communities. These practices though not very common underline the *unity* of the family members and their relations among whom a *man* replaces his elder brother when he is dead and a *woman* replaces her elder sister when she is dead and thus the children of the deceased parents are saved from becoming *orphans.*

Incest

Tribals consider the violation of incest prohibitions a grave evil. It is thought to corrupt the social order by undermining of morals. That is why it meets with horrified condemnation and is held to merit *exile* from the community. It provokes an emotional shock beyond

description. It is held in such a horror because it *upsets* the family structure by corrupting the *intimate relations* of the family members. It destroys the very *basis* of human society, turning it into a mere disordered crowd. This prohibition is, therefore, very important to preserve and maintain a tribal society.

Respectful Distance

Free association between the woman and the elder brother(s) of her husband offends modesty and is not allowed. This is to keep a respectful distance from the persons of the above mentioned categories. It is also understood as forbidden degree of association. Such a social behaviour expresses a sense of *decency* and caution against any undesirable intimacy. Such public decency is meant to protect and safeguard public and private morality.

Family

It consists of a more or less durable union, socially approved of a man, a woman, and their children. It is found in each and every type of society. The prime duty of a married tribal is to look after his/her family well, bring up children, take care of them and make them fit members of the tribe. Extra-marital relations or *adultery* is therefore a serious failure of one's sacred duty and responsibility towards one's family. Hence, it is condemned outright. In the same understanding, pre-marital sex or *fornication* and any other form of illicit sexual relation are grave offences. That is why a child born out of wedlock is considered *illegitimate* and of a male child of this category cannot inherit land though it is not his fault.

Inheritance

Except the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribals in North-East India, the other tribal groups form *patrilineal* societies. As a rule *males* alone inherit *land* in these societies. Socio-economically, a non-tribal cannot inherit land from a tribal. Hence, marriage within one's own tribe is strictly required. Possessing land and having a home is a basic right of every tribal for the upbringing of his/her children in the family. In order to ensure a ready supply of offerings to the ancestors, land is not allowed to go out of one's *clan*. Land belongs to the clan. Hence, women who

on their marriage go over to another clan do not inherit it at their parental home.

A childless widow or a widow with daughters only, provided she does not remarry or quit her late husband's house, is entitled to own his land until her death. *Sons* of a dead brother receive their father's share of land. A tribal without having any son, if he wishes, adopts one of his close nephews [9] of his choice to be his heir with the consent of the family members and the village *panchayat*. Moreover, if a tribal has only daughters, he takes a prospective son-in-law to his house to get married to one of his daughters and work at his house. If the young man consents to the arrangement, he may even be adopted as a son to succeed his father-in-law. However, this is rare these days.

Truthfulness

Before the British rule, formal judiciary and court procedures as well as prisons were clearly absent among the tribals. Instead of them there was a *panchayat* in every village to look after the smooth running of social life in the village. This institution still continues among them. Telling lies in the *panchayat* or showing disrespect and disobedience to it is a grave offence for which the offender may be subjected to *heavy fines* or even *expelled* from the tribe.

Justice, Peace and Unity

No one may deprive the other of his/her property by *encroaching* upon or *misappropriating* what does not belong to oneself. *Anger, envy, theft, quarrels, injury* and *murder* do serious harm to individuals and inflict suffering on them. They destroy peace and harmony existing among them. Practice of *witchcraft* and *sorcery* brings about *enmity, disunity* and *division* among the community members. Such actions are, therefore, severely condemned. The offender is made to give compensation if there is any loss of property and the usual fine is exacted from him/her by the *panchayat* which has to re-establish order by healing the harm done and restore peace and harmony between individuals, families and groups in the community.

Kindness and Hospitality

An action is judged to be right or wrong in reference to the good of the individual and of all the members of the community. The approach

is based on an *egalitarian*[10]outlook which determines the moral conduct of individuals. The moral ideals to be followed by all are peacefulness, equality and kindness. Peace with men/women and the supernatural is a sign of order and harmony as intended in creation. Equality among all promotes, strengthens and sustains the intended order. Kindness, hence, is characteristic of the tribals. If one chances to enter a tribal house, it will not be long before one is made to feel at home and no longer a stranger among the house members. If the guest is very dear or respectable, the mother or sister or sister-in-law washes his/her feet with water. This is done to the guest as a part of hospitality expressing welcome, love, affection, appreciation, friendship, respect and gratitude. If a person does not share such quality of hospitality, he/she is looked down upon by the community members and loses his/her respect in their sight.

Conclusion

Tribal morality places an overwhelming emphasis on the *community* and *tribe*. The goal of life is the *good* of the community, *continuity* of the tribe, for therein lies the good of the *one* and *all*. The good is understood as a happy living protected from physical evils. From the tribe alone does life derive its meaning and orientation. It thus appears that an individual is swallowed up by the community, his/her personal good and wellbeing overwhelmed as it were by the *interests* of the tribe. Therefore, questions may be raised: What is the *identity* of an individual in a tribal society? Where does a person stand in relation to his/her community? Does he/she not find his/her personality and individuality sacrificed for the tribe? Yes, the person belongs to the tribe. Apart from the community he/she has no identity. This is what the *ethical* and *moral* behaviour of a tribal is based upon. However, the community and the tribe do not exist like concrete beings, it is their members who exist and constitute them as thinking, reflecting, desiring, willing and acting beings in freedom with accompanying consequences.

The nature of tribal existence has to be understood in this way that the tribe is created and cared for by the Creator for a *communitarian* life where there is *equality* and *harmony*. After this life in this world, a person joins the community of his/her *ancestors* in the next world provided he/she had walked on the sacred path they had shown in their

lifetime in this world. *Salvation* for a tribal means *union* with ancestors and God the Creator. Thus, an individual apart from his/her community has no meaning and a healthy *tension* between this person and the members of his/her community *dead* and *alive* continues. Thus, the life and existence of every person receives true value and *meaning* in the tribe

The outlook on life and happiness is based on *equality* and *harmony* in the tribe. Establishing and maintaining happiness and wellbeing is a *collective* duty and responsibility. Everyone is responsible for the peace and prosperity of the other in the community. It is thus the members of a community or tribe that collectively determine tribal *moral conduct.*

It is to be pointed out, however, that the values mentioned above do not exist in their totality in the tribal societies today. They have considerably been fragmented, resources have been individualized, social stratification and competition have sharpened. In this manner, tribal values have undergone a considerable degree of change. Notwithstanding these, the values so described above are a kind of ideal types in terms of which tribal societies may be evaluated or reconstructed.

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Notes and References

1 Myth is a sacred or religious tale whose content is concerned with the origins or creation of natural, supernatural or cultural phenomena. The anthropological meaning differs from that which implies an untruth. Myths have been studied as clues to the society's dominant values as a 'social charter' and for their universal structures (Marshall 1998: 437).

2 Fish catching bird in water

3 Idea held by people about ethical behaviour or appropriate behaviour, what is right or wrong, desirable or despicable ((Marshall 1998: 689)).

4 Social and often sacred prohibitions put upon certain things, people, or acts, which render them untouchable or unmentionable ((Ibid.: 661).

5 Sexual intercourse between unmarried people.

6 Sexual relations between immediate relatives, usually between parents and children, and between brothers and sisters (siblings) (Ibid. 301).

7 Council of village elders or heads of families.

8 Marriage between mother and son, father and daughter or brother and sister.

9 Sons of his brother(s).

10 Seeing equality of condition, outcome, reward, and privilege as a desirable goal of social organization (Ibid. 185).

JPJRS 11/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2008 76-96

Sin As The Mirror Image Of The Person: Initiating A Functional Approach To The Doctirne of Sin

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Introduction: Stating The Problematic

That the sense of sin has eroded, partially at least, from the Christian consciousness is an incontestable fact. Some even hail this as the emancipation of the Christian psyche from the shackles of tradition and the opening of newer vistas for the progress of humanity. No wonder, then, that even preachers and theologians shy away from discussing sin. The fear is that, since sin is supposedly the forte of the old-fashioned, preaching or writing about sin would automatically place one with the obscurantist. People would rather keep quiet than speak about sin and forfeit their place among the progressives.

Perhaps this state of affairs should not be very surprising given the way the doctrine of sin has been handled in the past. Historically, the theological treatment of sin, especially from the Middle Ages on, began to assume legalistic and moralistic overtones with the emphasis on the matter of sin, the seriousness of sin, the classification of sin, the culpability for sin and so on. In the process of trying to achieve a certain objectivity regarding sin, the doctrine of sin lost its essential link with the other doctrines of faith. This isolation of the doctrine of sin obscured its full import for Christian living and gradually, and not without the influence of the Augustinian rigorism, paved the way for the development of an unhealthy sense of fear, guilt and shame. Sin came to be primarily associated with the infringement of certain norms and prescriptions, especially in the area of sex, requiring the sacrament of reconciliation. Thus, not infrequently do we come across people

approaching the sacrament of reconciliation with the magical notion that a mere enumeration of sins to the confessor effects a general cleansing and brings about a sense of relief from the burden of fear, guilt and shame. As a consequence of such developments, the doctrine of sin itself came to be looked upon with suspicion.

What is at stake here is not merely the doctrine of sin, but the very integrity of the Christian faith. For the doctrine of sin makes a crucial contribution to the comprehensive understanding of the Christian faith. First of all, Christianity is a soteriological religion, a religion that focuses on the salvation of human persons and their world. The whole divine economy – from Creation to Incarnation and the final recapitulation of all in Christ – is centred on the notion of salvation. In the absence of a genuine doctrine of sin, the concept of salvation remains vague and the idea of the divine economy of salvation fails to convey its depth of meaning. Second, the Christian doctrines concerning the church, sacraments, mission and practically all other doctrines of faith are linked to the offer of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of sin clarifies the nature of this salvation and, thereby, helps us to grasp the significance of the doctrines of the church in their entirety insofar as they are related to God's salvation. This being the case, a lack of an authentic doctrine of sin obscures the main tenets of the Christian faith..

This calls for a re-positioning of the doctrine of sin that would facilitate the overcoming of its prolonged isolation from the other doctrines of faith and its integration into the larger soteriological framework, which, in fact, is the general horizon for understanding the various aspects of the Christian faith. The modern disillusionment with sin and its gradual disappearance from the Christian consciousness is not unconnected with the displacement of the doctrine of sin from its soteriological context. Moreover, the loss incurred by other doctrines of faith in terms of meaning and coherence is also linked to the isolation of the doctrine of sin. These, once again, go to prove the necessity of relocating the doctrine of sin squarely within the totality of faith and reclaiming it for the Christian faith.

Methodological Presuppositions

The re-positioning of the doctrine of sin necessarily calls for an effective methodology. The two commonly used methods at present are the method of biblical theology and the interdisciplinary method. The former focuses on the analysis of the biblical narratives of sin as well as on the analysis of the various Hebrew and Greek words for sin in the bible.[1] On the basis of these, theology seeks to understand the root cause of sin, its universality, the nature and meaning of sin and its consequences at the personal and societal levels. Usually the method begins with the narratives of the Creation and the Fall and quickly moves on to the narrative of the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ. Such a method is ahistorical insofar as it neglects to take into account the contours of sin in its historical developments and manifestations. Secondly, this method tries to treat sin objectively insofar as it seeks to understand the origin and spread of sin, the nature of sin and its consequences. This method is valuable as it establishes the biblical basis of the doctrine of sin and also provides an objective understanding of the reality of sin and its various dimensions. However, the method is inadequate because in its attempt to generate objective data, it tends to overlook the function of sin in the bible.[2]

The interdisciplinary method aims at bringing the insights from the human and social sciences to the understanding of the reality of sin. This method, therefore, builds on and amplifies the discoveries made by the biblical method with the help of other disciplines. Accordingly, psychology greatly contributes to a deeper perception of sin by showing the psychic structure of human persons and the roots of loneliness and insecurity, guilt and shame, inauthenticity and alienation from self, and a myriad other psychological experiences such as inner conflicts and the operation of the subconscious factors affecting human behaviour[3]. Similarly, the insights from social sciences regarding socio-economic alienation, the functions of purity and pollution, violence, social oppression and discrimination, and exploitation of the weak and the powerless help broaden the understanding of sin by the inclusion of social structural sin.[4] Again, the philosophical enquiries into human existence reveal the problems of inauthentic existence, the experience of meaninglessness, purposelessness and, thereby, highlight the human predicament, which necessarily enhances our notion of sin.[5]

Furthermore, the discoveries in the field of neuroscience and the study of genetics have shed light on the element of determinism or conditioning built into the brain structure and the structure of the genes. These discoveries offer necessary corrections to the traditional simplistic understanding of sin.[6] Thus, the interdisciplinary method makes available wider categories for understanding the doctrine of sin. However, it is beyond the scope of this method to provide a theology of sin. Therefore, the interdisciplinary method is also inadequate for a theological approach to the doctrine of sin.

While the biblical method highlights the reality of sin and the interdisciplinary method underscores the contemporary significance of sin in the experience of the modern humans, they are insufficient for a theological re-positioning of sin within the comprehensive framework of the Christian faith. The question that confronts us is: What kind of an approach to sin will enable us to re-position sin in a manner that will facilitate the recovery of an authentic understanding of sin? Theologically the question boils down to the issue of theological method and can be reformulated: What theological method will enable us to move from the knowledge of sin to the function of sin?

This shift from the reality of sin to the function of sin is a shift in favour of a functional understanding of sin. Here it is essential to emphasize that the functional approach should not be understood in performative terms, where the focus will be on what sin does to the sinner as well as to those sinned against. If the focus remains the same, then the stress will fall primarily on the reality and the consequences of sin, and, there would be hardly any change in the method of approach to sin.

Rather, the functional approach is to be understood in terms of method. It presupposes the knowledge of the reality of sin and its consequences. But moving beyond, this approach asks: What function does the doctrine of sin perform in terms of its revealing power? The theological import of this question can be explained thus: As we all agree, the concept of sin, in one way or another, is present in all religions. If its function were to create, as already mentioned, a sense of fear, guilt, shame and other such negative emotions and feelings, then the persistence of the notion of sin becomes inexplicable. In this

context, it is probably right to say that religions with their idea of sin do not create the negative feelings and emotions. Rather, it is the experience of negativities and one's positive contribution to them that generate the feeling of fear, guilt and shame. The doctrine of sin confirms this. Thus, the methodological significance of the functional approach is to be viewed from the perspective of what the religions want their doctrine of sin to do.

Coming specifically to the Christian religion, we may ask: What does the Christian faith want its doctrine of sin to accomplish? In other words, what specific function does the doctrine of sin fulfil in the Christian religion?[7] It is this crucial question that will engage us in this essay. It must be admitted at the outset that identifying the function of the doctrine of sin within Christianity is a formidable task. For it presupposes a comprehensive grasp of the Christian worldview or the horizon of understanding within which the notion of sin operates. On the other hand, one's own horizon of understanding eludes easy conceptualisation precisely because, first, it functions as an unthematized background of all cognitive processes, and, second, the horizon keeps on changing. In any case, it is important to delineate, briefly at least, the main tenets of the Christian horizon of understanding in order to understand the function of the doctrine of sin in Christian religion.

The primary factor in the Christian horizon of understanding that is crucial for the functional approach to sin is the view of the human person. In other words, the function of sin in Christianity is predicated upon the notion of the human person. Linking the doctrine of sin with the doctrine of the human person can shed light on the function that sin fulfils in Christianity. Accordingly, in this paper I will argue that the function of sin is to reveal the human person to himself/herself by offering a mirror image of the person. Sin offers a mirror image because it reflects the existential status of a person called to live an authentic life. It reveals the disfigurement and disintegration of the person that result from sin with a view to advancing the authentic humanity of a person. Hence, the doctrine of sin has relevance insofar as it provides a contrasting image of the person and, thereby, reinforces the image of an authentic person.

From this perspective, the functional approach to sin emphasizes the revelatory power of sin in relation to the fundamental vocation of human persons to become fully and authentically human. The biblical testimony that the human person bears the image of God (Gen. 1:27) points to the call to become a full human person. The image of sin, on the other hand, offers a contrast: it offers the opposite of the image of God; the opposite of the basic vocation to be authentically human. At this juncture, it is important to underscore the point that the contrasting image provided by sin is not an artificial construction. If it were so, then the doctrine of sin would have only a heuristic function. That is to say, it would amount to an artificial construal of sin in order to generate a counter image of the person. It would imply the denial of the experiential dimension of sin.

Rather than an artificial construal, sin is a human reality located in the experiential realm of human becoming. It refers to the experience of being distanced from the goal of becoming an authentic human person. As such, humans experience it as a dynamic process intertwined with the project of actualising the fundamental vocation to become human. It is precisely the complexity and ambiguity resulting from the intimate link between the two processes in the sphere of human experience that necessitate the assistance of the mirror image to explicate the real trajectory of the process of becoming authentically human.

We have, up to this point, introduced the problematic we are addressing, and specified the methodological presuppositions for a functional approach to the doctrine of sin. We have also stated the central argument of the paper and offered some necessary clarifications. We shall now proceed to substantiate the argument that sin offers a mirror image of the person. For this, we shall first analyse the Christian theological understanding of the human person for the purpose of identifying some of the constitutive elements that make up a holistic vision of being human. In this connection we shall briefly analyse such themes as the human being as a creature, the human being as standing in a special relationship with God, the human being as essentially social and sexual, the human being as embodied and as related to and engaged with the world through action, the human being as dynamic and free

and, finally, the human being as called to a final destiny. These elements become the point of reference for understanding the reality of sin. Using these reference points we shall analyse, in the second place, the revelatory function of the doctrine of sin. Here we shall underscore the fact that sin as a mirror image reveals the opposite of becoming authentically human. This revelation makes us aware of the challenges involved in conforming ourselves to the Christian vision of the human person.

Anthropological Foundations

We have already pointed out that a comprehensive analysis of the Christian horizon of understanding is necessary for approaching sin from a functional perspective. Since such a task is impossible to undertake in the limited space of an article, we shall limit ourselves to the vision of the human person enshrined in the Christian horizon of understanding. The intention here is to outline the image of the person that emerges from within the Christian worldview along with its main characteristics. This image, as we shall subsequently see, will help us to examine the contrasting or mirror image portrayed by sin and to determine the function of the doctrine of sin in the Christian horizon of understanding.[8]

Rather than furnishing a scientific explanation of the human phenomenon, the Christian theological anthropology is primarily concerned about providing the meaning, value and purpose of human existence in its totality. The whole divine economy – Creation, Incarnation and Redemption – presents itself as an explication of the God-intended meaning, value and purpose of human beings and their world.[9] It is this overarching horizon of understanding that defines the human person from the Christian faith perspective. When the Christian faith affirms the reality of the human person, it is always an affirmation of the human person as one who stands before God – God who, as the origin and destiny of human persons, reveals the God-self in Jesus Christ as the source of the meaning, value and purpose of humans and their world. However, the Christian faith does not envisage the human person standing before God in isolation; rather he/she stands before God as a member of the human community and as one who is historically situated in the world. In other words, essential to standing before God

is standing **with** others in solidarity and standing **in** the world as an integral part of the cosmic process with the expectation and hope of realizing the God-given purpose. This, in a nutshell, is the core of the Christian vision of the human person. We need to unfold this vision drawing insights from the scriptures.

Human Being as Creature:

Central to the biblical affirmation about the human person is that one is essentially a creature. This is not an objective scientific statement about the origin of the human person. But rather one locates here the theological or faith affirmation regarding the specific nature of the relationship between human beings and God. It can be described as a relationship of dependence, provided that the concept 'dependence' is understood not in terms of enslavement, but in terms of the on-going creative activity of God that constantly sustains us in existence. It is this relationship that is emphasized when the Christian theological anthropology portrays the person as standing before God.

Human Being as Loved into Existence:

The characteristic of this divine (Creator) – human (creature) relationship is expressed in theology by the notion of grace. Grace, as the *dharma* of God,[10] as the loving disposition of the Creator toward the creature, signifies the entirely gratuitous ways of God's self-giving manifested in the act of creation, in holding the entire creation together in existence as well as in sustaining everything. The notion of grace furnishes the *raison d'être* for human existence: human beings are loved into existence and the same divine love keeps us in existence while leading us to our fulfilment in God.[11] In a way, the concept of grace recapitulates the whole divine economy in relation to human beings and their world. Once again, the proper human response to the grace of God is to 'stand before God'. As we shall presently explain, this graced relationship provides the foundation for other human relationships.

Human Being as Called to Communion:

From this portrayal of human persons in relation to God, we shall now move on to the human relationship with other human beings. The Christian anthropology is emphatic with regard to the social nature of

human persons. When the scripture depicts the creation of human persons, it pays special attention to the fact that humanity is created male and female (Gen 1:27). The implication is that authentic humanity does not reside in the male or in the female; it is to be realized through a process of communion among persons. The same point is emphasized in the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World,* where it says that God did not create human beings as solitary beings[12]. That is to say, communion among persons is a necessary condition for the realization of one's personhood. Thus, from the perspective of human-human relationship we get a picture of the person as one who is always related and moving out of oneself to other human persons.

Human Being as Oriented Toward Others:

This ecstatic nature of human persons is emphasized in human sexuality. It symbolizes the human need for the other to attain one's own humanity. Human sexuality connotes the essential other-orientedness of human beings. That is to say, human beings attain their authentic nature as human persons only by going out of themselves to others in love, intimacy and communion. Sexuality represents the energy that enables us to break open the enclosure created by our self-centredness and to move out toward life-enhancing relationships with other human persons. Sexuality reveals to us that one can become an authentic human person only by relating to others and not in isolation from others.

Human Being as Rooted in The World:

A third level of human relationality manifests itself in the sphere of human-world relationship. Like the divine-human, and human-human relationships, the relationship between humans and the world is constitutive of being human. The scripture is not shy to speak of human dependence on the created universe. According to the book of Genesis, human beings are related to the earth from the moment of their origins and continue to depend on the world for their sustenance (Gen. 2:7ff). Solidarity with and dependence on the world are integral to being human. For, human existence would be unthinkable without an environment. The essential link with the environment entails human responsibility for the created world. Becoming an authentic human person

presupposes not only the acknowledgement of one's dependence on the environment but also the active dimension of caring for and promoting the well-being of God's creation. This way of relating to the world is also a concrete expression of one's relationship with God and with other human persons. Thus, the emerging picture shows human beings as deeply rooted in the world.

Human Beings as Body-Persons:

These three dimensions of relationship are predicated upon the embodied existence of human persons. It is embodiment that gives solidity to the picture of the human person. That is to say, it is as body-persons that we stand before God in a love relationship, we enter into life - enhancing communion with other human persons, and we relate to the world around us. Body enables us to actualise our multiple relationships because it fulfils the conditions for relationships. First, embodiment allows us to locate ourselves within the vast universe and, second, it gives us a specific identity as human persons. Our location and our identity facilitate our reaching out toward others and to the world. In relation to other human persons, body enables us to actualise our ecstatic nature as symbolized by sexuality by becoming a body-gift to others. It is in our body that we become a self-gift to others.[13] In this way, embodiment becomes a precondition to becoming an authentic human person in relation to other human persons.

Human Beings as Engaged in Action:

As already mentioned, the relationship with and openness to the world is an essential requirement for the realization of one's humanity. This openness to the world is made possible by our existence as body-persons. Human activity in the world is an eminent expression of this openness of the body-person to the world.[14] The dialogical structure of the human person in relation to the world plays itself out through a process of active and creative engagement with the world. In this process, body-persons transcend the boundaries of one's embodied existence and reach out toward wider spheres of interaction. Moreover, the engagement with the world through activity ensures human solidarity with the past and future generations. Society as it exists is the incarnation of the labour of past generations of human community and our

participation in society is a manifestation of our solidarity with the past generations. Our present contribution to the betterment of society expresses our solidarity with the future generations insofar as they are the beneficiaries of our present labour. Thus, the openness to the world, the transcending of boundaries and the solidarity with humanity as a whole facilitated by human activity that follows from embodiment are integral dimensions of becoming an authentic human person. As we shall see, human activity also represents the process of the actualisation of human freedom.

Human Being as Dynamic:

So far we have specified a number of constitutive elements or dimensions of the human person. A careful look at these dimensions convinces us that they point toward the dynamic nature of the human person. They underline the fact that to be a human person means to be engaged in the *process* of becoming a human person. In other words, human existence itself is a constant becoming. From this point of view, a static understanding of human beings can only be an abstraction devoid of any foundation in reality. The human person is always in the process of becoming human and, therefore, the human person, as the various dimensions emphasize, is dynamic and this dynamism is the defining factor of the human person.

Human Beings as Free:

In theological anthropology this dynamism of the human person is expressed by the concept of freedom. Since human existence, as we have already stated, is a dynamic process of becoming, we are justified in qualifying human existence itself as freedom.[15]

From a theological point of view, freedom can never be a discrete human attribute or quality along with other attributes. For it refers to the whole human existence actualising itself in consonance with the various constitutive dimensions of the human person. Thus, for example, the actualisation of human existence along the line of the dimension of human beings standing before God defines freedom in this sphere as the ability to respond to the love of God and the opposite as unfreedom. Similarly, the actualisation of human existence along the line of the dimension of human beings as body-persons defines

freedom in this sphere as the willingness and ability to become a body-gift to others and the opposite as unfreedom. As we shall see shortly, the image of God is constituted by these freedoms and the mirror image is fashioned by the unfreedoms.

Human Beings as The Image of God:

The biblical metaphor that evokes the self-realization of human persons in the diverse spheres of human existence is the *Imago Dei.*[16] The image of God is not something static like a portrait. It is dynamic and provides a dynamic view of the human person. This dynamism, as already indicated, is oriented toward the attainment of the full stature of the human person. It reveals the essential truth about human persons, namely, their incomplete and unfinished nature, as well as their fundamental vocation to become persons through the actualisation of their multiple relationality.

Human Beings as Oriented Toward a Destiny:

As a dynamic metaphor of human existence from a Christian point of view, the image of God signifies the progressive nature of the human unfolding in the direction of God, who is the source and destiny of persons. Thus the full realization of the image of God in human persons and the realization of the destiny of human persons are synonymous. From this perspective, the existential self-actualisation of human beings in the various spheres of their relationality is directly and intimately linked with the final destiny of human persons. This connection makes it clear that the economy of salvation is not consequent upon the Fall. It is integral to the purpose of creation. The creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God affirms this fundamental truth.

Human Beings as Image of God in Christ:

Accordingly, the Incarnation, as popular theology often wrongly conceives, is not necessitated by the Fall. It is the gracious design of God that human beings become the image of God in union with Jesus Christ, and not apart from him. The incarnation confirms God's design. In him we see the unfolding of the human person in the direction of God and with him we, as human beings, also unfold in the direction of God. As stated earlier, this unfolding encompasses all the dimensions of the human person. Thus, Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible

God (Col.1:15) reveals to us what it means to be the image of God through the progressive realization of one's vocation to be an authentic human person.

Functional Approach to Sin

We have discussed the various constitutive elements or dimensions of the human person from the Christian anthropological point of view and indicated that these are the elements involved in the process of becoming an authentic human person. These elements cumulatively paint the picture of an ideal person from the Christian faith perspective. The Christian metaphor that evokes this ideal picture of the human is the *Imago Dei.* The various dimensions of this picture provide the point of reference for the understanding of sin. It is only with reference to these elements that we can approach the function of the doctrine of sin. That is to say, when we look at sin from the standpoint of the *Imago Dei*, we realize that sin functions as a counter image or a mirror image that is in radical opposition to all the fundamental dimensions of the human person as represented by the *Imago Dei.* In the remaining part of the paper we shall substantiate this with reference to each of the constitutive dimensions of being an authentic human person.

Inauthentic Human Existence in Relation to God:

As we have seen, the central theological affirmation about the human person is that he/she stands before God. The notion of creature emphasizes this dimension and the notion of grace qualifies this divine-human relationship as God's self-giving love. If standing before God and responding to God's love constitute a fundamental dimension of being authentically human, then the contrary implies the absence of this dimension and what emerges is the picture of a person who turns away from God, one who refuses to acknowledge one's dependence on God and one who rejects God's offer of love. Here the function of the doctrine of sin is to reveal the meaning of inauthentic human existence in relation to the divine-human relationship.

Inauthentic Human Existence in Relation to Humans:

The biblical testimony affirms that an inauthentic existence in relation to God has its consequences upon the other constitutive

dimensions of being authentically human. We shall examine the result of the rupture of relationship with God on the human-human relationship as implied in the creation of humankind as male and female. This relationship is founded on the divine -human relationship and, based on this foundation, human beings strive to fashion authentic existence through communion of persons in society. In this context, human sexuality becomes a force that empowers persons to move out of themselves toward others in communication, communion and intimacy. The embodied nature of human persons enables them to translate this force into the concrete action of becoming body-gift to others. In this way, the social, sexual and embodied dimensions of human persons promote authentic existence at the level of human-human relationship.

But the destruction of the primary divine-human relationship adversely affects the human-human relationship built on it. Accordingly, the life-giving communion among persons comes to be replaced by life-negating domination, discrimination, oppression and exploitation, which mark the end of mutuality and solidarity among persons in society. Similarly, human sexuality metamorphoses into a power for self-centredness, aggression and for possessing others to satisfy one's own selfish needs. Likewise, body becomes an instrument for self-aggrandizement, control, manipulation and self-seeking. These are indications of the loss of authenticity in the sphere of human-human relationship. In this context, the doctrine of sin reveals the meaning and reality of inauthentic existence at the levels of personal and social relationships.

Inaunthentic Human Existence in Relation to The World:

Another area that is adversely affected by the destruction of the divine-human relationship is the relationship between humans and the world. As we have seen, an authentic human existence presupposes a healthy interdependence of human beings and their environment. Acknowledging oneself to be an integral part of the comic process and one's role as the care-taker of the world, the human being works for the well being of creation. Through creative engagement with the world, human beings not only contribute their share to the advancement of

creation, but also actualise themselves in the process. Thus, openness to the world made real through human activity enables human beings to realize their authentic human existence.

Conversely, an inauthentic human existence manifests itself in the distortion of the human-world relationship. The ecological interdependence assumes the characteristics of ecological domination, exploitation and destruction. The human engagement that is meant to advance the well-being of creation turns out to be the cause of ecological disaster. Human activity that is supposed to express human solidarity with the past and future generations and to contribute to the building up of society degenerates into a means to exploit the fruit of other peoples' labour and to advance one's own self-interest at the expense of others, thereby paving the way for social misery in the form of hunger and poverty, disease and underdevelopment. These cosmic and social consequences of inauthentic human existence in relation to the world are highlighted by the doctrine of sin.

Inauthentic Human Existence as Unfreedom:

As we move on to the analysis of freedom, we recall that earlier we described human existence itself as freedom. It is because both, existence and freedom, have to do with becoming. When human existence unfolds in such a way that it leads to an authentic human existence through the actualization of multiple relationality, then it becomes a manifestation of authentic freedom. If human existence evolves in the opposite direction through the denial and destruction of relationships, then it becomes an exercise of unfreedom. That is to say, authentic human existence results from real freedom, and unfreedom leads to inauthentic human existence. It is the function of the doctrine of sin to reveal the spheres of unfreedom in human beings and it does so by highlighting the consequences of the destruction of relationships in different areas. Thus, sin reveals the operation of unfreedom in turning away from God, in the refusal of the love of God, in the negation of communion among human persons, in converting sexuality into self-centredness, in transforming body into an instrument of self gratification, and in changing human engagement with the world into an ecologically destructive activity.

Inauthentic Human Existence as Death:

Finally, sin reveals the ultimate consequence of the operation of unfreedom in the multiple spheres of human relationships, namely, the cessation of becoming authentically human, which is the same as being separated from the final destiny. If human existence is destined to unfold into the full stature of a person, that is, the attainment of the fullness of life, then the separation from the final destiny would mean ceasing to be human, that is, death. Thus, in relation to human destiny, the doctrine of sin performs the function of revealing the nature of a life that is oriented to death.

Two Images of The Human Person:

On the basis of our discussion we can now affirm that there are two images of the human person: one reveals the authentic human person and the other reveals the opposite. They are not discrete images as two separate photographs. Though we have dealt with them separately, they are intertwined in human experience and are linked together like an object and its mirror image. In the absence of the object, its mirror image ceases to exist. What gives reality to the mirror image is the presence of the object. We realize that what matters is not the mirror image but the object, and the mirror image has significance only insofar as it helps focusing on the object.

These two images are the human person as the image of God and the human person as the image of sin. The former is the real and the latter is the mirror image. The image of the human person as the image of God reflects the beauty, the desirability and the greatness of being an authentic human person as described in the section "Anthropological Foundations". The mirror image, on the other hand, reflects the monstrosity of an inauthentic human existence as described in the section "Functional Approach to Sin". In reality the human person is neither totally the image of God nor totally its mirror image – the image of sin. The two images remain as two possibilities of human freedom. They perform the same function in contrary ways. While the image of God invites, attracts and persuades us to become the reality it represents, namely, an authentic human person, the mirror image discourages, repels and dissuades us from becoming inauthentic human beings and turns our attention back to the image of God as the ideal to achieve. In

this way, the doctrine of sin empowers a person to consciously seek authentic human existence by conforming oneself to the image of God.

Adam as The Mirror Image of Christ:

In the light of all that has been said so far, we can have a fresh look at Rom. 5:12 ff., where St. Paul contrasts the figure of Christ and the figure of Adam. Though v.12 is used as the key text for the doctrine of the original sin, including the origin of sin and its universality, Paul's actual intention seems to go far beyond it. Is not Paul presenting Jesus Christ as the image of God and Adam as the image of sin? Is he not presenting Adam as the mirror image of Christ? If so, then Paul is portraying authentic human existence vis-à-vis inauthentic human existence with the help of the figures of Christ and Adam. He does not merely draw the portrait, but also emphasizes the possibility of changing unfreedom into freedom and thereby the possibility of moving from inauthentic to authentic existence made available through the self-gift of God in Jesus Christ. Thus, we may say that at the core of Paul's doctrine of sin in Rom. 5:12ff. is the question of authentic human existence.

Conclusion

Our aim has been to reclaim an authentic doctrine of sin for the Christian faith. This required of us to re-position the doctrine within the larger soteriological framework. Though we have not fully succeeded in explicitly situating the doctrine of sin in the total sphere of Christian faith, we have brought the doctrine of sin out of its theological isolation by locating human persons within the Christian horizon of understanding and by dealing with sin in relation to the human person. The functional approach helped us to link the doctrine of sin with anthropological foundations and to underscore its theological function in Christian faith. We have discovered that the doctrine of sin functions as a mirror image of the real person as envisaged by the Christian faith, and it creates in us the motivation to become that which the mirror image reflects. In this way, the functional approach gives us a clear insight into the positive function of the doctrine of sin in the Christian religion.

From this we may draw some valuable conclusions for theology and Christian living. The first conclusion is that the doctrine of sin is functional in the scriptures. It reveals how human beings stand in relation to the divine economy of salvation. It tells us in what sense we need salvation. By revealing our actual location in comparison to the divine call to be authentically human, the doctrine of sin motivates us to recommit ourselves to the realization of the fullness of life offered to us in Jesus Christ. Since the role of sin is functional in the scriptures and the scriptures do not assign any ontological status to sin, it is important that in its approach to sin theology follows the lead of the scriptures.

Second, the functional approach to sin reconfirms the fact that the focus of the Christian faith is on the human person called to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ and not on sin. This call is inscribed in the very creation of human beings. That is to say, the call to the fullness of life is not something added to the human vocation after the Fall, or necessitated by sin. This being the case, the doctrine of sin merely helps us to determine our existence in relation to this call to fullness. The functional approach to sin, thus, reveals the relative and provisional character of the doctrine of sin.

Third, it follows that in any discussion on sin, the legal and moral aspects of sin must give way to the experience of sin in relation to the vocation to live an authentic life in its fullness through multiple relationships. For, the former tends to reduce sin to definite actions and the intentions behind the actions, while the latter links sin to the very process of becoming human. The functional approach convincingly shows that the purpose of the doctrine of sin is not primarily to verify the moral status of an action, but to corroborate the correspondence between the action and the goal of becoming an authentic human person.

Fourth, the functional approach to sin sheds fresh light on the sacrament of reconciliation. If the mirror image reveals the disintegration of relationships with God, with humans and with the world, then the sacrament of reconciliation needs to change its focus from the enumeration of sins, absolution and penance to the sacramental grace that initiates the process of the restoration of broken relationships in us. In this way, the sacrament of reconciliation becomes more an

exercise of freedom in favour of human life unfolding in the direction of God than a magical washing away of sin. This exercise of freedom comes to be fleshed out in the restoration of broken relationships.

Finally, the functional approach to the doctrine of sin invites us not to be bogged down by the negative feelings of fear, guilt and shame that often accompany sin, but to discover the positive dimensions of the doctrine of sin, namely, the beauty, desirability and the greatness of becoming an authentic human person and, thereby, to be empowered to strive toward a deeper realization of the fullness of life.

Notes and References

1 The treatment of sin in the following works will give us a fair idea of a biblical method in the approach to sin. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1964; Reprint, Secunderabad: Om-Authentic Books, 2007); Eugene LaVerdiere, "The Need for Salvation: A New Testament Perspective", *Theological Studies* 21, no.3 (Fall 1982): 227-238; Piet Schoonenberg, *Man and Sin: A Theological View* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965); Alphonse Spilly, "Sin And Alienation in the Old Testament: The Personalist Approach", *Theological Studies* 21, no.3 (Fall 1982): 211-225.

2 This statement is applicable only if the discussion of sin ends with the analysis of biblical narratives and terminologies. But usually, biblical theologians attempt to bring sin into the experiential level, as an analysis of the works cited in the above footnote will testify.

3 For example, see Raymond J. Stovich, "Psychology and Salvation: Reflection Upon the Human Condition", *Theological Studies* 21, no.3 (Fall 1982): 255-264.

4 Examples of the sociological contribution to the understanding of sin can be found in Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975); Kay Carmichel, *Sin and Forgiveness: New Responses in a Changing World* (Glasgow: Ashgate, 2003).

5 Karl Rahner and Paul Tillich provide convincing example of using philosophical insights for understanding the doctrine of sin. Cfr. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: And Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) and Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Vol. II: Existence and the Christ* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

6 Ted Peters uses insights from genetics and evolution to analyze the Christian notion of sin. Cfr. Ted Peters, "The Genesis and Genetics of Sin", in *Sin and Salvation: Task of Theology Today III*, ed. Duncan Reid & Mark Worthing (Hindmarsh, Australia: ATF Press, 2003), 89-112.

7 Burke adopts a functional approach and explores the function of the original sin in Christian faith. However, he explains the function in relation to the significance of Jesus Christ for human beings. His argument seems to imply that the original sin necessitated the redemption in Christ, which is theologically an untenable position. Cfr. Patrick Burke, "Man Without Christ: An Approach to Hereditary Sin", *Theological Studies* 29, no.4 (March 1968): 4-18. In the present article my aim is to understand the function of sin in relation to human persons and their vocation to become authentic human persons.

8 An extensive discussion on the role of the horizon of understanding in perceiving the historical development of the doctrine of sin is found in Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans, 2007), 257-308

9 The analysis that follows is mostly based on my earlier article on human person. Cfr. Mathew Jayanth, "Theology and Science on Human Person: Constructing a Theological Anthropology in Dialogue with Science", *Malabar Theological Review* 2, no.1 (2007): 3-26.

10 For a discussion on *dharma* as grace, see Mathew Jayanth, "Theology and Science", *Malabar Theological Review*, 9-10.

11 This is idea is powerfully expressed the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World.* See *Gaudium et Spes*, no.19. I am grateful to Fr. Kurien Kunnumpuram, S.J. for calling my attention to this reference.

12 The *Pastoral Constitution* states: "God did not create man a solitary being. From the beginning "male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). The partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons." Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, no.12.

13 A comprehensive treatment of the significance of body is available in Mathew Jayanth, "Body Spirituality: Incarnation as an Invitation to an Embodied Spirituality", *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies 7, no.2 (July 2004): 112-135.*

14 For a philosophical analysis of the connection between embodiment and action in the world, see, Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, "The Phenomenon of Work: The Way of Human Existence as Worldly and Bodily", *Divyadaan* 17, no.2 (2006): 137-49

15 The concept of human existence as freedom is taken from Haight who, in turn, works with the Rahnerian concept of freedom. Cfr. Roger Haight, "Sin And Grace", in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspective Vol. II*, ed. Francis Schussler Fiorensa & John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 77-141. His discussion on freedom is found on pages 80-85.

16 The major interpretations of the meaning of the image of God can be found in Noreen L. Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). The significance of the image of God for understanding human person is discussed in Mathew Jayanth, "Theology and Science", *Malabar Theological Review, 6-7.*

JPJRS 11/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2008 97-113

The Understanding of Sin and Its Function in the Theology of Karl Rahner

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The notion of sin begins within a theological framework. It is religion that gives sin its particular contours and that enables persons to recognize sin as a breach of rules, a rupture of relationship, a denial of what is wholesome and/or good, and, finally, the means to overcome it. Religions possess their particular and specific understandings or definitions of sin. A single clear common denominator seems absent whereby the meaningfulness of sin can be grasped. Perhaps the most that can be said about a shared understanding of sin is that an agent brings about the destruction of order originating from the divine and expressed in religion. Connected with this understanding are the following: conscience, the freedom exercised by the agent, accountability, the harmful effects of destroying order, guilt, repentance, forgiveness, restitution, punishment and mercy. Doing good is seen as acting virtuously whereas doing evil is sinning. Both these actions presuppose a religious tradition to which one belongs and in virtue of which a person experiences fulfilment or loss of oneself.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition puts great emphasis on the free choice of a person that is exercised in conformity with the will of God or against it. While there is mention of sins committed inadvertently, sin normally means a deliberate rejection of the covenantal relationship between God and persons. This rejection is seen taking place in the concrete circumstances of everyday life. Even so, a renewed offer of covenantal relationship on God's part along with a conversion of the person can rebuild the relationship between the person and God. The primary aspect of this relationship is God's graciousness to the person who owes his/her origin and preservation to God. Hence, even the Genesis account of creation is understood as establishing a covenant

between God and the persons created by God. The sin of Adam and Eve is essentially a rejection of God's covenantal relationship with the creature. The Genesis narrative tells of the catastrophic effects of that rejection, yet it highlights the promise to be realized in the future that will refound the covenantal relationship that had been broken by the sin of Adam and Eve.

However, the covenantal God described in the scriptural narrative is not one object among many others present in the cosmos at large. God is characterized by transcendence, mystery and a sense of the unconditional. Any naming of God—as in the case of concrete objects—is fraught with danger since it willy-nilly boxes God into a space that can be occupied only by a finite and created reality. God as the named reality in the Christian scriptures is distanced from God's creation—qualitatively and quantitatively—in an infinite way! When the breaking of relationships between human persons takes place, one can identify the dynamics that are present in that fracturing, but how does one understand the dynamics that are present between God and human persons? How does one elaborate a theological method that deals with sin in the world without reducing God merely to another object in creation? Can one draw out a metaphysics of sin when the finite and the infinite are to be considered in their specific identities/natures?

As a Christian theologian, Karl Rahner interprets sin in terms of his system of transcendentalism. He begins by sketching out his understanding of the human person vis-à-vis God, the transcendent reality. Freedom is that which characterizes a person, and it is only then that he begins treating of the reality of sin. Hence, this article first deals with the freedom of the human person in the world (his/her situatedness) created by God. After that, an attempt is made to explicate Rahner's understanding of sin in terms of that situation. Finally, the third and concluding section will offer some critical remarks on Rahner's understanding of sin and its function in his theology.

Part One: The Human Person in the World

In Rahner's understanding, one does not begin to understand the situation of the human person as sinful by subjecting him/her to an enquiry that does not take into account divine revelation. On the one hand, human persons are not self-sufficient creatures; they are separated

by a mysterious chasm from God, yet are dependent on that God for their being and final fulfilment. At the same time, persons are capable of true and radical freedom so that they can accept or reject God's offer of communion and eternal bliss. In both cases human responsibility is exercised. How and where does one begin to analyze the person in terms of freedom and/or self-determination?

The Human Person

A person is situated in the world not primarily in opposition to another but as one who is thrown into the world to be in a network of relationships that make up the world. The person is *Dasein*.[1] Heidegger, whose classes Rahner attended and found stimulating, holds that the very modes and vantage points that we employ to examine being are constitutive of that being's essential characteristics. The influence of the German poet Friedrich Hoderlin (1770-1843) and Holderlin's understanding of "inhabit" is reflected in Heidegger's and Rahner's approach to being. To be in the world is to live harmoniously in it and to the full.

> Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it—all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves...The entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "*Dasein*".[2]

The intelligibility of being does not come about as a result of our reasoning processes but is already present in its "there-ness". Keeping to the Heideggerian perspective of being a person, Rahner too takes into account the different attributes, or rather possibilities of being a person.

The human person is unable to construct a theology by merely viewing the situation in which he/she exists. It is not only reasoning—even when done within a faith perspective—that ensures a valid theology. In Rahner's own words:

> In the primary and original sense theology is not a system of valid propositions constituted by human thought, but the totality of divine speech [God's total revelation] addressed by God himself to man, albeit

in human language. This word of God's revelation, thus already heard and grasped in an original unity of *auditus* and *intellectus*, can and should in turn be made by man the object of his enquiring, systematizing thought.[3]

Hence, one does not try to construct with the help of logic and/or natural philosophical knowledge alone a picture of evil since such an effort is no more than speculative. At most, it argues a disposition of true openness on the part of the human person.[4]

But the communication of God has taken place and continues to be an existential reality in the world of men and women. This communication has taken place through happenings in the history of men and women. These happenings are seen as "categorical" in that they are perceived against the horizon of transcendence that lies within the human spirit. The categorical may be understood as episodic happenings strung together and forming the history both of the world and of the human phenomenon. Human persons grasp the transcendence of God that is seen in the categorical events of history. The believer easily understands that the mysterious and transcendent God is present and mediated through the various elements and factors that make up creation (and therefore historical reality) but above all and most definitively in the person of Jesus Christ.[5]

This communication can be understood as God sharing the God-self with persons. This constitutes the supernatural existential.

God's self-sharing is in Rahner's phrase a "supernatural existential." The word "existential" (borrowed from Heidegger) indicates an aspect of human life, a reality of existence. A supernatural existential is a form not phenomenologically seen but held by faith to be real and present, "present in every person at least in the mode of an offer."[6]

A problem that is often associated with the supernatural existential is that the status of the natural is so magnified that it is treated as divine. Such an understanding would be counter to what is affirmed in *Dei Filius* of Vatican I regarding what we can know through our human intellect (natural reason), what is revelation proper—i.e. known by divine faith—and how it can be grasped by a God-given illumination. Human redemption takes place through grace but grace is without question a gift of God to humankind. Let us hear Rahner explain this point:

Without prejudice to the fact that it speaks of a free and unmerited grace, of a miracle of God's free love for spiritual creatures, the statement that man as subject is the event of God's self-communication is a statement which refers to absolutely all men, and which expresses an existential of every person. Such an existential does not become merited and in this sense "natural" by the fact that it is present in *all* men as an existential of their concrete existence, and is present prior to their freedom, their self-understanding and their experience. The gratuity of a reality has nothing to do with the question whether it is present in many or only in a few people.[7]

Already in Hearers of the Word, Rahner anticipates the charge that he has so identified the natural status of the person so that he/she seems graced by nature and not by the free gift of God.[88] (Translated by Michael Richards), Herder and Herder, New York, 1969, p 73, footnote 3.

Human Freedom

Rahner is aware of two basic types of freedom that the person is capable of exercising. Traditionally, one type is the 'freedom of choice' when an individual is supposedly neutral and decides for one thing rather than another.[9] Another type is when 'self-realization' takes place so that an individual is able to realize himself/herself to a greater extent (as in some way envisaged in the *esse melius* of scholastic philosophy). Hence, 'self-realization rather than 'freedom of choice' is the characteristic of human freedom. This is so because the spirit of the human person transcends the concrete reality of a person.

It would be a complete misconception of the nature of freedom to try to understand it as the mere capacity of choice between objects given *a posteriori*, among which, besides many others, there is also God; so that God would only play a special role in the choice made by this freedom of choice from among these many objects on account of his own objective characteristics but not on account of the nature of freedom itself. Freedom only exists—as was seen explicitly by St. Thomas—because there is spirit understood as transcendence. (p 179)

It is decisive for the Christian understanding of freedom, however, that this freedom is not only made possible by God and is not only related to him as the supporting horizon of freedom of choice in

categories, but that it is freedom *vis-à-vis* God himself. This is the frightening mystery of freedom in its Christian understanding. Where God is understood in categories as merely one reality among others, as one of the many objects of freedom of choice—understood as a neutral capacity which is arbitrarily occupied with this and that—the statement that freedom of choice is choice even with regard to God would present no particular difficulty.[10]

The Radicalism of Human Freedom (Fundamental Option)

The intention of Rahner in identifying human freedom with a person's transcendence and, therefore, spirit is to highlight the overpowering and devastating consequences that follow from the exercise of human freedom. A person has the awesome power of accepting or rejecting the transcendent reality of God as presented to him/her in Christian revelation, and, more specifically, in Jesus Christ. In exercising this freedom the person becomes that reality which God intended he/she should be: finite transcendence fulfilling its finality!

Freedom never happens as a merely objective exercise, as a mere choice 'between' individual objects, but is the *self*-exercise of the man who chooses objectively; only within this freedom in which man is capable of achieving himself is man also free with regard to the material of his self-achievement. He can do or omit this or that in view of his own self-realisation that is inescapably imposed on him. This self-realisation is a task he cannot avoid and, in spite of all the differences within the concrete material of his self-achievement, it is always either a self-realisation in the direction of God or a radical self-refusal towards God.[11]

Rahner's approach to human freedom, the understanding of its exercise and the possibility of saying "yes" or "no" to God provides the wherewithal for understanding the doctrine of the fundamental option.

The concrete freedom of man by which he decides about himself as a whole by effecting his own finality before God, is the unity in difference of the formal '*option fondamentale*' and the free individual acts of man no longer attainable by reflection, a unity which is the concrete being of the subject of freedom having-achieved-itself. In all

this, to emphasise this once more and explicitly, freedom—precisely speaking—is not the possibility of infinite revision, but the capacity to do something uniquely final, something which is finally valid because it is done in freedom. Freedom is the capacity for the eternal. (*emphasis mine*)[12]

Enough has been said about the human person in his/her situatedness in the world to understand how Rahner envisages the exercise of human freedom in a Christian economy of grace. His notion of the fundamental option is the outcome of his anthropology.[13] Rahner's doctrine about the fundamental option seeks to demonstrate how the exercise of human freedom cannot be the compelling motive and reason for human self-fulfilment. In the ultimate analysis human fulfilment remains gift totally given by God in God's free self-communication.

The total decision by which man decides definitively about the whole of his reality, i.e. posits this totality itself in its freely determined finality (and an individual act can be called really and completely free only in so far as this happens), is a total decision that according to revelation belongs to the judgment of God alone. Man does indeed come ever closer to his finality in freedom as a *conscious* subject, but he cannot once more objectify this result of his freedom for himself, i.e. judge for himself and even less others in their total quality before God. The *Catholic* doctrine of faith declares that man cannot, while still a pilgrim on earth, have an absolutely certain judgment about his state of justification or eternal salvation. Even the *Protestant* doctrine of justification is not ultimately at variance with this point (in spite of all controversies) since, even for the Lutheran doctrine of justification, absolute fiducial faith always remains subject to temptation. This means also, therefore, that man cannot adequately reflect objectively and with absolute certainty on his free decisions. It means that freedom is really subjectivity and that subjectivity is in itself and in its self-presence a more original reality than individually existing objects which can be clearly determined by a previously conceived co-ordinate system of universal ideas.[14]

The doctrine of the fundamental option, as understood by Rahner, does not pretend to explain away the mystery of human sinfulness or the mystery of God's redeeming action that brings about the conversion of the person. It seeks to give substance to the human act of freedom in

the sight of God, places the human person totally in the arena of God's forgiving love and mercy, and attempts to present human choices in a more comprehensive perspective. It is in this context that the doctrine of the fundamental option is brought into play.[15] Richard A. McCormick (Ref. Richard P. McBrien (general editor):

The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism

HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1995, p 594) says the following:

Whether it explains human choice satisfactorily, God's respect for that choice and the act of conversion to God's grace in a better way than theories that preceded it is a moot point. What Rahner does affirm is that the God revealed through Jesus Christ is eternally the God of love, of mercy and forgiveness, no matter what human intransigence may attempt and succeed in doing.

Part Two: Sin in the World

Freedom and Responsibility

The fact of sin is linked to responsibility. The human subject posits acts that help realize his/her selfhood in the world. Catholic theology interprets these actions as virtuous or sinful in so far as they are seen to accept or reject God's self-communication. Such an interpretation affects all men and women in the world because all persons are included in one divine plan of salvation.

The understanding of these concepts [freedom and responsibility] in the history of man's self interpretation has no doubt a long and variable history to which also belongs precisely the history of revelation and of Christian theology. Christian theology nevertheless presupposes a permanent nature in man which is preserved throughout the whole history of mankind even though it only becomes gradually conscious of itself in that history. It therefore presupposes also a permanent common knowledge about responsibility, even though this too has its own history. Otherwise, all men could not really be the subject and object of one divine salvation on the part of one and the same God in Jesus Christ within one unified history of salvation.[16]

Human freedom and responsibility are not experienced in an ambience where the human person is separated from that space where

God is present making available the offer of divine self-communication to the creature, but are exercised in that very space. A person

understands freedom as an autonomous self-possession of man before or even against God, but not in the sense that God's grace and mastery and the responsible exercise of freedom are realities encroaching on each other...The divine freedom and mastery are experienced from the outset as the reason for the possibility of the creature's responsibility and freedom, so that both grow in equal and not in inverse proportion...This is obviously what is meant by the Christian statement about man and his salvation and damnation...[17]

Freedom and Guilt

However, not every act of freedom is able to bring about the self-fulfilment and a total giving of oneself to God. This would be the oblique side of the exercise of freedom. Further, it is also part of human experience that a person does not know with absolute certitude that one is justified before God. At the same time, Catholic doctrine holds that there exist "material, objective and universally valid norms for the right or wrong exercise of this subjective freedom in the categorized material of the nature of man and of his world."[18] Hence, the true and absolute condition of the person in his/her accepting or rejecting God's self-communication is not a matter that is unilaterally known by a person but is best left to the merciful judgment of a loving God! About guilt, Rahner has the following to say:

If...the relationship between guilt in the theological and in the ordinary sense is to be defined exactly, it must not be overlooked that it is not given to man to pass any ultimate judgment about guilt before God, in the form of a reflected objective statement either in his own case or in that of others. Hence it is impossible, even from the objective material, the spatio-temporal tangibility and the objective quality of human action, to get any clear idea for such definitive judgment about such a really existing guilt before God.

The true status of the human person must be faced. It is only God who is totally aware of the self, whereas the human person must contend with limited awareness and corresponding responsibility in knowing and understanding the self. If a person cannot be absolutely certain about

his/her state of grace, neither must we assume that—in every circumstance—a person who is acting wrongly is totally aware of what he/she is doing. In keeping with the presupposition of God making it possible for a person to posit a free act, it is God's judgment alone that validates the act of virtue or sin.

What then of the punishment due to sin that Christian teaching implies? There is no need of punishment being imposed from God's part as a form of "retribution":

there will no longer theologically speaking be any insurmountable obstacles to the thesis maintaining that all divine punishment is a connatural consequence of guilt flowing from the proper nature of guilt and need not be specially added by God: and that therefore God is the punisher of sin by having created the objective structures of man and of the world.

However, it is appropriate for the keeping of good order in society for civil authority to punish someone for the preservation of the common good. But this pattern must not be extended to God's way of dealing with persons.

Freedom and Sacramental Forgiveness[19]

The Christian offends against God but as a member of the Church. In committing sin, he/she "offends against *her* Spirit, against her mission and against the unquestioning obedience he owes to her." Even more, the Christian "renders the Church herself sinful in a certain regard." (p 137) Hence there is need to confess to the Church.

Binding and loosing refers to the ban imposed on the penitent who is kept away from the Lord's Supper till the ban is lifted. This is to make the person more intent on feeling his/her exclusion from the Eucharist and thus helping towards the process of conversion. (148)

The questions that had been raised regarding the "matter" in the sacrament of Penance arose from the fact that conversion—by doing penance, i.e. moral acts that enhanced the graced stature of the penitent—was a process present in the penitent. Yet the Church had to officially pronounce—effect rather than merely "declare"—its absolution so that

the penitent could take his/her place back in the eucharistic assembly. (162)

If the Church helps the penitent to overcome the guilt of sin and to experience grace in his/her heart, it is because the Church has already prayed and continues praying for him/her. The prayers recited before the absolution proper signify the Church's prayer. (pp 162-163)

The final point of arrival of the penitent is awareness that God has forgiven him/her through the ministry of the Church, thus fulfilling the sacramental aspect of Christ's saving grace and mission. (pp 166-169). The absolution along with the sign of the *pax* would mark the point of being again in God's favour.

Part Three: An Assessment[20]

In general, it is easier to elaborate on the free act that a person makes with regard to the good. In such an act, the finality to which one tends brings about a greater self-realization and, in a theistic context, is seen as an option that one makes for God. In fine, when a person posits an act of virtue it is an act that is fulfilling. However, when one sins, it is more difficult to explain how self-realization is denied and how one says "no" to God. In great part, Teilhard de Chardin's (1881-1955) attempts at a grand synthesis have still to deal with a satisfactory explanation for the reality of sin (not necessarily Original Sin) in human history. Traditional scholasticism too referred to sin as an "absence" (*privatio*) not a reality (*ens*). Classical Catholic theology does not see grace as the counterpart of sin as though a neutral finite subject, a human person, could simply accept or reject God. At the same time Christian revelation and Catholic teaching have assured us of God's love and mercy in an existing human situation where persons can change (be converted by grace) and enter into communion with God's again.[2121] J. Neuner and J. Dupuis:

The Christian Faith

in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, seventh and Enlarged Edition, 2004, Chapter V, Original Justice and Fall, p 195: "

While the doctrine of creation illustrates what life within this world should be according to God

's plan, the biblical account of the fall constitutes the interpretive key to evil, "the mystery of lawlessness...at work (2 Thess 2:7) in our world."

There are problems in Rahner's understanding of sin as 'the freedom to say "no" to God'. For instance, (1) human freedom seems to be irrevocably defined in the "yes" and the "no" when either is posited. How does one explain conversion to God after a "no" has been affirmed?

Rahner defines sin in the strict sense as the fully free and definitive "no" to the person of God, made by the total human being in a whole life act in an encounter with God as mediated by the world of things and other people. This negative decision is simultaneously about God and the whole human person, and irrevocably brings the human being to completion as a "no" to God.[22]

It is not easy to see the "no" to God as irrevocable and therefore final unless possibly at the end of one's historical existence. Would this mean that Rahner does not envisage—in practice—the possibility of serious sin (mortal sin) being committed in the course of a person's historical existence?

(2) It would seem that Rahner's theological anthropology disregards the fact of conversion as spelt out in sacred scripture and the Church's tradition, even though Rahner accepts that a person can repent of his/her sins, can be forgiven, and can enter into communion with God again. The whole of salvation history is a series of events where a God permits sin and guilt to be present in the world of human persons and constantly offers his faithful and unconditional forgiving love. Rahner has no difficulty with the datum of sacred scripture and the official teaching of the Church. But in his efforts to make those doctrines relevant to our times, he attempts to interpret dogma and doctrine anew. It will be for students of Rahner to discover if the theological anthropology that he elaborates, allow for true forgiveness, a change of heart and a grace-filled existence of persons once again.

(3) Is Rahner putting a value on human freedom that is akin to the freedom of God in its absoluteness and irrevocability? At the end of his article, Ron Highfield says the following:

Finally, we have come to the tap root of the tensions in Rahner's doctrine of sin. Since the concrete human being is thought of as a union of God (supernatural existential) and (pure) human nature, Rahner considers himself able to attribute to this human, by a sort of "communication of properties," the freedom which is characteristic of the divine life alone. Under the flag of grace, an attribute of God can be safely transferred to the human being, so that human beings are said to have the freedom to decide definitively about God and the totality of their own being; thus they are free to realize themselves as a "yes" or "no" to God.

God is only what God wills to be. But no being other than God can be thought to decide about God freely and definitively. Only where freedom is absolute are the conditions fulfilled for the possibility of such a decision. And what are the implications if, nevertheless, Rahner understands the human being to be able to make this judgment?[23]

(4) Rahner lived through the Nazi era and elaborated his transcendental method at a time when people were suffering from lack of freedom on many fronts. The Jews were targeted and made scapegoats, the Christian Churches were not forthright in their condemnation of Hitler's policies, and the trampling of political freedoms took place with impunity by a Germany conscious of its military might. These factors are strangely absent from Rahner's reflections on freedom, sin and guilt. Should these not have featured in Rahner's theology precisely because of the Heideggerian perspectives that he employed in understanding the human person in the sight of God?

Concluding Remarks

Rahner's anthropological theology is not aimed at explaining away the incomprehensibility of the divine. He is aware, along with Thomas Aquinas, that what we do not know about God is more than what we can know about God through our efforts. Rahner's theology is a reflection on the self in the light of revelation and he does not want to be hemmed in by the scholastic theology of the pre-Vatican II era. But Rahner is

very aware of the mysterious aspect of God and he is aware that no theology can provide a system of thought that can give an adequate and complete understanding of the creature (person) vis-à-vis the divine.

One must appreciate Rahner's attempt after having examined his views on mystery. Appreciating the mystery of God is a crucial fact in Rahner's theology. In the face of it, he even admits to a sense of helplessness:

In my theology I wish to proceed from the fact of an essential and absolute, ultimately insuperable sense of helplessness. When I approach God to the extent I understand him, I only reach him when I perceive him as the absolute mystery that surpasses me. And when I do not perceive him as the absolute mystery, then I have to say: Stop! You're on the wrong track, this path certainly does not lead to the true God of Christianity, the God of eternal life. If you intend to "explain" God with a certain rationalistic clarity, as is done sometimes even in Catholic theology, then you have certainly failed in your task. For me, God is precisely that mystery of the incomprehensible, the inexpressible, towards which at every moment of my life I am always tending.[24]

Terms like *depositum fidei* can give the impression that Catholic faith is primarily a set of dogmatic truths (*fides quae*). There is also the danger in seeing Catholic Tradition as a consolidated body of truths about God as revealed in the Christ event. It is important to see the truth of God's revelation bringing us to affirm the mystery of his presence in our lives.

Would Rahner's understanding of God as incomprehensible or as mystery soft-peddle the meaning contained in the scriptures and magisterial teachings of the Church? Not really. But while God is absolute, articulations of the mystery are context-bound, i.e. present in the events of human and therefore personal history. Such articulations possess a meaning within the context of the faith community of the Church. But all religious language is symbolic. Hence it is not a question of discarding dogmas and doctrines but of perceiving their true function. That is what Rahner's theological anthropology seeks to do.

All the while, Rahner acknowledges that human freedom and the worst it is capable of (guilt in all its aspects) cannot annul the ever-present forgiving love of God. Further, while Rahner may not be able to

articulate comprehensively the ultimate status of the person who has accepted God's forgiveness after he/she has repented, he knows that the victory of the Risen Christ is the final point of arrival for the human person.

Notes and References

1 Martin Heidegger: Being and Time, (translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson), Harper and Row, New York / London, 1962, p 26: "Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the 'there is'."

2 Martin Heidegger: Being and Time, (translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson), Harper and Row, New York / London, 1962, pp 26-27.

3 Karl Rahner: Hearers of the Word, (translated by Michael Richards), Herder and Herder, New York, 1969, pp 8-9.

4 Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler: Theological Dictionary edited by Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (translated by Richard Strachan), Herder and Herder, New York, 1965, "Theodicy", p 455.

5 Karl Rahner: Foundations of Christian Faith, An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity, (translated by William V. Dych), A Crossroad Book, New York, 1978, p 72: "Transcendence is the more original in relation to individual, categorical, univocal concepts. For transcendence, that is, this reaching out beyond towards the unlimited horizon of the whole movement of our spirit, is precisely the condition of possibility, the horizon, and the basis and ground by means of which we compare individual objects of experience with one another and classify them..."...transcendental experience is the condition which makes possible all categorical knowledge of individual objects..."

6 Thomas F. O'Meara: God in the World, A Guide to Karl Rahner's Theology, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2007, p 59.

7 Foundations of Christian Faith, p 127.

8 (Translated by Michael Richards), Herder and Herder, New York, 1969, p 73, footnote 3.

9 I use the word "supposedly" on purpose, since a host of factors de facto affect the exercise of our intellect and will.

10 Karl Rahner: Theological Investigations, Volume VI, (translated by Karl-H and Boniface Kruger), "Theology as Freedom," Darton, Longman & Todd, London and The Seabury Press, New York, 1974, p. 180.

11 TI, Volume VI, p 185.

12 TI, Volume VI, p 186.

13 Pope John Paul II's encyclical Veritatis Splendor (1993) nos. 67-69 cautions against assuming that one's transcendental orientation is separated from one's concrete decisions made in the world. It does not seem to me that Rahner's position falls under these strictures. Rahner is suggesting that in our present state we may not arrive at absolute clarity and certainty in our decisions. Full knowledge and total awareness are God's alone!

14 TI, Volume VI, p 191.

15 Richard A. McCormick (Ref. Richard P. McBrien (general editor): The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1995, p 594) says the following:

fundamental option, a technical and even misleading term that refers to a dimension of freedom in human action deeper than mere freedom of object choice. This dimension is not the freedom of choice to do a particular thing or not, that is, a choice of specific objects. It is rather the free determination of oneself with regard to the totality of existence. It is a fundamental choice between love and selfishness, between self and God, who is our destiny...

...It is fundamental for several reasons. First, it is not an activity like the many daily activities that occupy people's lives. It underlies all other choices. Second, since it underlies other, more superficial choices and manifests itself in them, there is a continual interplay between basic freedom and particular acts. Acting according to this option, one deepens it. Acting contrary to it, one undermines its stability. Finally, actions derive their moral seriousness from the presence or absence in them of this basic freedom. Thus, many theologians understand both mortal sin and conversion from it as necessarily being fundamental options.

16 TI, Volume VI, "Guilt – Responsibility – Punishment within the view of Catholic Theology," p 199.

17 TI, Volume VI, ibid., p 201.

18 TI, Volume VI, ibid., p 205.

19 This section will present the points treated by Karl Rahner in his article " Forgotten Truths concerning the Sacrament of Penance." (TI, Volume II,

Man in the Church, (translated by Karl-H. Kruger), Helican Press, Baltimore, 1966.)

20 In this part, much of my assessment has been stimulated by an article of Ron Highfield: THE FREEDOM TO SAY "NO"? KARL RAHNER'S DOCTRINE OF SIN, in Theological Studies 56 (1995), 485-505.

21 J. Neuner and J. Dupuis: The Christian Faith, in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, seventh and Enlarged Edition, 2004, Chapter V, Original Justice and Fall, p 195: *"While the doctrine of creation illustrates what life within this world should be according to God's plan, the biblical account of the fall constitutes the interpretive key to evil, "the mystery of lawlessness...at work (2 Thess 2:7) in our world."*

22 Ron Highfield, p 489.

23 Ron Highfield, pp 504-505.

24 Rahner in Dialogue, pp 216-7.

JPJRS 11/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2008 114-136

Human Dignity or Freedom of Research?
An Ethical Debate on the Embryonic Stem Cell Research

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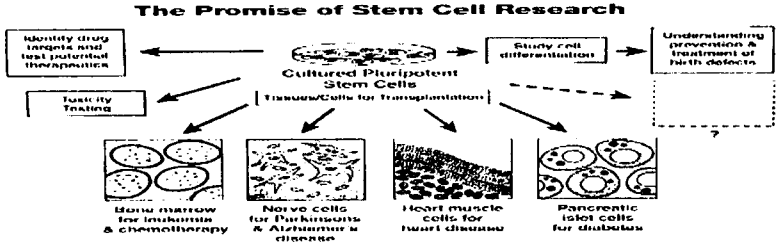
Introduction



The discovery, isolation and culturing of human embryonic stem cells has been described as one of the most significant breakthroughs in biomedicine of the century.[1] This promising area of science has led scientists to investigate the possibility of cell-based therapies to treat disease, which is often referred to as regenerative or reparative medicine. Stem cells give rise to multiple specialized cell types that make up the heart, lung, skin, and other tissues and offer the possibility of a renewable source of replacement cells and tissues to treat diseases including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases[2], spinal cord injury, stroke, burns, heart disease, diabetes, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, etc. The Stem Cell Research (SCR) has become the centre of public attention, both as a fascinating area of biomedical research and as a permanent focus for ethical and legal controversy.[3] The controversy is not because of its goals, but rather because of the means of obtaining cells. The crux of the debate centres on derivation of embryonic stem cells which require the destruction of an embryo.

1 What are Stem Cells?

Stem cells have two important characteristics that distinguish them from other types of cells. First, they are unspecialized cells that renew themselves for long periods through cell division. The second is that under certain physiological conditions, they can be induced to become cells with special functions such as the beating cells of the heart muscle or the insulin-producing cells of the pancreas. Scientists primarily work with two kinds of stem cells: embryonic and adult stem cells of animals and humans. Scientists discovered ways to obtain or derive stem cells from early *mouse* embryos more than 20 years ago. Many years of detailed study of the biology of mouse stem cells led to the discovery of how to isolate stem cells from *human* embryos and grow the cells in the laboratory in 1998.[4] The embryos used here were created for infertility purposes through *in vitro fertilization*[5] procedures and when they were no longer needed for that purpose, they were donated for research with the informed consent of the donor.

1.1 What are embryonic stem cells?

An embryonic stem cell is a primitive type of cell that can be coaxed into developing into most of the 220 types of cells found in the human body (e.g. blood cells, heart cells, nerve cells, brain cells, etc). Immediately after the fertilization the cells divide once every 12-18 hours. Each cleavage-stage cell is called a *blastomere* and the 3- to 5-day-old embryo is called a ***blastocyst***.[6] A fertilized egg is considered *totipotent*[7] meaning that its potential is total; it gives rise to all the different types of cells in the body. Stem cells extracted from early embryos can become all cell types of the body because they are ***pluripotent***.[8] In contrast adult stem cells are generally limited to differentiating into different cell types of their tissue of origin. Thus they are normally *multipotent*.[9]

1.2 What are adult stem cells?

An adult stem cell is an **undifferentiated** cell found among differentiated cells in a tissue or organ, can renew itself and can differentiate to yield the major specialized cell types of the tissue or organ. Some scientists use the term somatic stem cell instead of adult stem cell. The primary role of adult stem cells in a living organism is to maintain and repair the tissue in which they are found. They are a

very small number of stem cells in each tissue. They reside in a specific area of each tissue where they may remain quiescent (non-dividing) for many years until they are activated by disease or tissue injury. The history of research on adult stem cells began about 40 years ago. In the 1960s, researchers discovered that the bone marrow contains at least two kinds of stem cells. One population, called hematopoietic stem cells, forms all the types of blood cells in the body. A second population, called bone marrow stromal cells, was discovered a few years later.

In 1990s scientists discovered that the adult brain does contain stem cells that are able to generate the brain's three major cell types—*astrocytes* and *oligodendrocytes*, which are non-neuronal cells, and *neurons*, or nerve cells. A number of experiments over the last several years have raised the possibility that stem cells from one tissue may be able to give rise to cell types of a completely different tissue, a phenomenon known as plasticity. Examples of such plasticity include blood cells becoming neurons, liver cells that can be made to produce insulin, and hematopoietic stem cells that can develop into heart muscle. Therefore, exploring the possibility of using adult stem cells for cell-based therapies has become a very active area of investigation by researchers.

1.3 Successes of adult vs Failures of embryonic SCRs

Researchers in China met with a disastrous result. Fetal tissue injected into a patient's brain produced temporary improvement, but within two years the patient developed a brain tumor and died. An autopsy revealed that the fetal cells had taken root, but had then metamorphed into other types of human tissue – hair, skin and bone. These grew into the tumor, which killed the patient. At Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, the implanted embryonic cells apparently grew too well in some of the patients, churning out so much of a chemical that controls movement that they writhed and jerked uncontrollably. Dr. Paul E. Greene called the uncontrollable movements developed by some patients as *"absolutely devastating."* He said, *"They chew constantly, their fingers go up and down, their wrists flex and distend. It's a real nightmare. And we can't selectively turn it off. No more fetal transplants. We are*

absolutely and adamantly convinced that this should be considered for research only." [10]

In stark contrast to the failures of embryonic SCR, the future looks very promising for treatment with adult stem cells. The following are a sampling of research breakthroughs with adult stem cells.[11]

Researchers at Harvard Medical School say adult stem cells may eliminate the need for embryonic ones. The researchers experienced a permanent reversal of Type 1 diabetes in mice by killing the cells responsible for the diabetes. The animals' adult stem cells took over and regenerated missing cells needed to produce insulin and eliminate the disease. The results hold promise for rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, lupus and more than 50 other ailments.

At the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, a man with a rare, potentially fatal skin disorder that was so severe that he could no longer eat, is now symptom-free after receiving a transplant of his own adult stem cells.

Doctors at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago extracted the adult stem cells from the blood of two Crohn's patients and successfully used them to rebuild their faulty immune systems.

Researchers at the University of South Florida in Tampa have found that adult stem cells from the umbilical cord blood may be able to help repair damaged brain tissue after a stroke.

Dr. Edward Holland of the Northern Kentucky Eye Laser Centre in the greater Cincinnati metropolitan area, is using adult stem cell transplants as part of a treatment to dramatically improve the eyesight of his patients.

The Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York came to a similar conclusion. A study by the Institute for Stem Cell Research in Milan, Italy, showed that certain cells from the brains of adult rats can be used to generate muscular tissue.

Scientists at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of NJ have found that bone marrow cells may be converted into replacement nerve cells, able to treat brain and nerve injuries. Dr. Ira Black and his team were able to convert 80% of the bone marrow cells into nerve cells.

Diane Irving, Ph.D., a former professor of biology at Georgetown University and former biochemist with the National Cancer Institute, said, *"I have argued that adult stem cells are better because they are closer to the stage of differentiation than embryonic or fetal cells – therefore they do not have as long a distance to travel differentiation-wise as the younger cells. Therefore there is far less of a chance for genetic errors to be accumulated in the implanted cells and less side effects for the patient to deal with."*[12]

Cloning holds even less promise for success than research with embryonic stem cells does. It took 277 attempts to get Dolly. Scientists estimate an overall failure rate for cloning farm animals to be 95% or greater. One shudders to think how many living human embryos will be sacrificed in attempts to clone humans.

2. SCR in India: The Emerging Scenario

The establishment of new human Embryonic Stem Cell (hESC) lines from spare, supernumerary embryos is permissible with prior approval of the Institutional Committee for Stem Cell Research and Therapy (IC-SCRT) and Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) provided appropriate consent is obtained from the donor as per the guidelines for SCR[13], which have been formulated jointly by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology (MST) and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). Besides many other SCR centres, the following institutes are the ones which deal exclusively with embryonic stem cell researches in India.[14]

- National Institute for Research in Reproductive Heath, Mumbai;
- National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bangalore;
- National Centre for Cell Science, Pune;
- National Brain Research Centre, Manesar;
- Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology, Thiruvanthapuram;
- Centre for Human Genetics, Bangalore; and
- Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bangalore.

This reality reveals that there is liberality and possibility of Embryonic Stem Cell Research in India. Even Indian scientists wanted

to try and harvest stem cells from fresh human embryos, not frozen ones. Deepa Bhartiya and Indira Hinduja are among scientists in India who wanted national ethical guidelines revised to allow the creation of human embryos exclusively for research.[15] There were also requests from scientists at the Hyderabad SCR symposium to allow therapeutic cloning and embryonic stem cell research in India keeping its potential in view.[16] Presently the major programmes of SCR in India include among others: establishment of hESC lines, use of limbal stem cells to repair corneal surface disorders caused by limbal stem cell deficiency, isolation, purification and characterization of haematopoitic, mesenchymal, and liver stem cells; differentiation of stem cells into neural, cardiac cell lineages, etc. Apart from the government, some industry research organizations are also involved in SCR. There has been a tremendous success of adult stem cell researches in India. For example, "More than 300 patients suffering from limbal stem cell deficiency have been treated using limbal stem cells at LVEPI, Hyderabad."[17]

3. Global Regulations on SCR

Legislation governing HESC research varies from country to country. Some countries like India, Israel, Singapore, China, Australia, Italy, Sweden, United Kingdom and other European countries have relatively liberal and research-favourable regulatory polices, while others are still struggling to draft regulatory policies. Most of these countries have a liberal policy to use the left over embryos *in vitro*. The table below shows the global Regulations of Human Embryonic SCR.[18]

Country	Policy
Australia	Approved SCR on human embryo isolated from supernumerary embryo after getting consent from the donors.
Canada	Assisted Human Reproductive Act allowing researchers to derive embryonic stem cell lines from left over embryos.
China	Human embryonic stem cells used for research purpose can only be derived from surplus IVF embryo, embryos created from fully-donated gametes and by nuclear transplantation.
France	France permitted research on embryo-derived cells in July 2004. French decree authorizing import of embryonic stem cells derived from supernumerary IVF embryos with the consent of the donors and research on the imported cells.
Germany	Prohibits the derivation and use of human embryonic stem cells from blastocysts.
India	Establishment of new hESC lines from spare, supernumerary embryos is permissible with prior approval of the Institutional Committee for Stem Cell Research and Therapy (IC- SCRT) and appropriate consent is obtained from the donor as per the draft guidelines.
Ireland	Prohibition of the creation of human embryos for research purposes and for the procurement of stem cells from human embryos by law.
Singapore	Allow the creation of human embryos for research purpose with somatic cell nuclear transfer technique as well as use of supernumerary embryos for procurement of human embryonic stem cells.
South Korea	Guidelines set by the Ministry of Health and Welfare issued after the South Korean Parliament in January

	2004 banned human cloning but left room for stem cell research for curing diseases.
Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Finalnd, Greece, The Netherlands, United Kingdom and Belgium	Allow the procurement of human embryonic stem cells from supernumerary embryos. Allow the creationof human embryos for research purpose by *in-vitro* fertilization, with somatic cell nuclear transfer technique as well as use of supernumerary embryos for procurement of human embryonic stem cells.
United States	Allow surplus frozen embryos from *in vitro* fertilization clinics for SCR with the permission of donors.

As per the national guidelines in India, SCR has been classified under *permissible, restricted and prohibited* categories. However, embryonic stem cell research falls under *restricted* category. It *can be* carried out with the approval of Institutional Committee (IC-SCRT) at the institutional level and National Apex Committee (NAC-SCRT) at the national level. Research pertaining to reproductive cloning, introducing animal embryos in human, etc. has been categorised as *prohibited.*

4. The Key Problem

The embryonic stem cell research presents us with a moral problem of destruction of the embryo in the process. It brings into tension two fundamental moral principles: one principle enjoins the alleviation of suffering, and the other directs us to respect the value of human life. It is true that the harvesting and culturing of embryonic stem cells has considerable potential to bring about remarkable benefits in the way of alleviating debilitating medical conditions. Thus it satisfies the first principle to a very great degree. On the other hand, the harvesting of human embryonic stem cells violates the second principle in that it results in the destruction of human life with value (i.e. human embryos).[19] Accordingly, both principles apparently cannot simultaneously be respected in the case of embryonic stem cell research. The question then is which principle ought to be given

precedence in this conflict situation. Should we give more weight to the first, and permit destructive embryonic stem cell research because of its remarkable potential benefits? Or should we give more weight to the second, and prohibit destructive embryonic research because it violates respect for the value of the embryo as the beginnings of a human life? This is the central ethical problem here.

Surplus embryos left over from *in-vitro* fertilization procedures in fertility clinics are thawed. The inner cell mass of an embryo is extracted. Stem cells are all that remain. The embryo is killed in the process. This raises the same ethical questions and conflicts as the ethics of abortion. Much of the controversy on stem cells has revolved around the status of the early human embryo. However, there are no major ethical concerns about the extraction of adult stem cells, from umbilical cords, skin, bone marrow, etc., as long as the donor gives permission. They are the ethically preferable avenue for research, as they are presumed to be ethically trouble free. For these obvious reasons, it has been advanced most forcefully by opponents of human embryo research.[20]

4.1 Extracting Embryonic Stem Cells without Killing the Embryo?

There was a report on 10 January 2008 in the subject journal "Cell Stem Cell" the American Robert Lanza of the Biotechnology Company of Advanced Cell Technology, Worcester in Massachusetts would succeed together with his research team to win stem cells without killing the embryo. With the new procedure, a cell is taken from an embryo in the eight cell stage in order to breed trunk cells from it. The taken cell was spent in nutritional liquid and was stimulated to the division, with what a culture grew up with embryonic trunk cells. One assumes that the embryo after the cell removal normally survives, since this procedure is applied diagnostics as with the Preimplantations. Most of these original embryos would not be damaged according to statements of the researchers and would still develop normally in test tubes for some days, until they were frozen.[21] However, this method does not exclude itself from the ethical problem of the newly separated or created cell, which is capable of growing into an embryo.

There was another report on a new methodology, namely, *induced Pluripotent Stem cells* (iPS).

The Yamanaka and Thomson research teams have shown that ordinary skin cells can be driven back to a primitive, embryonic state of pluripotency. But no one knows yet exactly where the limits of this reprogramming technique lie. Perhaps iPS cell researchers will discover that skin cells can be driven back even further in development to a totipotent state, that is, to a single zygote-like cell capable of generating not only all three germ layers but also all the supporting extra-embryonic tissues. If this were to happen, then one could argue that any cell in a person's body has the biological potential to give rise to another complete human being under the right circumstances, regardless of whether the original, horticultural sense of the Greek word *klon* –that is, "twig".[22]

With the iPS methodology, the adult stem cells can be reprogrammed into pluripotent cells, thus it could be possible to turn it into powerful pluripotent stem cells or possibly even into totipotent embryonic stem cells. Human iPS cells, if they are truly pluripotent, should be capable of generating human sex cells. But then this would entail that ordinary skin cells could be transformed into human sperm and eggs. This fact could radically alter our commonsense notions of human fertility and infertility. It is worth noting that human iPS cell research carries the familiar ring of old philosophical questions about reproduction, life, and what it means to be human.

4.2 The Embryos *in vitro*

July 25, 1978, marked a decisive step in reproductive science, when at Oldham in Northwest England, a 30 year old woman Lesley Brown delivered by caesarean section a normal healthy baby girl as a result of 'fertilization in vitro' of one of her ova with sperm of her husband Gilbert.[23] With this medical success of IVF arose certain moral problems like artificial insemination through an illicit procurement of sperm by masturbation, loss of fertilized ova; and the very authenticity of the sacrament of the marriage and its conjugal love. *Time* magazine reported that before the successful embryo transfer with Mrs. Brown, hundreds of attempts were made and that perhaps in half of them ova were fertilized.[24] This means that so many fertilized ova were lost in

the experiment. The loss of fertilized ova calls for serious reservations about the treatment of human life. A large number of these embryos would die spontaneously. This could be regrettably seen in parallel to the loss of normal conceptions that do not implant or do not survive beyond the first few days of fertilization. It would be nature's way of screening the unfit. Indeed there are more failures in *in vitro* than loss in nature.

Gene Outka [25] defends that embryos do have intrinsic moral value but it might be still permissible to use embryos that are surplus for *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF). The idea here is that if embryos are definitely not going to be implanted then 'nothing is lost' by their being used for ES cell research. Such claims imply that it might be acceptable to use spare embryos for ES cell research even if it is the case that they have the moral status of persons. This argument has found favour in some countries which sanction the use of surplus IVF embryos for research but not the creation of embryos specifically for that purpose. The distinction here is between using, for an important medical purpose, embryos that have been created by a couple who are trying to have a child but which have to be destroyed because they cannot be implanted, and deliberately creating 'ethical embryos' with the aim of destroying it.[26] The latter, it is argued, is immoral because it treats the embryo as a mere commodity.[27]

It was reported in *Time*[28] "Had the doctors detected any serious problems, Lesley Brown would have quickly received an abortion." Another incident of 1961 in which an Italian experimenter Daniel Petrucci destroyed a human embryo which he had fertilized *in vitro* on the 29th day because it was turning monstrous. He rightly received condemnation from many people. Embryos are persons and not play tools. Yet another incident that occurred in Australia in June 1984 brings out the complexity of the problem and the need for great caution in the whole matter. A couple died in an accident when their tiny embryo was still in deep freeze awaiting implantation. What is to be done in such cases? Destroy the embryo? Thaw it and allow it to die? Implant it in a surrogate mother? Suppose this is done, who is the legal mother? Has the child any right to the property of the original parents?[29]

Should poor countries like India be pouring money into life-creating technologies when basic health needs go unmet? We should consider

whether costly experimentation with serious ethical problems should be carried on to the neglect of other more urgent needs. Therefore, "Research should be evaluated not only in terms of its effects on the subjects of the experiment but also in terms of its connection with existing patterns of oppression and domination in society."[30] There is also a considerable body of writing that explores the impacts of new reproductive technologies on the interests of women, particularly how those technologies might contribute to oppression.[31] Women who donate ova are at risk of exploitation to the extent that male-dominated medical practice appropriates their reproductive labour for research and commercial benefits. They are at risk of being alienated from their reproductive labour and of being commodified, and their acts of altruistic donation demeaned, if downstream users can develop commercial applications for stem cells developed from their ova and embryos.[32]

4.3 Therapeutic Cloning

Tissues grown from adult stem cells are immunologically compatible with the person from whom the stem cells are harvested. This means that those tissues can be transplanted into that person without fear of the body rejecting them. Tissues produced from embryonic stem cells for the purpose of regenerative therapy, however, are unlikely to be immunocompatible, like the use of immunosuppressant drugs (with its possible serious side effects). Two potential solutions to this immunological limitation have been suggested. The first proposes a "tissue bank" with a sufficiently large number of different embryonic stem cell types to generate tissues that can be immunologically matched with different recipients. Wayne Hall, however, points out, "this would require a huge number of human embryonic stem cell lines (the number being a matter of debate). Such an embryonic stem cell bank would be technically difficult and expensive to generate. The number of embryos that would be required to produce the cell bank would probably test public support."[33]

The second possible way of overcoming the problem of immunological incompatibility is through what has been called "therapeutic cloning". In this process, the nucleus of a human oocyte or egg is removed and replaced with the nucleus of a cell taken from the body of the intended tissue recipient. The new egg is induced to

develop into an embryo, from which immunocompatible stem cells are harvested. The embryo will be a human embryonic clone of the recipient, with all his/her exact genetic characteristics. To date, there have only been one or two reported attempts at human cloning that have met with some success.[34] Another suggested solution to the problem of destroying viable embryos is to create embryos that cannot develop to term. This may be done by inducing unfertilised eggs to develop as if fertilisation had occurred, producing *'parthenogenetic'* embryos that can go through the early cleavage divisions to the *blastocyst* stage but cannot develop into a foetus.[35] Those with absolutist religious views are likely to regard the creation of such 'embryos' as unnatural and immoral, while some scientists object that ES cells created in this way are likely to have abnormalities that will seriously limit their usefulness.

Therapeutic cloning too meets ethical objections revolving around the creating of an embryo, and moreover, the creating of an embryo for a use that will destroy it. These objections and arguments usually rely centrally on certain views about the value or moral status of the embryo. Whatever benefit the *pluripotency* of embryonic stem cells has in generating immunocompatible tissue, this benefit is likely to be possible only at the cost of having to engage in either the morally contentious practice of human (therapeutic) cloning, or the morally contentious practice of using (and destroying) a large number of embryos to create a sufficient range of embryonic stem cell lines for organ banks. Hence, any kind of human cloning, including therapeutic cloning, should be prohibited.[36]

5. The Moral Status of the Embryo

There is a wide spectrum of opinions in relation to the moral status of embryos. There are those who believe that an embryo has full moral status and is deserving of the same rights, protection and respect as an adult human being from the moment of conception. There are also those who believe that embryos gradually gain moral status as they develop (known as the gradualist approach). Others consider the appearance of a nervous system or the ability of the foetus to feel pain as critical points in development. Those who hold the gradualist view consider that the therapeutic possibilities offered by embryonic stem cell

research may outweigh the infringements of the respect and dignity of the embryo. The debate regarding the moral status of embryos is also linked to the debate about personhood. Most prominent philosophical arguments to justify the destruction or use of human embryos have been from the question of 'personhood'.[37]

1. John Locke defined a person as "a thinking, intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and different places."[38] According to this explanation, embryos are not human persons, although they may or may not be human beings, and thus they do not merit the full protection that is due to a person. The definition of person given by John Locke is best exemplified by strong and self-conscious adults who are able to exercise their freedom and assert their autonomy. This theory excludes the weak, the semi-conscious and the incompetent who are precisely those in greater need of protection. If a human being is a person, embryo is a human being, and then embryo must be a person. A non-person cannot grow into a person. What was not already cannot become one. According to Boethius a person is an individual being of a rational nature. At all stages this individual being is nothing more or less than another human being. Therefore, the human embryo is not a potential person, but a person with potential. Embryo as a person grows with all its potentialities. All human beings share this common nature, and this is the reason for vindicating human rights for all who share this nature. Here we must emphasise the virtue of *philanthropia* – love of fellow human beings (especially of not yet born) in the protection of their humanity.[39]

2. A difficulty was raised by R.G.Edwards and J.Diamond against the view that the human individual begins at the zygote stage on account of the phenomenon of identity twinning.[40] It followed, according to this argument, that the pre-embryo[41] was not a 'person', given that the concept of personhood is often taken to imply indivisibility or individuality. Embryos, particularly the very early pre-implantation *blastocysts* involved in stem cell research, do not, for instance, have consciousness, individuality, the ability to reason, or the ability to form courses of action in life and to choose between them. However, it could be argued on the contrary that even in the case of identical twinning, the zygote has the natural capacity to become one or more human beings

by virtue of its own inherent active potentiality. The infant has an *inherent* natural active capacity to develop to the stage of being able to exercise self-conscious and rational acts while retaining the same ontological identity as a human individual. Thus an embryo is a person already because its nature enables it to develop to the age of reason without loss of ontological identity.[42]

3. Hans Dreisch (1867-1941) says that the embryo must possess something like a soul because, when it was divided, it did not die or produce two-half-beings but rather developed into two complete individuals. Aristotle says something similar in relation to animals that continue to live when divided 'in each of the two [separated] parts, all the parts of the soul are present' (*On the Soul* I.5). Each new part becomes new wholes. Aquinas would hold that where there is a whole unified organism, there is a soul. The soul is not multiplied by the body, but souls are multiplied according to the number of bodies (*ST* Ia Q.76 art.2). Fisher (1991) and Flannery (2003) hold that as twinning results in a multiplication of human embryos, then God gives new souls appropriately. This could be explained away with an analogy. We are familiar with taking cuttings from a plant to generate new plants. Here the original plant has given rise to two new plants, which themselves are also new wholes. An embryo gives rise to two new embryos, which are two new identical wholes. All this can only further allow us to affirm that the original embryo is potential of dividing and giving rise to new beings.[43] Identical twins are genetically identical and derive from the same fertilized egg, but they are separate individual human beings.

4. Some argue that in moral terms a more developed nervous system should be the focus of concern, such as the emergence of the first components of the central nervous system and developments in the brain that allow sustained awareness.[44] Some philosophers contend that full moral status is only reached when an individual possesses self-consciousness.[45] As this does not appear to develop until some months after birth, on this view not only the embryo and foetus, but also the newborn baby and the young infant, lack the moral status of a fully self-conscious person. Central to this position is the claim that it is the capacity for self-consciousness and self-valuing that gives humans their unique status as moral agents. Such views have not only ethical but also scientific flaws. Self-consciousness cannot be a criterion for

evaluating the status and dignity of human beings, for it excludes the semi-conscious and the incompetent persons and persons in a coma stage.

5. There are serious dangers in seeking to define some point in postnatal development at which the life of a child begins to command full respect, and which strengthens the grounds for sustaining his or her life. Any attempt to define clearly and without prejudice the moment at which a developing child acquires full moral status is likely to fail. Non-controversial could be the position, if we accept that the life begins at conception. Anything against such a position would involve ethical complications. Only in the context where the life of the mother is seriously threatened, "indirect" abortion is permissible.[46] However, this cannot provide a justification for the use of abortion as the solution to unwanted pregnancy. The *Declaration on Procured Abortion* in paragraphs 12 and 13 gives us a sharp clarity on the matter.

In reality respect for human life is called for from the time that the process of generation begins. From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor or the mother, it is rather the life of the new human being (=*novi viventis humani*) with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already.....The one who will be a man is already one.[47]

6. The Meaning and Significance of Human Dignity[48]

The word "dignity" comes to us, via the Latin *dignus and dignitas*, from Greek and Roman antiquity, in whose literature it means something like "worthiness for honour and esteem". The school of philosophy in ancient Greece and Rome, the Stoics, believed in dignity as a genuine possibility for all human beings, regardless of their circumstances, social standing, or accomplishments. For the Stoics, human beings have dignity because they possess reason, and the best life, the life according to nature, is available to anyone who chooses to live in a thoughtful or reflective way. Human dignity, according to Höffe, is the "highest moral and legal principle, which gives the human being an absolute value against other highlighted natures of rationality and freedom."[49]

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant has based universal human dignity on a strictly philosophical foundation. For Kant, in agreement

with the Stoics, dignity is the intrinsic worth that belongs to all human beings. All men possess dignity because of their rational autonomy, i.e., their capacity for free obedience to the moral law of which they themselves are the authors. His doctrine of human dignity demands equal respect for all persons and forbids the use of another person merely as a means to one's own ends. [50] "Only the human being considered as person, that is, as subject of a moral-practical reason, is exalted over all price; because as a such one (*homo noumenon*) s/he is not a means to the other, not even to his/her own purposes, but to be estimated as end-in-itself, for s/he possesses a dignity (an absolute inner value)."[51] *Dignity (Würde) is intrinsic but value (Wert) may be added by society.* Kant's celebration of human autonomy and prohibition of the "*instrumentalization*" of human subjects has had certainly a lasting impact on modern ethical thought and on bioethics in particular. The dignity of the human person demands therefore that we never treat another as a *thing*, as a *means*, even to accomplish the greatest good. Another person is a subject and not an *object/it*. When I treat another as an *it*, I threaten his reality as a person; I cut myself from the rich reality of this other person and so impoverish myself.[52]

In the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), recognition "of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" is said to be "the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world." At least thirty-seven national constitutions ratified since 1945 refer explicitly to human dignity, including the *Basic Law (Grundgesetz) of Germany* (1949), which begins: "Human dignity is inviolable. To respect and protect it is the duty of all state authority."[53] Human dignity in these documents plays the role of a supreme value on which all human rights and duties are said to depend, but the meaning, content, and foundations of human dignity are never explicitly defined. What mattered most after 1945 was not reaching agreement as to the *theoretical* foundations of human dignity but ensuring, as a *practical* matter, that the worst atrocities inflicted on large populations during the war (i.e., concentration camps, mass murder) would not be repeated. The inviolability of human dignity was enshrined in at least some of these documents chiefly in order to prevent a second Holocaust. Thus, for a long time this liberal principle of "respect for persons"— has proved serviceable in resolving many ethical problems. Therefore it must be further asserted that all human

beings have rights and freedoms that must be respected equally, even without spelling out too clearly the ground of that assertion.

A broader shared notion of human dignity is found in the Biblical account of humans as "made in the image of God" (Gen 1:27). This teaching, together with its further elaborations in Jewish and Christian scripture, has been interpreted in many different ways, but the central implication seems to be that human beings, because they are in some respects godlike, possess an inherent and inalienable dignity. In this sense, "made in God's image" has the implication that all human beings, not only those healthy and upright but also those broken in body or soul, have a share in this God-given dignity. Dignity in this sense would give ethical guidance to us in answering the question of what we owe to those at the very beginning of life, to those at the end, to those with severe disability or dementia, and even to tiny embryos. Seeing human beings as created in the image of God means, in some sense, valuing other human beings in the way a just or loving God would value them.

7. Ethics of Healing

Christian response to sickness is not merely *curing* the disease, but *'healing'* the person.[54] Healing is in fact *wholing* or restoring the integrity of the person as much as possible.[55] As Victor Frankl says, the radical cause of sickness is the loss of meaning in life and hence sickness cannot be handled effectively unless that meaning is restored.[56] He says in his celebrated book *Man's Search for Meaning,* "an incurably psychotic individual may lose his usefulness but yet retain the dignity of a human being. This is my psychiatric credo."[57] Similarly Mowrer has drawn attention to the importance of handling moral guilt, and not merely psychic guilt feelings in the treatment of illness.[58] Thus in the field medical care, even the psychosomatic approach to healing is incomplete. Health and illness have a still deeper dimension involving the spiritual area of the human personality. This noble thought would make it clear that physical healing will not alone make a person healthy. In medical care money and health are not the only matters. In such complexities of human life, we cannot attach to the patient the guilt of taking away the life of an embryo for the sake of healing or prolonging one's life.

A Final Word

Using human embryos for any purpose other than to allow it grow into a baby is highly controversial and unethical. It disfigures human dignity. Destroying a human embryo either of the *in-vivo* or the surplus *in vitro* or of *the cloned one* to provide a cure for a disease is wholly unacceptable and morally evil. Human dignity cannot be sacrificed at the altar of research laboratories. Therefore "it is wrong to destroy embryos of any gestational age, for any purpose,"[59] for "human life develops itself not something unto humans, but as humans."[60]

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2 Parkinson's disease (PD) is a very common neurodegenerative disorder that affects more than 2% of the population over 65 years of age. PD is caused by a progressive degeneration and loss of dopamine (DA)-producing neurons, which leads to tremor, rigidity, and hypokinesia (abnormally decreased mobility). PD may be the first disease to be amenable to treatment using stem cell transplantation. Alzheimer's disease constitutes about two thirds of cases of dementia overall (ranging in various studies from 42 to 81 percent of all dementias). Alzheimer's disease is a progressive neurologic disease that results in the irreversible loss of neurons, particularly in the cortex and hippocampus. The clinical hallmarks are progressive impairment in memory, judgment, decision making, orientation to physical surroundings, and language.

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4 By a team led by Dr. James Thomson at the University of Wisconsin.

5 In 1978 in vitro fertilization (IVF) led to the first successful human birth.

6 Blastocyst is a *preimplantation* embryo of about 150 cells produced by cell division following fertilization. The blastocyst is a sphere made up of an outer layer of cells (the *trophoblast*), a fluid-filled cavity (the *blastocoel*), and a cluster of cells on the interior (the *inner cell mass*). ***Trophoblast is the*** extraembryonic tissue responsible for implantation, developing into the placenta, and controlling the exchange of oxygen and metabolites between mother and embryo. The fluid-filled cavity inside the *blastocyst* of the developing embryo. ***Inner cell mass (ICM)*** is the cluster of cells inside the

blastocyst. These cells give rise to the *embryo* and ultimately the *foetus*. The ICM cells are used to generate *embryonic stem cells*.

7 Totipotent means "capable of becoming anything".

8 Pluripotent stem cells can give rise to any type of cell in the body except those needed to develop a foetus.

9 Multipotent stem cells can give rise to a small number of different cell types.

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JPJRS 11/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2008 137-151

Catholic Colleges and Social Transformation

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Abstract: Does education transform society as the topic of this session seems to suggest, or does society shape education? According to the author, this question has been answered at least in three different ways. The third perspective avoids the two extreme positions of social change through education or educational change through social revolution, and accepts a middle view, which may be termed the "relative autonomy thesis," which the author finds most plausible. By providing some statistical data on Catholic higher education, the author suggests some areas of relevant action, like liberative thrust, promotion of justice, pedagogy of praxis and ethos of co-operation. The author concludes the article by affirming that in a world where so many pressures unconsciously condition the minds and the feet of our youth to the rhythmic drumbeat of the status quo, Catholic education should be able to offer students a different option – to become enlightened, creative non-conformists, committed to the cause of building the India of our dreams.

Keywords: Higher education, Catholic education, liberative thrust, promotion of justice, pedagogy of praxis, ethos of co-operation.

When one considers the topic of this session,[1] *Catholic Colleges and Social Transformation*, the question that poses itself right away is analogous to the proverbial "chicken or egg" puzzle. Does education transform society as the topic of this session seems to suggest, or does society shape education? This question has been answered at least in three different ways.

The first is the conventional view, which holds that the educational system can bring about key changes in the consciousness of a society, which in turn can transform its social, economic and political structures. It can promote social mobility, equalise opportunity and thus function

as an agency of individual and societal emancipation. This rather optimistic view of education is echoed in the policy documents put out by the educationists and planners. The Kothari Commission Report, for example, declared: "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms. This we believe is no mere matter of rhetoric... If societal change on a grand scale is to be achieved without violent revolution, there is one instrument and only one instrument that can be used: EDUCATION" (1.01; 1.14). Similarly, the Third Five Year Plan document stated: "Education is the most important single factor in achieving rapid economic development and technological progress and in creating a social order founded on the values of freedom, social justice and equal opportunity." Almost every policy statement on education has projected education as the single most important tool to reduce disparities, equalise opportunities and bring about orderly transformation in a peaceful manner.

In sharp contrast to this conventional view is the notion that educational institutions do not, indeed cannot, transform society. The scholars of this persuasion believe that envisaging the school or college as an agent of social change is an idea that is utopian in the extreme. Thus Paulo Freire, the renowned Brazilian educationist writes:

The schools where systematic education is developed do not shape society, but instead society shapes them. It is impossible to expect schools to transform society... The oppression of the masses, which is the problem of the exercise of power, was not caused by the schools and therefore will not be solved by the mere transformation of the schools. Transformation of reality cannot be mediated by educational changes. That would be a utopian panacea. On the contrary, it is the transformation of society by political action that will change education (1983, 21).

As a subsystem of society, the educational system is dependent upon and subordinated to the political and economic structures and the dominant value system of the society in question. Therefore, the educational system reflects and, in turn, reinforces the institutionalised inequalities in the social system.

The educational system is particularly susceptible to political manipulations. Those who wield political power will strive to ensure

that the educational system promotes and perpetuates their privileged position in society. They will oppose educational policies and initiatives that might weaken the existing power structure and result in a radical reconstruction of the society. As Freire puts it, "There is nothing like neutral education. Education is a political act. Those who wield power define what education is. They determine the ends it should pursue and what its methodologies should be... They cannot be expected to design the kind of education that will work against the preservation of their power" (1983, 21). Education, in this perspective, articulates the ideology of the dominant group in a society and socialises the young into the rituals of the dominant culture. The socio-economic and political emancipation of society must happen first, and then the transformation of the educational system will automatically follow.

The third perspective avoids the two extreme positions of social change through education or educational change through social revolution, and accepts a middle view, which may be termed the "relative autonomy thesis." I find this view of education the most plausible of the three. As Murickan has pointed out, "All education has a dual character. As a process of socialization it makes individuals conform to the norms and values of society and its establishment, thus dominating and domesticating them; at the same time it has the capacity to generate a spirit of inquiry and questioning of the accepted truths, thereby liberating the human mind from the shackles of the past and the present" (1995, 54).

Although education is subordinated to and largely conditioned by the socio-economic and political forces in society, it does possess a certain autonomy, which, if actualised, can lead to real, if limited, social changes. In other words, education is a dialectical process. Although it tends to legitimise and reproduce the status quo, it has also a liberative potential that can lead to social transformation.

Which of these two functions shall dominate and to what extent, depends largely on the educators and those who administer the educational institutions. Whether a college functions as an instrument of domestication or an agency of emancipation depends, in no small measure, on the choices we make as educators and administrators of educational institutions. As the Kothari Commission Report has long ago pointed out: "The naive belief that all education is necessarily good,

both for the individual or for society, and that it will necessarily lead to progress, can be as harmful as it is misplaced... It is only the right type of education, provided on an adequate scale, that can lead to national development; when these conditions are not satisfied, the opposite effect may be the result" (1.18).

I. Catholic Education and Social Transformation

Since the social functions of education are variable, whether education domesticates or liberates, whether it functions as a catalyst for social transformation or a bulwark of the status quo, cannot be deduced logically; it can only be ascertained empirically. In reality then what kind of a role do the Catholic schools and colleges play with respect social transformation in India today? Let us look at some pertinent empirical data.

Table 1 presents the views of the members of two major Religious Congregations of India – one, a Congregation of women, and the other, of men - on how effective their educational apostolate has been in terms of the goals articulated in their mission statement.

Table 1. Assessment of Educational Apostolate by the members of two leading Religious Congregations of India (% Responding "Agree")

	Our Educational Apostolate has been effective in:	**(A) Women**	**(B) Men**
1.	Ensuring academic excellence	90	82
2.	Providing educational opportunities to the Catholics	74	80
3.	Inculcating discipline in students	68	76
4.	Promoting human excellence/ integral development	52	55
5.	Providing educational opportunities to the poor	51	26
6.	Providing remedial education to weaker students	50	xx
7.	Ensuring justice in education	49	48

8.	Inculcating social consciousness and civic sense in students	37	33
9.	Witnessing to Gospel values	28	24
10.	Being agents of social transformation	21	23

There is a clear and consistent trend in the data. While the Catholic educational institutions are highly successful in promoting academic excellence, they are perceived to be least effective as agents of social transformation. Inculcation of discipline in students is a top priority in our schools and colleges. In contrast, development of social consciousness and civic sense in students receives low emphasis. Catholic educational institutions have done much in providing educational opportunities to the Catholics. But they have not been as successful in making education accessible to the poor or providing remedial education to the weaker students, who are by and large from the disadvantaged sections of society.

The data seem to suggest that the Catholic educational institutions as they function today contribute little to the social, political and economic emancipation of the country. And since there is no neutral education, any education that does not transform invariably serves to buttress the status quo, to perpetuate and deepen the existing system of institutionalized inequalities, power and privilege for the affluent few, and deprivation and exploitation for the marginalized many. It seems fair to conclude that Catholic education as it functions in India today seems to be more an instrument of domination and domestication than an agency of emancipation and transformation.

This is all the more paradoxical when one recalls the fact that the Church has always insisted that education, if it is to be authentically Christian, must transform not only individuals but also society. Catholic schools and colleges are an extension of the mission of the Church, which is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. The mission of Jesus is perhaps best summed in his own words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:16-19).

The mission of the Church to bring about a society based on justice, equity and freedom was repeatedly highlighted in the social teachings of the church over the past hundred years. This is perhaps best summed up in the dramatic declaration of the Third Synod of Bishops in 1971 that the work for justice and the transformation of the world is a "constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel." Our schools and colleges, if they are to be true to their Christian character, must mediate the vision and mission of Jesus to bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind and set at liberty those who are oppressed. This mission to participate in the struggle of the poor and the marginalized to bring about a just society is all the more significant in a country like India, where substantial sections of the population live in poverty, where centuries long discrimination based on caste had condemned the masses to a subhuman existence, where the barriers erected in the name of religion, language and other sectarian identities spawn hatred and violence.

More recently, this aspect of Christian education was highlighted by Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. "The Christian spirit of service to others for the *promotion of social justice* is of particular importance for each Catholic University.... The Gospel, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, is an urgent call to promote the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfilment" (34).

II. Areas of Relevant Action

If higher education in this country is to serve the cause of a just society, profound changes in the educational system are imperative. There are several areas where the Catholic colleges can provide leadership to transform education and thereby transform society. I wish to highlight four such areas.

A. Liberative Thrust

"All education is either education for domestication or for freedom. That the non-elitist, transforming, prophetic, dialogical and critical pedagogy of Jesus is highly liberative is evident... This pedagogy was liberative in a double sense: it liberated people by making them conscious of their worth as children of the one Father in heaven... And as prophetic and critical teaching, it liberated them from the manipulative myths which legitimised their oppressive and alienating society by pointing towards a new fraternal and non-exploitative 'world' in which men and women could live together as brothers and sisters... Any pedagogy that claims to be Christian must be liberative in this double sense" (Soares-Prabhu 1985, 98).

A liberative pedagogy has necessarily a critical thrust. The present "banking system of education" is oriented to promoting in the students conformist and passive attitudes such as submission, acceptance of the existing order and fear of conflict. "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry" (Freire 1972: 46). Few teachers are aware of the contradiction between their educational ideal and the educational reality of which they are a part. On the one hand, the teacher in the role of absolute authority makes the students dependent, passive, uncritical and gullible. On the other hand, the students are constantly urged by their teachers to be bold, enterprising, creative and critical. However, the moment a student tries to live up to this ideal, he/she will be branded as a "deviant" or a "rebel". The socio-logic of the educational practice rewards conformity and obedience and discourages initiative and critical outlook. This situation must change if our colleges are to become agents of liberative education. As Freire has pointed out: "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students (1972: 46).

Teaching is made up of two components: content and method. Of these the content is usually considered to be the substance of the lesson. The teachers are there to "give" content, and the students are there to

"get" content. The task of the teachers is to "cover" content, and the duty of the student is to memorize and reproduce content. Method, on the other hand, is seen merely a means of transmitting content. The content exists prior to and independently of the method. The method is not important in itself; the method employed is irrelevant as long as the content is efficiently communicated.

This dichotomy between content and method in our educational system is what makes education a boring exercise in mechanical reproduction, rather than an exciting experience of critical and creative inquiry. Students are required to remember, not to inquire. If education is to become transformative, the medium must become the message. The critical aspect of any learning experience is the method or process through which learning occurs. How they learn is as important as what they learn. Students should not be treated as passive receptacles for the teacher to deposit the content. Rather the teachers should initiate the students into the process of critical search for answers to questions that are relevant to them. Students must play a role in determining what problems are worth studying and what procedures of enquiry need to be employed. Definitions must be formulated by the students, not dictated by the teacher. Students should be required to discover, not merely to remember. The "guess what I am thinking" type of questions, which the teachers normally ask in the class room, must be replaced with "tell me what you are thinking" type of questions. Whereas content-oriented teaching asks, for example, "who discovered America?", process or method-oriented teaching asks "how do you discover who discovered America?" (Postman and Weingartner 1969). At its highest level, the purpose of teaching is not to teach – it is to inspire the desire for learning. Once the student's mind is set on fire, it will find a way to provide its own fuel.

Furthermore, education to be liberative must cultivate in students "the art of mistrust" or "the virtue of doubt." For just as there is no neutral education, there is no neutral knowledge either. All knowledge, as the sociology of knowledge emphasises, is socially constructed and socially maintained. Human ideation is a social process. The complex, blind mechanisms of society determine, often without our awareness – indeed, even against our intentions - the content of what is passed on as "objective knowledge." In as much as all thinking is socially

determined, all knowledge is subject to ideological distortions or false consciousness. For every group, through a largely unconscious process, tends to create an understanding of reality that legitimizes its power and privileges. As Marx pointed out long ago, the ruling ideas of a time are necessarily the ideas of the ruling class. The interests of the dominant elite are often disguised and presented as objective knowledge and eternal verities. Liberative education must alert the students to the ideological biases that tend to creep into knowledge and empower them to debunk such distortions. A good teacher will not only make the students aware of the half-truths and beguiling fallacies produced and propagated by the dominant elite, s/he will go a step further and guard the students against his/her own, the teacher's, preconceptions and prejudices. This is perhaps the hardest task of a teacher.

B. Promotion of Justice

The All India Seminar on "Church in India" stated nearly four decades ago: "The Catholic educational endeavour should be part of the process of bringing about radical social change, specially by helping the poor and the underprivileged and by spreading the message of brotherhood and social justice through the entire network of relationships within the academic community...Unless the commitment to social justice and brotherhood of man becomes an active force in the actual working of Catholic educational institutions, they may not claim to be Christian.. The Church does not want its educational institutions to produce worshippers of success and security" (cited in Desrochers 1987, 219). Numerous documents of the Church have since reiterated this message: unless our educational institutions become genuine instruments to build up a just society, they are Christian only in name.

Education for a just society involves first and foremost ensuring justice in education itself. Justice in education calls for the equalisation of educational opportunity. This means providing equal access to education especially to those who have traditionally been denied access to quality education - the poor, women, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and other educationally backward sections of the population. Equal opportunity in education involves not only equality in access to education, but also equal chance of success for all.

The principal beneficiaries of our system of higher education are boys, people of urban areas, and the middle and upper classes and castes. It clearly discriminates against women, the poor, the low castes, and the people of rural and tribal areas. A dualistic educational system has come to be established in this country, with a high quality elite sector and a low quality mass sector. There is segregation in education itself - the minority of private, fee charging, better colleges meeting the needs of the upper classes and the vast bulk of free, publicly maintained, but poor colleges being utilised by the rest. And this segregation has widened the gulf between the classes and the masses... (Kothari Commission 1, 36-37). Learning opportunities are severely skewed in favour of the rich and the powerful. Good education is available only to a privileged minority who can "buy" it.

Unfortunately, Catholic schools and colleges have also played a role in creating this segregation in education. Many, if not most, of the colleges run by the Catholic Church in India today are of the elitist type. In the survey of a leading Religious Congregation of Women cited above, as many as 56% of the members agreed that the schools and colleges run by their Congregation cater to the rich rather than the poor; only 26% disagreed. The same view was echoed by as many as 65% of the members of the Congregation of men mentioned earlier. In fact, more than two-thirds admitted that education has become more of a business than a ministry in their Congregation.

Recently the Church leadership in Kerala strongly resisted the measures introduced by the Kerala government to make professional education accessible also to the common man by streamlining admission policies and fee structure of the private self-financing professional colleges, many of which are owned by the Church. This is a sad commentary on the Church's commitment to equal opportunity and social justice in education.

The elitist profile and academic excellence of Catholic private colleges make them very popular among the affluent sections of the society. Therefore, the rich and the powerful bring a lot pressure to bear on these institutions to secure admissions for their children. The affluent with superior individual merit and academic excellence find it easy to secure admissions in these colleges, while the students from backward castes and classes get pushed out of the system. The caste-

class exclusion in the educational system is often legitimized in the name of maintaining academic excellence. Time has come for elitist schools and colleges to make a choice between the prestige and power spawned by academic excellence and the service of the marginalised, which may entail some loss of prestige and power.

As indicated above, equalising access to education alone is not enough to ensure equal opportunity in education. Equalising access to our colleges is not all that difficult. Creating equal conditions for success for all in our colleges is a more challenging imperative. Equality demands that we adopt remedial measures to help the disadvantaged students to overcome the handicaps imposed by their background and culture. If we admit these students without the support of remedial teaching, we might be doing a disservice to them because underperformance would only exacerbate their sense of inadequacy. Secondly, the needs of the poor and the underprivileged students must be kept in mind in the recruitment of teachers, the choice of the curriculum, the selection of instructional aids, the preparation of tests and setting of the college time-table. Thirdly, the extracurricular activities of the college should be organised in such a manner that they contribute to the growth of all, rather than the development of some.

Even with remedial measures, academic results are likely to fall, at least to some extent. As T. Kunnunkal has pointed out: "Standards will fall .. and so will the school's ability to win medals and certificates at state or national levels. But if we cater to those who can get an education even if we don't provide it and thus neglect the many who have no such means, our Christian standards will fall. We have to make a choice between maintaining academic standards and Christian standards in our colleges. If a large number of students do well because of high capabilities and financial resources, are we not basking in borrowed sunshine? What glory is there in such achievement? Given the circumstances, our results are normal and to be expected. The real glory would be to make failures into successes, third into second, and second into first divisions" (as cited in Desrochers 1987: 285). Education for social transformation means that we have to educate the underprivileged in our schools and colleges even at the cost of lowering our academic standards to place them within their reach, and not beyond their capabilities.

C. A Pedagogy of *Praxis*

Praxis is a technical term that has its roots in Marxism. It refers to a method or model of thinking in general, and of learning in particular. One of Marx's breakthroughs was his discovery that rational or intellectual knowledge alone does not constitute genuine knowledge. We know best when knowledge is coupled with and challenged by action, when we are not merely objects of the historical process but its subjects. Praxis means unity of knowledge as content and knowledge as activity. It is acted upon reflection and reflected upon action, both rolled into one. This is perhaps best summed up in Marx's famous thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have interpreted the world, the point, however, is to change it." If the students learn about, say, the gender bias in our society , but are not motivated to do anything to eradicate it, not only is such knowledge futile, it is dehumanizing as well.

Educational theories have in the past tended to emphasise the individual dimension of education almost exclusively. According to this view, education is primarily for the benefit of the individual. That is to say, the growth of the individual, the full and harmonious development of all his or her capabilities and talents is the principal, if not the sole, objective of education. Today this individualistic outlook has given way to a communitarian orientation. In this perspective education must benefit society at least as much as the individual. This has been underscored by the Vatican II Declaration on Education: "A true education aims at the formation of the human person with respect to his ultimate good and simultaneously with respect to the good of the societies of which he is a member..." (No. 1).

Education can perform this social role only if there is a close relationship between the college and the community of which it is a part. However, many, if not most, of our colleges now seem to live in splendid isolation from their surroundings, without any institutional commitment to the community and its concerns. This situation must change if colleges are to become effective agents of social transformation. Our colleges should find ways of being part of the community of the poor by getting involved in issues that concern them and rendering whatever assistance they can.

Such involvement in the neighbourhood is an important means of creating in the students a critical awareness of the social reality of India. It can help to open their eyes to the distortions in our society, the abject poverty of the masses, the gross inequality, the inhuman exploitation of the weak by the strong, the all pervasive corruption, the wanton destruction of the environment and so on. Creation of this awareness is crucial because we easily develop what Desrochers has termed 'the habit of unseeability'. This is a "psychological device by which we screen out of our field of vision disturbing factual evidence which would expose the falsity of our comfortable assumptions. To some extent, for all of us 'familiarity breeds disappearance'; we simply do not see the central facts of our social existence. Our students simply do not see the ugly reality of caste discrimination, the squalid horrors of slum existence, the malnutrition of masses of our people, the social dislocations of urban life, the chauvinistic divisiveness of language, caste, region and religion" (1987: 232). Our colleges should become effective agents of conscientization by relentlessly calling the attention of the students to the distressing facts of our social existence, shake them out of their apathy and motivate them to be committed to the creation of a just and humane society.

D. Ethos of Co-operation

The present education system is geared to promote competition rather than co-operation. The stress on self-development and individual excellence fosters individualism and self-centredness. "By favouring individual effort and success over teamwork, solidarity and co-operation, education inculcates individualism, selfishness, and even a certain mistrust of others. College situations often encourage brighter students to compete for a few places at the top, where winning comes only at the expense of losing. Moreover, our society rewards intelligence and high grades with scholarships, the guarantee of best jobs, salaries and perks. No wonder then that the bright people tend to look upon their talents as their own private property which they can use for their own self-aggrandisement" (Desrochers, 1987: 206).

It is often argued that healthy competition and rewarding the winners are necessary to bring out the best in students. But is competition, which projects a few as winners and the many as losers, ever healthy?

Surely, competition is neither the best nor the only way to bring out the best in the students.

This is not to suggest that teachers and educators condone laziness or be satisfied with mediocrity. They should motivate them to excel through service, compassion and co-operation rather than through competition, which breeds individualism and personal ambition. The brighter students can be urged to give of their best by helping the weaker students, thereby enabling the whole group to advance. Teachers can help the students to experience the joy and fulfilment that comes from offering one's talents and capabilities to enrich the lives of others, especially the weakest and marginalized in society. Team work and mutual help should be encouraged. Group marks could be given whenever possible. Instead of rewarding only personal achievements at prize distributions, altruism and social concern also should be recognised and rewarded. With imagination and creativity, the competitive ethos of our educational institutions can be replaced by a communitarian outlook. Students should be educated to look upon their companions not as rivals to be defeated, but as brothers and sisters to be cared for.

Conclusion

These are some of the different ways in which Catholic colleges can function as catalysts of social change. In his essay on "Self-reliance," Emerson wrote: "whoso would be a man [woman] must be a non-conformist." Apostle Paul tells us that whosoever would be a Christian ought to be a non-conformist. Indeed, this command not to conform comes ultimately from Jesus himself, the world's radical non-conformist, whose ethical non-conformity still disturbs the conscience of humankind. Catholic colleges cannot hope to be true to Jesus' legacy if the students they turn out easily allow themselves to be co-opted as the votaries of the existing system. To be authentic, Catholic colleges must offer an education with a difference, for a difference. In a world where so many pressures unconsciously condition the minds and the feet of our youth to the rhythmic drumbeat of the status quo, Catholic education should be able to offer their students a different option – to become enlightened, creative non-conformists, committed to the cause of building the India of our dreams.

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1 This is a revised version of a paper presented at the National Conference on Church and Higher Education in India organized by Stella Maris College (Autonomous), Chennai, 23-24 February 2007.

JPJRS 11/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2008 152-157

Book Reviews

Freedom of Enquiry and Expression in the Catholic Church:A Canonico-Theological Study by Jesu Pudumai Doss, SDB. Kristu Jyothi Publications, 2007. pp. xix-398. Rs. 450.

This work of Jesu Pudumai Doss, SDB, is good for any canonical library. The content is timely and practical in the light of some of the current controversies facing the Church. Human rights are those basic entitlements whereby the human person can live in peace, freedom and justice. They are enshrined in international, regional and national instruments, protecting and enhancing the dignity of each human being regardless of their national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, political affiliation, etc. Human rights have deep roots in philosophical discourses, historical precedents, religious thought, and political and social institutions.

This work presents an appreciation and understanding of rights and duties of the faithful in the Catholic Church. In this book the author responds to questions often raised by many: "Do I have freedom of enquiry and expression as a member of the Catholic Church?" and "If I do, what exactly are those rights?" The force behind the book is the current state of affairs of human dignity and freedom of enquiry. The book's purpose is "to familiarize Catholics with the rights and obligations written into Church law for all its members."

Chapter one presents a very brief overview of the development of freedom of enquiry and expression in the Catholic Church. The chapter presents rights thinking from the time of Vatican II to the revision and promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law. More could have been included under this particular title, but the reader does indeed obtain an appreciation of the important role of rights in the Catholic tradition.

This chapter concludes by stating that C. 218 of CIC and C.21 of CCEO are the brainchild of Vatican II.

Chapter two is dedicated to the rights and obligations enumerated in the 1983 Code of Canon Law and 1990 Code of Canon for Eastern Churches. In this chapter a detailed account of the subjects, the object and the primary limits of the freedom of enquiry and expression is given. This will certainly aid the reader in a proper understanding of what is expected from the members of the Church regardless of their calling.

Chapter three deals with the complex relationship between the Magisterium and theologians from the beginning of the early Church to our present day.

The final chapter highlights a few aspects of the new horizons that this Canon has opened before the Modern Church. It has focuses on:

a) The new horizons as regards the understanding of the Church and the Christian faithful.

b) Certain implications concerning the dialogue between the Magisterium and theologians

c) and finally, the horizons that enlarge the right-duty to all the faithful.

The reader of this chapter will gain insightful knowledge on the important matter of a right and duty of enquiry of all.

Jesu Doss concludes his work with a series of appendices aimed at furthering a better perception of rights in the Church. This little manuscript will greatly benefit all interested in the promotion and protection of rights in the Catholic Church.

Fr. Roque Alphonso

Classical Indian Philosophy, by Swami Vikrant, S.D.B, Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Pbs., 2007, vii + 124. Rs. 60/-

Vikrant intends to introduce the reader to the main ideas of the six classical Hindu *daraœanas* and also of Jainism, Buddhism and Cârvâka philosophy. The presentation is reader-friendly. Each chapter is divided into sections and sub-sections, and the headings are in bold. I get the impression that the book is the printed version of the notes he offers to his students.

Vikrant thinks that the "experience of the sacred [by great mystics] seems to be identical, though at the level of articulation there is divergence" (iii). I believe our pre-understanding colours our experience even of the sacred. Hence even the experiences are different. Vikrant also mentions that the history of Indian Philosophy can be divided into three parts, the third "extending, roughly, to the beginning of the eighteenth century" (iv). Have there been no philosophical thinkers in India after that?

The book could have received much more editorial attention. Let me mention some shortcomings. We not only have the initials of Mahadevan, but also a brief note about him (45), but Sheldon is mentioned without even the initials (28), and since there is no bibliography, there is no way of knowing who he is. At times the title carries a Sanskrit word followed by the English equivalent in brackets, while sometimes an English word is followed by the Sanskrit equivalent in brackets (21-22). Given the contents and style of the book, it may not be of much help to the scholar, while a beginner may at times get confused.

Subhash Anand

Global Christianity: Contested Claims, Studies in World Christianity and Interreligious Relations, no. 43, by Frans Wijsen & Robert Schreiter, Amsterdam\New York: Rodopi, 2007, 231.

In this book "scholars of religion and theologians assess the global trends in World Christianity as described in Philip Jenkin's book [*The New Christendom*, 2002]. It is the outcome of an international conference on Southern Christianity and its relation to Christianity in the North," held at Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands (4).

Jenkins elaborates some of the claims he makes in his book: during the last fifty years the centre of Christianity has moved towards the South. Within a few decades Christians in Europe and the US will constitute a small fraction of world Christianity. The new churches will not reflect the concerns of the North, "but will seek their own solutions to their particular problems" (15).

W. Ustrof thinks that Jenkins is proposing an alliance between the US leaders and Southern Christianity. This would be disastrous. B. Knighton believes that Southern Christianity is a threat to the US, and that "in the long run Christian faith is propagated not so much by the `senders' in mission, bu the `receivers', or rather the appropriators" (52).

S. Kim and F. Verstraelen criticize Jenkins for basing his conclusions more on statistics, ignoring the quality of life: the impact of Christianity does not depend on numbers but on the integrity of Christians. They base their observations on a study of the Church in Korea, India and Europe. J. Chesworth, studying the situation in Africa, comes to a similar conclusion: "Unless Christians in Africa develop a deeper personal commitment and churches agree to work together, Islam may indeed gain the upper hand in Africa, as they themselves confidently

expect" (129). K. Steenbrink, reflecting on the Christian Diaspora in Asia says: "Christianity will have to come to terms with the remnants of a colonial past and learn how really to behave as a minority religion... It must be a prophetic voice, joining efforts with all positive elements in Asian societies" (134).

Jenkins seems to think that conversion leads to a new affiliation, away from the past. J. Vernooij examines the Church in the Caribbean and concludes that only when there is a good synthesis of the old and the new, will the new remain. H. Gooren reflects on the Pentecostal Churches in Latin America. He finds that conversion need not be lasting. It could respond to a passing crisis and when the crisis is over, the individual may return to his former affiliation.

There are two studies by women theologians. M. Frederiks writes about women in Africa, G. Cruz about Filipina domestic workers in Hongkong. The former group is working with a composite hermeneutic: inculturation and liberation. The Filipinas in Hongkong are discovering the solace religion can provide to people who miss their land and family. Thus these two studies confirm Jenkins thesis that the new churches will seek their own solutions to their particular problems.

Some mistakes escaped the editor's attention, e.g., "mission would be much more effective is [if?] they were enabled..." (52); "this give [gives?] it a certain affinity..." (56); "The mode and reasons for this growth varies (vary?)..." (70). The book, however, is very neatly done and makes easy reading.

All Third World theologians will find in this volume a confirmation of their basic conviction: only a truly local church can make the Church truly Catholic. All missiologists should make it a point to ready it.

Subhash Anand

A Short History of Christianity in India, By Joseph Thekkedath, SDB., Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore, 2007, x-109.

The book under review is, in the author's own words, a "text book for seminarians, students and young professors." It is a short work of about 100 pages, meant to give a basic knowledge about the origin and development of Christianity in India, but with emphasis on the Catholic Church. It comes from an eminent Church Historian, whose contribution to the study of History of Christianity in India has been immense. He has put together his vast experience as teacher and scholar in these pages and thus has made available to all, especially students of History of Christianity in India, a very short introduction to the History of Christianity in India.

In six chapters supported by maps, a short bibliography of important works on the subject and an index, the book deals with the major topics on the History of Catholic Christianity in India: apostolic origin of Christianity in India, The arrival of western Christianity, the conflict between western and eastern Christianity in India, and the spread of the Catholic Church in various parts of India. The Non-Catholic Churches are dealt with in mere 10 pages. And that remains the main drawback of the book. The title of the book could have been *A Short History of the Catholic Church in India*. A second drawback of the book is that it is a purely chronological account of the spread of Christianity in India whose evident usefulness need not be debated at all. It does give some useful historical information to students of History of Christianity in India and as such will be a help to them.

Isaac Padinjarekuttu

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Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ

A parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule.

The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule 'braying' -or- whatever mules do when they fall into wells.

After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth the trouble of saving.

Instead, he called his neighbors together and told them what had happened and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery. Initially, the old mule was hysterical.

But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back a thought struck him. It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back He should shake it off and step up.

This he did, blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up, shake it off and step up, shake it off and step up," He repeated to encourage himself. No matter how painful the blows, or how distressing the situation seemed the old mule fought panic and just kept right on Shaking it off and stepping up.

It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well. What seemed like it would bury him, actually blessed him all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity.

That's life. If we face our problems and respond to them positively, and refuse to give in to panic, bitterness, or self-pity

The adversities that come along to bury us usually have within them the potential to benefit and bless us.

Remember that Forgiveness, Faith, Prayer, Priase and Hope all are excellent ways to Shake it off and step up out of the wells in which we find ourselves.

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Pune Journal of Religious Studies

National Seminar on St. Paul

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The seminar will last for four full days – 17, 18, 19 and 20 October 2008. There will be 56 participants. Twenty of them will present scholarly papers during the seminar while all the participants will be actively involved in the group discussions and general sessions.

We plan to publish some of the papers in the next, January 2009, Issue of *Jnanadeepa*. And all the papers will be published in the form of a book before 29 June 2009 when the Jubilee year ends.