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*Pune Journal of Religious Studies*

## Towards a Vibrant Indian Church

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*Editorial*

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## **Editorial:**

# **Towards a Vibrant Indian Church**

We are happy to dedicate this volume of *Jnanadeepa Journal* is to Prof Dr Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ, Professor (Emeritus), Systematic Theology, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. and founder of this journal. After having specialised in Vatican II, he has been teaching various subjects like Theological Anthropology, Ecclesiology and Priesthood for more than thirty years. He has contributed significantly towards an Indian Church.

Dr Kunnumpuram is a versatile personality: a committed professor of theology, creative thinker, prolific writer, gentle mentor and compassionate guide to many people. As a professor of theology, he has been the pioneer to introduce and enable the vision of Vatican II to the Indian Church. As a thinker, he has contributed significantly to an Indian theology that is both contextual and relevant. As a writer, he has founded *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* and edited Asian Journal for Religious Studies, besides his own numerous books. As a mentor, he has been inspiring countless number of students in their academic and affective progress. As a guide, he has been accompanying numerous persons in their intellectual and spiritual journey. In short, he has been a critical, creative and gentle personality who has touched the lives of many people respectfully and reverentially! He cherished freedom, affirmed the dignity and accepted others as they are and rejoiced in the happiness of others!

Coming to the academic part: as a theologian and teacher, he has been pleading for a Church that is more human and promoting human persons who are more liberated and liberating. He has been consistently pleading for a spirituality that is rooted in a personal encounter with God and in the deepest human values! One of his last contributions to theology has been single-handedly editing the collected works of Samuel Rayan, a six-volume work. A remarkable contribution to the Indian Church!

All the articles in this volume are directly connected with the vision and theology of Kurien. Call for a deeper spirituality of care and compassion, ways of salvation in Christ, life according to Vatican II are dear themes of Kurien's daily life. Dialogue with others, including science and technology, call to return to the original Church, affirming the dignity of human beings and sharing the religious spaces with others have been his focus. Joy and freedom have been his key Christian principles. So, the article in this issue, written by his close collaborators and friends are challenge to a vibrant, joyful and hopeful Indian Church.

It may be worthwhile to recall that Kurien is a theologian, a religious and a human being. As a theologian, he is critical, analytic, creative. As a religious, he is caring, compassionate and concerned of others. As a human being, he is fully open to others, truly humane and deeply devoted to others. So he has been an creative thinker, guiding inspiration and close friend to many of us. He has contributed much to the Church in India, to make it vibrant, joyful and free!

May this volume be a modest contribution, inspired by the life of Prof Kurien Kunnupuram SJ, to foster a common and collective life of love, joy, peace and freedom for every individual in our vast human family! May this further the vision of Kurien Kunnupuram, SJ who accepts, affirms and respects every individual!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ



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# **The Spirituality of Fullness of Life: A Study of the Spiritu- ality of Kurien Kunnumpuram Based on his Writings**

**Stephen Chundamthadam S J**

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Kanjirapally, Kerala*

**Abstract:** People sincerely search for God experience through spiritual practises. Spirituality has to lead one to liberation and salvation. Liberation is from the oppressive and inhuman structures and situations and salvation is movement towards eternal life. One can experience God in nature, in the depth of one's own being, through the rites and doctrines of religion and in the socio-political involvements. In this sense, spirituality becomes an integrated one, integrating prayer and work and humanizing the person. Prayer improves the quality of a human person so that one may experience peace and joy in life. Christian Spirituality is meant to facilitate personal growth in the following of Christ for the service of our people. Spirituality is a life-style and a way of life. It is an internal search for growth, meaning and holiness of life, which is revealed in the quality of one's life.

**Keywords:** Inclusive spirituality, Abba experience, spirituality of compassion, pilgrim of the Absolute, inhuman structures, people of God.

## Introduction

This is article is about the spirituality of Kurien Kunnumpuram based on his writings. He started his academic life in the context of Vatican II, which influenced his theological thinking and spirituality to a great extent. Kunnumpuram developed an inclusive spirituality faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ and Vatican II. This inclusive spirituality leading to fullness of life for all was a deviation from the traditional understanding of Christian spirituality. The traditional Christian spirituality taught that salvation is possible only in and through the church. But spirituality in the wider sense is not restricted to any particular religion, tradition or culture. The common factor in all these is the belief in a transcendent divine power.<sup>1</sup> Christian spirituality is partaking in the Christ event (life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus) through personalization of Christ mystery. Spirituality is a life of total detachment lived in the awareness of the indwelling and all-pervading spirit. “Christian Spirituality is, therefore, a participation in the mystery of Christ through the interior life of grace, actuated by faith, charity and other Christian virtues. Vatican II opened up the understanding of salvation and spirituality. The life that the individual receives through participation in Christ is the same life that the Incarnate Word shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

## Inclusive Spirituality

Inspired by the vision of the Second Vatican Council, Kunnumpuram presented an inclusive spirituality, which

1 “In its widest sense, spirituality refers to any religious or ethical value that is concretized as an attitude or spirit from which one’s actions proceed. This concept of spirituality is not restricted to any particular religion; it applies to any person who has a belief in the divine transcendent power and fashions a life-style according to one’s religious conviction. In this context, one can speak of Zen Buddhist, Jewish and Muslim Spirituality as well as Christian Spirituality.” Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*. London Sheed and Ward, 1979. P. 17.

2 Jordan Aumann, 1979.p. 18.



envisages the salvation for all as the people of God. He makes a distinction between piety and genuine spirituality; the former is guided by the faithful performance of devotional practices and rituals whereas the latter is guided by the spirit of God which transforms the life and values of a person. There is an urgent need for true spirituality in the Church. Encouraged by the idea of Karl Rahner on spirituality he makes it clear what we need today in the Church is not piety but true spirituality manifested in the life and values of a person. "The Church's public life even today (for all the good will which is not to be questioned) is dominated to a terrifying extent by ritualism, legalism, administration, and a boring and resigned spiritual mediocrity continuing along familiar lines."<sup>3</sup>

Though there are a number of religious congregations and pious and devotional practices, he wonders, how many of them have genuinely imbibed the spirit of Jesus' Abba experience which became the driving force behind his radical commitment to the kingdom of God. For him, religious life is not a monastic withdrawal from the world but it is a prophetic commitment to the people to enable them to experience God in the midst of their struggles and sufferings.

## **Spirituality: A Way of Life**

Spirituality, according to Kurien Kunnumpuram, is a life style and a way of life. It is an internal search for growth, meaning and holiness of life, which is revealed in the quality of life. In the final analysis, spirituality is the transformation by the touch of the spirit of God.<sup>4</sup> Kunnumpuram argues that this life style has to be simple and detached from the material riches; because,

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3 Quoted by Kunnumpuram, in his work, *Towards the Fullness of Life*. from K. Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, London: SPCK, 1972, p. 82.

4 Kurien, *Puthiya Sabhakhum Puthiya Lokathinumvendi*. Er-nakulam: St. Paul's, 2016 p. 102.

“attachment to riches can prevent us from being open to God and to other human beings.”

According to him:

Spirituality is a way of life. It is our total inward quest for growth, meaning and authenticity. And it is manifested in the quality of one's life. In the last analysis, to be spiritual is to be touched and transformed by the Spirit of God. In a person who has been touched and transformed by god's Spirit the fruits of the spirit will be seen: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23).<sup>5</sup>

In this sense spirituality aims at “personal growth in the following of Christ for the service of our people.” Following Christ requires the reliving of his Abba experience of God as unconditional love.

In moments of honest self-awareness, we can detect in ourselves a tendency to be greedy, demanding and fastidious, and to cling to whatever we have. We also tend to use our ministry and social position for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. It is here that the call to a simple lifestyle becomes relevant. It tells us to let go, to be simple, to be modest. It also asks us to share with others not only our possessions but also our time, talents, industry and creativity. It also demands from us a more responsible use of time and money.<sup>6</sup>

In short spirituality is self-emptying and detachment from anything that is contrary to spiritual values. In this sense, spirituality is a call to unconditional love.

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5 Kunnumpuram, *Towards the Fullness of Life*. Mumbai: St. Paul's, 2009 p. 35.

6 Kunnumpuram, “The Prophetic Dimension of the Religious Life.” in *Shaping Tomorrow's Church*. Kurien Kunnumpuram, ed. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2006. P. 398.

## Spirituality is a Call to Selfless Love

Spirituality is a call to ‘total and selfless love’ and demands us “to deal with all beings-plants, animals, humans-tenderly and affectionately.” He laments,

In the world today there is a lot of pain and suffering inflicted not only on human beings but also on animals. Harm is also done to the inanimate creation. Humankind seems by and large to have lost true chastity, that is, the ability to touch persons and things without hurting and harming them. That is why there is so much cruelty and violence among us.<sup>7</sup>

Though the spirituality Kunnumpuram advocates demand compassion and care for the entire creation it gives an important role to the full development of the human person. He writes, “Mission of the Church is to collaborate with God in His Work for the Wholeness of the Human Person, the Human Community and the Cosmos according to the Pattern Revealed in Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Spirituality of Compassion

The priests and the religious are called to live a spiritual life participating in the Abba experience of Christ. He is critical of the kind of spirituality practised today, which lacks compassion and forgiveness. “One is at times surprised that priests, religious and lay people who are obviously pious are manifestly unfair in their dealings with others. Some of them show so little compassion of Christ and are quite unwilling to forgive others.”<sup>9</sup>

“All spirituality is meant to facilitate personal growth in the following of Christ for the service of our people.”<sup>10</sup> Personal growth is for the service of the people of God. Following Christ involves recapturing Jesus’ Abba experience, identifying oneself 7 Kunnumpuram, *ibid* p. 398.

8 Kunnumpuram, “The Church of My Dreams” 407; also in *Freedom and Liberation. Reflections on the Church’s Vocation and Mission*. 131.

9 Kunnumpuram, *Towards the Fullness of Life*. p. 35.

10 Kunnumpuram, *ibid*, p. 36.

with the poor and the powerless, confronting the agents of oppression. Kunnumpuram thinks that the Church in India failed to be the agents of God experience to the faithful. As a result, the people search for God experience elsewhere. It is true that the Charismatic movements in India, to a certain extent, hold back our faithful from joining Neo-Pentecostal Churches. Church in India is more concerned about the prestigious institutions and structures than leading people to God experience.

He laments:

Our liturgy, too, has largely failed to mediate an authentic experience of God. There is an undue insistence on rites and rubrics, on law and structure, in our common worship. We cannot, of course, deny the need for some general norms in this matter.... But sufficient room must be left for responsible experimentation. Since life is so rich and varied, meaningful liturgy, which is the celebration of life will always be free and spontaneous, at least to some extent.<sup>11</sup>

Referring to the Asian Synod, Kunnumpuram argues that Christian spirituality in India has to resonate with the Asian spiritual traditions founded on experience. "The search for God... has always stirred the human heart and which is particularly visible in Asia's many forms of spirituality and asceticism." (*Ecclesia in Asia* 44). The Synod proposes faithful listening to the word of God and meaningful celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist as the means of God experience. (*EA* 22-23). Based on the teachings of Vatican II and some of the popes Kunnumpuram elucidates the main characteristics of spirituality for India.

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11 Kunnumpuram, "The Crisis of Values in the Catholic Church." in *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005.pp 240-251.

## Spirituality is Experiencing the Divine

Christian Spirituality is a spirituality of involvement in the world and not of monastic withdrawal from it. Involvement in the world brings in the different dimensions of the experience of the Divine. Some of the main characteristics of spirituality are experiencing God in nature, in the depth of one's own being, through the rites and doctrines of religion and in the socio-political involvements. In this sense, spirituality becomes an integrated one, integrating prayer and work and humanising the person. Prayer improves the quality of a human person so that one may experience peace and joy in life.

Prayer for him is the loving contact with God, which is possible only through loving contact with people. Love of God and love of people are the two dimensions of the most important commandment in Christianity. 'Compassion and kindness enabled the good Samaritan' to transcend the narrow restrictions imposed on him by the Jewish tradition and to reach out to his neighbour who was in need. Spirituality strengthens hope. "In the final analysis, Christian hope is not about what we can foresee, plan, control and manipulate. It is about our total surrender to the incomprehensible mystery of God, who cannot be controlled or manipulated, but who is perceived as the one who ultimately blesses, sanctifies and constitutes our salvation."<sup>12</sup>

## The Spirituality of Suffering

In his work *towards the fullness of life*, he writes:

There is a tendency among many people to practice a spirituality which may not be quite Christian. They believe that the more they suffer, the more pleasing to god they become. What kind of God is this who is happy to see us suffer? I firmly believe that God wants us to be happy here on

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<sup>12</sup> Kunnumpuram, *Towards the Fullness of Life*. p. 20.

earth. Besides, we Christians are committed to the removal of pain and suffering from the face of the earth.<sup>13</sup>

He continues, “It is not that God prevented me from experiencing pain, suffering or even failure... What I wish to say is this: In and through my mistakes and sins, and in and through the wise and foolish decisions of my superiors and others, God has guided my life according to his design.”<sup>14</sup>

For Kunnumpuram, spirituality is a term with wider meaning; it doesn’t limit itself to the socio-cultural and economic aspects of this worldly life; it goes beyond the empirical existence. Because, for him “The human person is not a soul living in a body, but an animated body, so perfectly integrated that the person in his totality can express himself/herself and be apprehended in any part.”<sup>15</sup>

## Spirituality of Salvation

As a soul animated body, a human person longs for liberation and salvation. Liberation is from the oppressive and inhuman structures and situations and salvation to eternal life. “The first and fundamental meaning of liberation, which thus manifests itself is the salvific one: man is freed from the radical bondage of evil and sin. In this experience of salvation, a man discovers the true meaning of his freedom, since liberation is the restoration of freedom. It is also education in freedom, that is to say, education in the right use of freedom. Thus to the salvific dimension of liberation is linked its ethical dimension.”<sup>16</sup>

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13 Kunnumpuram, *ibid* p. 73.

14 Kunnumpuram, *ibid* p. 133.

15 Kunnumpuram, “Reflections of Christian Spirituality,” 212. in *Life in Abundance: Indian Christian Reflections on Spirituality*, by Kurien Kunnumpuram, 211-220. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2006.

16 Cited by Kunnumpuram from “Instruction on Certain Aspects of Theology of Liberation. 23 “Freedom and Liberation. Re-

Salvation, according to Kunnumpuram, has a social dimension (*L G 9*), it is not attained through the individual, internal effort alone. “The universal plan of God for the salvation of mankind is not carried out solely in a secret manner” (*AG 3*). Nor it is limited to Christians alone; it is open to all people of good will.

All this holds true not for Christians only but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active and invisible. For, since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.<sup>17</sup>

Vatican Council teaches: “Seeds of the Word lie hidden in these cultural and religious traditions of people,” these have to be respected. (*A G.11*), “they are precious elements of religion and humanity” (*G S. 92*). Whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations is a sort of secret presence of God, because, “Doubtless, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified.” (*A G.9.4*). In *Perfecte Caritatis* we read, “The manner of living, praying, and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, but especially in mission territories, to the requirements of the culture and to the social and economic circumstances.” (*P. C. no. 3*). Culture, tradition and belief system play an important role in the formation of any spirituality. Three factors, i.e., God, world and human are inevitable for a better understanding of any spiritual tradition.

## Love for Culture of Silence and Solitude

God speaks to us in the depths of our being. In order to listen to God, we need to cultivate the culture of silence and solitude.

reflection on a New Document from Rome.” p. 194.

17 *GS 22*, cited by Kunnumpuram in *Ways of Salvation: The Salvific Meaning of Non-Christian Religions According to the Teachings of Vatican II*. Poona: Pontifical Athenaeum, 1971. p.89.

He proposed two kinds of prayers, i.e., the prayer of the mind which includes vocal prayer, meditation and contemplation; and prayer of the heart where the mind is inactive. “We need to try ever new methods of prayer in order to find out those methods which help us to pray at this stage of our life. Methods that we found helpful at an earlier stage of our life may not be so right now... We learn to pray well by praying.”<sup>18</sup>

## **The Need for Integral Spirituality in the Indian Context**

Kunnumpuram feels that there is a strong longing for God experience in the minds of the ordinary people, which is revealed in various spiritual movements. The longing for God experience is strong in the pluri-religious context in India.

Pope Paul VI during the Bombay Eucharistic Congress in 1964, addressing the non-Christian Religious Leaders said: “Yours is a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire in deep meditation and silence and in hymns of fervent devotion.”

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1986, Pope John Paul II in his address to the representatives of religions in Delhi said:

Integral human development requires a spiritual vision of man- that man is a pilgrim of the Absolute, travelling toward a goal, seeking the face of God. From this spiritual vision of man comes the strength to preserve in the cause, as well as the clarity of thought needed to find concrete solutions to man’s problems.

Pope John Paul II, more than any other pope has been keenly encouraging a culture of inter-religious dialogue among the

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18 Kunnumpuram, *Towards the Fullness of Life*. Mumbai: St. Paul’s, 2009 p. 33.



faithful. Through his worldwide travels, prayer meetings, meeting with heads of religious communities; his close acquaintance with other religious traditions, etc., created a better rapport with other traditions.

## Conclusion

Inspired by the Second Vatican Council and encouraged by the pioneering theological efforts of Samuel Rayan and George Soares-Prabhu, Kunnumpuram argued for an inclusive spirituality. This inclusive spirituality leading to the fullness of life for all was a deviation from the traditional understanding of Christian spirituality. His understanding of spirituality included all irrespective of caste, religion, culture or tradition. He believed that the whole of creation has a role in the economy of salvation. Though Kunnumpuram advocated for compassion and care for the entire creation, he gave an important role in the full development of the human person. The distinction he made between piety and genuine spirituality is relevant in the Indian Church today, and he believed that there is an urgent need for true spirituality in the Church. For him, religious life is not a monastic withdrawal from the world, but it is a prophetic commitment to the people to enable them to experience God amid their struggles and sufferings.

Spirituality, according to Kunnumpuram, is a lifestyle and a way of life. It is an internal search for growth, meaning and holiness of life, which is revealed in the quality of life. His thought-provoking insights that the Church in India failed to be the agents of God experience to the faithful, Indian Church has to resonate with the spiritual traditions of Asia based on experience, Christian Spirituality is the spirituality of involvement in the world and not of monastic withdrawal from it are challenges to the Church in India.

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

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

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

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

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



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## **Ways of Salvation and the Way of Salvation**

**Jacob Parappally MSFS**

*Tejas Vidya Peetha, Bengaluru-560074*

**Abstract:** Every religion offers salvation or liberation. Since the time of Cyprian of Carthage, the Catholic Church held the exclusive Christian claim that there is no salvation outside the Church (*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*). However, at the Vatican II there was a re-visioning and a renewed understanding of salvation that went beyond absolute exclusivism to a recognition of the role of other religions in the economy of salvation. Based on the teachings of Vatican II, the author shows that in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God's Communion within the Trinity as well as God's communion with humans and their world all authentic ways of salvation find their uniqueness and legitimate space distinct but not separate from Christ, the Way! *Extra communionis nulla salus* – Outside Communion no salvation!

**Keywords:** Salvation, Church, Communion, Religions, Vatican II.

Every religion claims to offer the certainty of salvation or liberation to its adherents if they follow the way shown by it faithfully, consistently and perseveringly till the end of one's life. Some religions claim that the way shown by them is the only way to be followed to attain salvation or liberation. There are others who would do not deny the possibility of salvation in and through the following beliefs and practices of religions other than their own but would claim at least a certain kind of superiority over other religions. Since the time of Cyprian of Carthage the Catholic Church held the exclusive Christian claim that there is no salvation outside the Church (*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*). However, at the Vatican II there was a re-visioning and a renewed understanding of salvation that went beyond absolute exclusivism to a recognition of the role of other religions in the economy of salvation.

Immediately after the Vat II Council it was Kurien Kunnumpuram entered into an engaging dialogue with the teachings of Vatican II on the salvation of those who are not the members of the Church. It was his concern that the multi-religious context of India with many religions which claim to be ways of salvation challenges Christian faith about the claim of salvation exclusively through Christ and his Church. It is the concern of every Christian believer in India to understand the meaning of his or her salvation through Christ and his Church in the face of Hinduism and other religions of India which claim to be ways of salvation. In the foreword to his book *Ways of Salvation*<sup>1</sup>, which was a revised version of his doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Innsbruck in 1967, he articulated the problem of religious pluralism that confronts every Christian believer in India. He observes that for a long time the Catholic Church showed little interest in entering into dialogue with other religions "leaving the Indian Christian a frustrated and marginal figure, ill-equipped for his mission in this pluralistic society". The Second Vatican Council opened

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1 Kurien Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation*, Pune: Pontifical Athanaeum, 1970

the Church to the outside world and encouraged dialogue with other religions. Kunnumpuram contributed to the understanding of the theological significance of other religions in God's plan of salvation according to the teachings and insights of the Vatican II and highlighted the importance of entering into dialogue with other religions as an imperative to the self-understanding of Church which is essentially missionary by its nature. At the end of his research on the approach of Vatican II to world religions Kunnumpuram affirmed that the approach of the Church was positive as the Council recognized the place and function of world religions in the divine economy of salvation. It discovered and acknowledged the presence of the seeds of the Word and the fruits of the Spirit in them. Therefore, the need for a theology of Non-Christian religions and developing a theology of Christian Missions were seen that time, immediately after the Council, as the task ahead for the Church, especially, the Indian Church.

The recognition of the place and function of non-Christian religions in the divine economy of salvation and the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the people of other religions call for a deeper reflection on the nature of the Church itself and its place in the world. Kunnumpuram says, "We need a clearer grasp of its [Church's] place in God's plan for the world. We must learn to regard the Church as the home of all peoples and religions. Thus we realize that is our Christian duty to recognize and appreciate the positive values in all religions, in a spirit of faith in God who has scattered his graces and insight among the nations of the earth. Genuine faith is always ready to acknowledge him wherever it encounters him."<sup>2</sup> During the fifty years after Kunnumpuram had made his study on the teachings of Vatican II on Church's understanding of the place and role of other religions in the divine plan of salvation there have been important papal encyclicals<sup>3</sup> and other magisterial teachings, hundreds of theological books and articles on dialogue with other

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2 *Ways of Salvation*, p. 95

3 Eg. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Christifidele Laici*, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Inter-*

religions and on the need and the relevance of Christian missions. However, it is difficult to find in them a definitive statement with regard to recognizing other religions as ways of salvation that gives other religions their legitimate place in divine plan without a paternalistic or condescending attitude of the Church.

A theology of religion that sees other religions only as preparation for the gospel or ways that are to be fulfilled in Christ and in his Church may satisfy a Christian believer who experiences Jesus Christ as the fullness of revelation. Such an understanding of other religions satisfies one who is confronted by the nagging question about the salvation of millions of people who are not the members of the Church or not even heard of Jesus Christ or even they have heard of the gospel and Christ yet do not accept it as a better way of salvation than what they believe in. Why and how should, then, the Church fulfill its missionary mandate to proclaim Christ and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (cfr. Mt 28:18) if all religions are ways of salvation? Would not the understanding that all religions as ways of salvation sap the energy and enthusiasm of thousands of missionaries all over the world who toil day and night risking even their own lives for proclaiming Christ and work for the implanting of the Church? The legendary missionary zeal was for the salvation of the souls living outside the bark of Peter?

By going beyond the clear statement expressing the traditional belief of the Church that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* or outside the Church there is no salvation in the Second Vatican Council, the Church made itself very vulnerable. It is certain that a negative approach to other religions and the exclusive claim of salvation in and through the Church engender missionary zeal and enthusiasm as it was seen in the Church before Vatican II. In spite of the positive approach to other religions and acknowledging their place in the economy of salvation some missionaries continue to

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*religious Dialogue and The Proclamation Of The Gospel f Jesus Christ, etc.*

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hold the pre-Vatican II negative attitude towards other religions in their missionary approach to other religions. In this context, how do we reconcile the self-understanding of the Church and its commitment to follow the missionary mandate entrusted to it and still adhere to the positive approach to other religions and their offer of ways of salvation to humans? How can Church remain a home for all peoples and religions in the light of the teachings of Vatican II as envisioned by Kunnumpuram? In this paper an attempt is made to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the Ways of Salvation and the Way of Salvation. Do the Ways of Salvation reduce the importance and uniqueness of the Way of Salvation? How are the Ways of Salvation related to the Way of Salvation? Is the proclamation of Christ and his Kingdom to those who follow other Ways of Salvation still relevant?

## **Vatican II on the Salvific Meaning of Other Religions**

No other ecumenical council in the history of the Church took seriously the plurality religions and their salvific meaning as the Second Vatican Council. It attempted to discover its own identity in relation to other religions and its mission to the people of other religions from its new insight into the meaning of revelation. The Dogmatic Constitution Divine Revelation viewed revelation in relation to the events of salvation history. The salvific interventions of God in history culminated in Christ and he is the perfection of revelation. From this new understanding of revelation which is summed up and climaxed in Christ was a departure from the “neo-scholastic intellectualism for which revelation chiefly meant a store of mysterious supernatural teachings”<sup>4</sup>. It opened the possibility of discovering the presence and action of God in all that is good in other religions. The teaching of Vatican II on other religions evolves from this new understanding of revelation.

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4 Kurien Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation*, Pune: Pontifical Athanaeum, 1970, p. 80; J.Ratzinger, “Revelation Itself”, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed., Vorgrimler, London, 1969, p. 172.

The important teachings of Vatican II on non-Christian religions are found scattered in various documents of the Council. The Declaration on Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) affirms that "other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself"<sup>5</sup>. The Catholic Church does not reject anything true and holy in other religions as well as affirms that they reflect a ray of the Truth that enlightens all people. Indeed, according to the Christian faith Christ is this Truth and the Way! It can be legitimately concluded that the Council recognizes everything holy and true in other religions flow from that Truth whose ray is found in these religions.

How are the religions related to Christ the Truth and his Church so that it possible for those who follow these religions to find salvation? *Lumen Gentium* clearly states, "Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all people life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all humans be saved. Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience"<sup>6</sup>. If salvation is only through the Way and Truth that Christ is, then the salvation is both offered and received only through him whose Spirit is mysteriously at work in everything good, holy and acceptable to

5            *Nostra Aetate* No. 2

6            *Lumen Gentium* , No.16



God in all these religions. It is through this mysterious action of God they are saved if they remain open to that Truth that enlightens every human. The document on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* states, “God in ways known to himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him”.<sup>7</sup>

According to Kunnumpuram, “The Second Vatican Council recognizes that non-Christian religions possess many positive values such as truth and goodness, grace and holiness. It regards these values as a sort of secret presence of God, as the seeds of the Word and the fruits of the Spirit. The Council realizes that these religions cannot be considered merely as natural religions, since they contain supernatural elements, even saving faith. Despite error, sin and human depravity, non-Christian religions are a preparation for the Gospel, as they have an intimate tendency, an inner dynamism towards Christ and his Church. For those who have not yet been existentially confronted with Christianity, non-Christian religions can serve as ways of salvation, in the sense that God saves these human beings in and through the doctrines and practices of these religions”.<sup>8</sup> Going further from these conclusions the question can be raised about the theological reasons for recognizing the non-Christian religions as Ways of Salvation because they have ‘an intimate tendency, an inner dynamism towards Christ and Church’. What is the source of this inner dynamism towards Christ and Church?

## Recent Teaching of the Church on Salvation

All the previous magisterial teachings before Vatican II affirmed the necessity of being a member of the Church for salvation and at the same time categorically stated who cannot obtain salvation. We have seen that with Vatican II there is broadening of the understanding of the possibility of salvation for others who

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7 *Ad Gentes* No.2

8 *Ways of Salvation*, p. 91

do not belong to the Catholic Church through mysterious ways known to God alone.<sup>9</sup>

The Letter *Placuit Deo* published on 22 February, 2018, by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith headed by Cardinal Ladaria addressing all the bishops of the Catholic Church on certain aspects of salvation is the first document in the history of the Church which explains at least certain aspects of salvation. Though it is not a comprehensive document on salvation it liberates the notion of salvation from its traditional individualistic, spiritualistic and other-worldly understanding.

The salvation that God offers us is not achieved with our own individual efforts alone, as neo-Pelagianism would contend. Rather, salvation is found in the relationships that are born from the incarnate Son of God and that form the communion of the Church. Because the grace that Christ gives us is not a merely interior salvation, as the neo-Gnostic vision claims, and introduces us into concrete relationships that He himself has lived, the Church is a visible community. In her we touch the flesh of Jesus, especially in our poorest and most suffering brothers and sisters. Hence, the salvific mediation of the Church, “the universal sacrament of salvation”, assures us that salvation does not consist in the self-realization of the isolated individual, nor in an interior fusion of the individual with the divine. Rather, salvation consists in being incorporated into a communion of persons that participates in the communion of the Trinity. Both the individualistic and the merely interior visions of salvation contradict the sacramental economy through which God willed to save the human person.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of Pope Francis’ attack on neo-Pelagian individualism and the neo-Gnostic disregard for the body, the document affirms, “In the face of these two trends, the present Letter

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9 *Lumen Gentium* , No.16

10 *Placuit Deo* No.12-13

wants to reaffirm that salvation consists in our union with Christ, who, by his Incarnation, death and Resurrection has brought about a new order of relationships with the Father and among human persons, and has introduced us into this order, thanks to the gift of his Spirit, so that we are able to unite ourselves to the Father as sons in the Son, and become one body in the “firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29).<sup>11</sup> The document further says, “At no moment in history did God stop offering his salvation to the sons and daughters of Adam (cf. Gen 3:15), establishing his covenant with all of humanity in Noah (cf. Gen 9:9) and, later, with Abraham and his descendants (cf. Gen 15:18). Therefore, divine salvation takes on the creaturely order shared by all humanity and accompanies their concrete journey in history”.<sup>12</sup>

The mission of the Church is to communicate the experience which begins in the historical existence and is fulfilled in the eschatological communion with the Trinity so that those who are objectively saved through their ontological union with Christ may experience wholeness here and now. The document says: “The awareness of the fullness of life into which Christ the Saviour introduces us propels Christians onward in the mission of announcing to all the joy and light of the Gospel. In this work, Christians must also be prepared to establish a sincere and constructive dialogue with believers of other religions, confident that God can lead “all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way” towards salvation in Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

Some have tweeted that ‘Placuit Deo reads like a summary of Dominus Iesus.’ However, those who have really analysed the document Placuit Deo would not miss the opening of a new theological vision of salvation, though it may be sketchy, presented in this document compared to the narrow and exclusive understanding of the Church and salvation through Jesus Christ

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11 *Ibid.*, 4

12 *Ibid.*, 8

13 *PlacuitDeo*, No.15.

in Dominus Iesus. Austen Ivereigh, Pope Francis' biographer and supporter in tweet implied that Placuit Deo advances the formula Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus. It must be stated that this document is not a repetition of the traditional axiom that there is no salvation outside the Church. It opens up new avenues for theological reflection on Christian understanding of salvation that salvation or wholeness essentially consists in Communion.

### III Communitarian Dimension of Salvation

Both the Second Vatican Council and the recent document on certain aspects of salvation Placuit Deo affirm the communitarian dimension of salvation. Whether within the Church or beyond the Church in other non-Christian religions salvation is through communion and salvation is ultimately communion. Even in the Relatio referring to non-Christian religions in the 1964 schema on Church says, “All grace takes on a communitarian character and tends to the Church”<sup>14</sup> The Constitution on Church, Lumen Gentium affirms this when it says, “At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right. God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness. He therefore chose the race of Israel as a people unto Himself.”<sup>15</sup> Divine purpose is human well-being or wholeness is through communion with God and communion with others.

The source of communion among humans is the Trinitarian communion of the Father, Son and the Spirit. The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church says: “This decree, however, flows from the “fount - like love” or charity of God the Father

14 *Relatio Super Schema Const. Dogma. De Ecclesia*, 1964, p. 53: “*Omnis autem gratia quondam indolem communitariam induit et ad Ecclesiam respicit*”.

15 *Lumen Gentium*, No.9

who, being the “principle without principle” from whom the Son is begotten and Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, freely creating us on account of His surpassing and merciful kindness and graciously calling us moreover to share with Him His life and His glory, has generously poured out, and does not cease to pour out still, His divine goodness. Thus He who created all things may at last be “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28), bringing about at one and the same time His own glory and our happiness. But it pleased God to call men to share His life, not just singly, apart from any mutual bond, but rather to mold them into a people in which His sons, once scattered abroad might be gathered together (cf. John 11:52).<sup>16</sup> The divine plan for humans is that they live, move and have their being in communion which begins in their historical existence and fulfilled in the eschatological communion with God, the Absolute Communion.

The essential communitarian dimension of any religion and the social nature of humans have their source in the Trinitarian communion and in the reality of Christ. In the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) - Church acknowledges the communitarian dimension of religions and the social nature of humans.<sup>17</sup> “The social nature of man, however, itself requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion: that he should share with others in matters religious; that he should profess his religion in community.”<sup>17</sup>

The Christian faith-experience affirms that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, the Trinity and therefore every human being is Trinitarian or communitarian by nature. It is by their essential communitarian nature humans are persons. The social nature of humans is rooted in as well as the expression of the essential Trinitarian nature of human being. The capacity of humans for transcendence can be considered as their Father-dimension, their transparency or openness

16 *Ad Gentes* 2

17 *Dignitatis Humanae* 3

as the Son-dimension and their immanence or interiority as the Spirit-dimension. Thus communion is the beginning and end or the source and destiny of humans, indeed, it is their communion with the Absolute Communion or the Trinitarian life that brings final fulfillment of humans as humans.

Every type of human community has its source and model in the Trinitarian communion. Trinity is the source of human community because every human is the image of the Trinity and therefore communitarian and this essential nature is lived existentially in communities. Trinity is the model for communitarian life because in the Trinity there is absolute self-giving among the Persons of the Trinity and therefore, the Trinity is absolute unity or love. The revelation of God as Trinity is also the revelation of the meaning of plurality of everything that exists in the world and all forms of plurality. In the Trinity the Persons are distinct but not separate. The distinction or difference among the Persons of the Trinity is for communion and therefore it justifies all distinctions or differences that lead to communion. The ways of authentic communion among humans too are different and distinct but not separate from the Trinitarian communion historically manifested in Jesus Christ the Way. It is the Christian faith-experience that Jesus Christ, the incarnation of Absolute Communion is indeed the Way of salvation. The Church is the sacrament of Christ, the incarnate communion of God.

In Jesus Christ everything is united as he is the Alpha and the Omega of the entire creation. Everything is created in him and for him. "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"(Colossians 1:15-17). By assuming humanity, Jesus Christ, the Word, includes everyone before him, after him and contemporaneous with him. "He is the head of the body, the

church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent”(Colossians 1:18 ). In his body, the Church, all are included though their relation to the body may differ. The ontological union of every human being with Christ and the interrelatedness of the entire humanity in Christ through incarnation make objective salvation of humans possible. All those ways of salvation, however, they are perceived, understood and their demands are lived with a sincere heart by those who follow those ways cannot be separated from the Way of Salvation, Jesus Christ and his body the Church! The ways of salvation offered by non-Christian religions are distinct from the explicit way of salvation in Jesus Christ and his body the Church but cannot be separated from Christ or his Church. If so, can we not say that those who are walking on those ways are, in fact, walking with Christ and united with Christ, the Way, though it may not be known to them?

The mission or the proclamation of the good news continues to be an imperative placed on every disciple. It means that Jesus Christ, the incarnation of Absolute Communion, and his Church the Sacrament of Christ need to be offered to all humans to experience wholeness or salvation through communion in a new way hitherto unknown to them. Its newness consists in revealing to humans that the heart of salvific communion is self-emptying love revealed in Jesus Christ and actualized through the Spirit of God .It is also a part of the mission to recognize and affirm that all other ways of authentic communion as the expression of God, the Absolute Communion because outside communion there is no salvation – *extra communionis nulla salus!*

## Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council’s recognition of the presence of seeds of Word and the rays of Truth in non-Christian religions was a great relief for Christians who were encountering daily

the reality of a plurality of religions and each of them claiming to be the way of salvation for its adherents. Immediately after the Council it was Kurien Kunnumpuram who recognized that the teachings of Vatican II on non-Christian religions scattered in various documents offered the Church in India the possibility to enter legitimate dialogue with other religions especially Hinduism. In the context of India he envisioned a new self-understanding of the Church that it becomes a home for all religions and all peoples. The task ahead for the Church, according to him, was to develop a new theology of religions and a relevant Missiology that takes into account the new approach of the Church towards other religions which claim to be ways of salvation. The challenge of Kurien Kunnumpuram to develop a relevant ecclesiology and a Missiology can be responded to adequately if the self-understanding of Church as the Sacrament of Christ the incarnation of Absolute Communion lives and relates with all humans as a home of communion and proclaims that outside communion there is no salvation. It can be theologically shown that in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God's Communion within the Trinity as well as God's communion with humans and their world all authentic ways of salvation find their uniqueness and legitimate space distinct but not separate from Christ, the Way! *Extra communis nulla salus* – Outside Communion no salvation!

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## **Life in the Spirit of Second Vatican Council**

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**Abstract:** In the person of Kurien Kunnumpuram, we see someone celebrated for his theological contributions, spiritual insights and commitment to Christian humanism. And the thread that runs through his entire life as a theologian, spiritual guide, scholar and teacher is his unwavering commitment to a Church that embodies the spirit of Vatican II. And for Kurien, what symbolized the Vatican II Spirit is freedom because it belongs to the very nature of the human person as we see in the deceptively simple sentence, all but lost in the documents of Vatican II: “Authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within the human person.” It is this commitment to freedom that has made his reflections on the Church and life in the Church refreshingly new, relevant and appealing to all. Kurien’s motto has been, “Reach out to life with both hands” as seen on a picture hanging on the wall in front of him. And there can be no genuine life without genuine freedom. Kurien always fought

against an un-free Church and theology, an un-free religion and spirituality, and, therefore, this short paper is a plea to revive the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in the Church in general and in theology in particular.

Vatican II was a revolution and revolutions can be stalled for a time, but cannot be stopped. Therefore, it may be wiser to conclude that the vast movement of transformation begun by Vatican II will not be easily ended either externally or internally. Hopefully, the Church will genuinely accept the spirit and implications of Vatican II in realizing a “people of God” ecclesiology, in a stress upon both a working collegiality and the genuine centrality of the Eucharist within the Church, especially the local Church in the warm recognition of the values of pluralism and freedom within and between particular Churches as within human society generally and in a commitment to work and find Christian holiness within the struggle for justice and peace in solidarity with the poor. But for that to happen, the Church has to become humble.

Keywords: Vatican II, freedom, Christian humanism, Church open to the world.

On the Sunday after the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) of Pope Paul VI was published, the American Jesuit, Horace McKenna, preaching to an impoverished congregation at St. Aloysius parish in Washington D.C. apparently left the impression that despite the encyclical there was still room for the exercise of individual conscience. After the Mass, a lawyer came up to him and asked: “Do you think you can reconcile what you said with loyalty to the Holy Father?” “Yes, I think, I can,” replied the priest. The lawyer retorted: “I don’t see how you can say that. Let me make up an example. If you were working for the President of the United States, and he gave you a bag of rose seeds, and told you to plant them in the Rose Garden of the White House, and you didn’t do it, would you say you were being loyal?” “I think so,” said the Jesuit, “if the Rose Garden was already full.”

In the person of Kurien Kunnumpuram, a Jesuit of a similar mould is being honoured and celebrated for his theological contributions, spiritual insights and commitment to Christian humanism. And the thread that runs through his entire life as a theologian, spiritual guide, scholar and teacher is his unwavering commitment to a Church that embodies the spirit of Vatican II. And for Kurien, what symbolized the Vatican II Spirit is freedom because it belongs to the very nature of the human person as we see in the deceptively simple sentence, all but lost in the documents of Vatican II: “Authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within the human person.” It is this commitment to freedom that has made his reflections on the Church and life in the Church refreshingly new, relevant and appealing to all. Kurien’s motto has been, “Reach out to life with both hands” as seen on a picture hanging on the wall in front of him. And there can be no genuine life without genuine freedom. Kurien always fought against an un-free Church and theology, an un-free religion and spirituality, and, therefore, this short paper is a plea to revive the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in the Church in general and theology in particular.

## **The Story of Catholic Theology**

Before the twelfth century, theology was an exposition of Scripture by appeal to the established tradition of ecclesiastical authorities. So Augustine said to the Manichaeans: “I would not believe in the gospel if the authority of the Catholic Church did not lead me to do so.” A theologian had authority not on the ground of his own interpretations but only if his insights were consistent with those of his predecessors and the received doctrinal tradition. Even the best theological synthesis of the Middle Ages was basically reconciling it with the past voices. By the modern period, this authority was to be found in the Roman Pontiff, who is considered the most authentic interpreter of Revelation in Scripture and Tradition. The Reformers also basically shared the idea that truth was not to be found in the individual or collective acts of theologising but in the fidelity to divine Rev-

elation. The only difference was that for them it was only Scripture, but for the Catholics, it also included Tradition. But they the Reformers also introduced another element into theology, the freedom of the theologian to study, to criticise and thus the responsibility of the theologian to delve into the truth through his creativity. It is the Enlightenment that took this idea of freedom and autonomy further and effected a paradigm shift and even rejected the truth claims of both Scripture and Tradition, placing them in opposition to human reason. The Christian Churches had to defend the integrity of their theological vision against this subjective approach.

What came to the rescue of theology was Romanticism. Truth, the Romantics claimed, was discoverable not in some objective metaphysical referent but only in its historical development. Divine Revelation is not static but rather can be conceived as a process and hence, experience plays an important role and so the “role of individual creativity in theological reflection was remarkably enhanced. The theologian was no longer seen as mimetically representing an objective revelation but as imaginatively constructing the immediate, though historical, experience of salvation.” Here begins the tension between the Magisterium and the theologian in the nineteenth and twentieth century. This paradigm found itself in conflict with the classical paradigm “as defined at Trent, affirmed at Vatican I, and promulgated throughout the Modernist controversy and its aftermath until Vatican II.” The most forceful repudiation of it came in the wake of the Modernist controversy by Pope Pius X in his *Pascendi dominici gregis* of 1907. The Pope assailed the Modernist pride which “leads them to hold themselves up as the rule for all.” No doubt, a number of positions of Modernism were a threat to Catholic Christianity. On the other hand, the condemnation showed no appreciation of the positive values the movement represented: faith as personal encounter, relation between psychology and religion, sense of mystery, pastoral function of theology, less mechanical role for authority, new insights into development of dogma, fresh stress on the organic nature of the Church and the importance

of the laity, greater respect for scriptural scholarship and natural science, a newer framework for church-state relationships, a call to abandon a Catholic cultural ghetto, etc. More harmful was the aftermath of the condemnation which created an intellectually oppressive situation in the Church which lasted practically till the eve of Vatican II.

## **The Challenge of Vatican II**

Vatican II had to recognize a new man, a new woman and a new world that had emerged after the post-World War II period. A new epoch had come to birth. A new epoch is born when there is a consensus about ideals and standards, consensus about what is meaningful at all, about what is obvious and simply beyond argument, a consensus about what counts as relevant, worthwhile and significant, or pointless or ridiculous. The period surrounding Vatican II was a new epoch although the Church seemed unaware of its existence. This was as an epoch in which traditional religion and theology were becoming rather irrelevant. The God they presented could not be experienced by anyone. In an age increasingly concerned with man's temporal destiny and temporal development, an age that has discovered the person and is passionately concerned with emphatically personal realms of responsibility, identity and liberty, traditional methods of philosophy and theology with their concern for objectivity, known and judged according to universal norms supplied by the Church was not acceptable. Contemporary man and woman searching desperately for meaning were not attracted to such a philosophy and theology. The world had shifted from the classical mentality where truth floats serenely in a pace unaffected by persons and events, to historical consciousness where truth is ever writhing in the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age." Search for certainty is less significant than the quest for intelligibility. There is also a profound affirmation of freedom. Human being cannot be understood apart from his freedom. The Second Vatican Council understood some of these modern aspirations and we see traces of them, for example, in the affirmation

of religious freedom as a human right, based on the very dignity of the human person. Philosophy would characterize this radical shift as one from essence to existence, which for the Church would mean that living in the doctrine of Christianity is more important than speculating on it. There is a dynamic interrelation of the self and the world, the awareness that experience of the world of things was not as important as the experience of the world of persons, that experience is never a closed circle but always open to further development.

Within Catholicism and outside, the traditional search for certainty has been replaced by the quest for understanding. Understanding how God speaks to men and women today, disclosing himself to men and women today, in persons and events and situations rather than through propositions and abstract truths. And one is not sure just where secular experience ends and religious experience begins. There is “less attachment to the incontrovertible proposition, more profound attachment to the God to whom all propositions point; less clarity in the meaning of experience, the greater conviction that religious experience cannot be “cribbed, and confined” by law or system.

It is good to point out that many of these ideas were already present in the “words of the holy fathers” spoken centuries ago. In that sense, the Council was basically going back to the “sources” in trying to answer the new questions of the modern world. One of the important facets of patristic thought was that there was no gap between theology and spirituality. “If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian,” said, Evagrius Ponticus. The gap was created later when it was made it into a system, a set of ideas. For the Fathers, theology was a search, not only for the truth of God, but for God’s very self.

Moreover, the search was carried on not by reason alone, but the whole person because it is the whole person that must respond to the revealing God. So patristic theology is a spirituality. It was produced not in theological laboratories but grew out of

live problems in the Church and society, pain, persecutions and sufferings; it was not timeless, extra-temporal and static. A second important facet of patristic theology was the Fathers' experience of Scripture. True, they did not have the tools that we have, and they were accused of too much subjectivism and allegory, but they did not commit the sin of "straining out the gnats and swallowing the camel" through lifeless exegesis. They were able to see God and his works in Scripture. "It is this feeling of faith that we must recapture if we too want to understand what the Bible is trying to tell us. Then it will be that many of the false problems will vanish. We shall find in the Bible the truth in its totality because we shall be searching for it there alone where God put it." Theology for the Fathers was their experience of Scripture within the Church. We need to recapture their familiarity with Scripture, their love for Scripture, their search for Christ in Scripture, which prompted Jerome to say that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. The third facet of patristic theology was its understanding of the Church. For the Fathers, the Church is primarily a communion, not a pyramid but a body. This one communion shares jointly in Christ's light and life. This one communion jointly communicates Christ's truth and grace to men and women. This experience of the Church as communion was not so much a thought-out theory as a lived-out reality. It was expressed warmly in the patristic imagery of the Church as "mother" with all the faithful responsible for the common life of the community. There were heresies, sects, schisms, etc. but the Christian Church during the patristic era could suffer these without devastating rupture to its oneness. There were different theological currents, schools and tendencies, but all coexisted within the one Church. There were geographical and cultural mentalities but not to the destruction of the one body. Despite divergences in race and culture, in language and mentality, in exegesis and theology, Basil of Caesarea could write: "The faith we profess is not one thing in Seleucia, another in Constantinople, another in Zela, another in Lampsacus, and still another at Rome. The faith that circulates today is no different from the faith of yesterday; it is always one and the same." This oneness was not an abstract unity

parroted by bishops in council, it was a life, and its foci were the local church and the Eucharist. This communion was imperilled in an established Church torn internally where Christian emperors like Constantine could control ecclesiastical policy and bishops like Cyril of Alexandria could call a fellow-bishop “the new Judas” and Rome and Constantinople could challenge each other with unchristian coldness. But still in the patristic age the magic word was not authority but community. And the Eucharist was still capable of linking hostile hands in love, still the most powerful force for building up the Body of Christ. That is the reason why Henri de Lubac clearly perceived that there could not be any renewal of the Church without the study of the Fathers.

Thus, at Vatican II, the council Fathers came back to the thesis that theology has to be authentically biblical and historical because it has to wrestle with the biblical event and the progressive efforts of the Christian ages to grasp it and express it and live it. Theology has to be anthropological in that it has to search out human beings as they are; it has to be pastoral in that its burning questions will rise in significant measure from the anguish of contemporary man and woman. It will be ecumenical in that other Christians will not be primarily adversaries but co-operators in common concern, the effort of faith not simply to understand but to unite in love. It will be eschatological in its awareness of a pilgrim people in the movement now and tomorrow and every day, thorough the demonic and salvific, to the consummation of their corporate oneness in Christ. Vatican II’s contribution to theology was not primarily in its formal acceptance of a particular approach, for example, to ecclesiology or to revelation; although its documents on these matters are immensely significant, the Council’s importance for theology lies rather in the new location it proposed for theological reflection. It proposed that the Church ought to be characterized by a profound engagement with the reality of the world’s experience: no longer a Church set apart from the world within an institutional Christendom, but a Church that enters into profound solidarity with the experience of human society, and takes humanity seriously in the unfolding of its history.



This new location of the Church's identity prescribes a new location for theological activity. Human history becomes the *locus theologicus* for the post-conciliar theologian. The new stage on which post-conciliar theology is to speak is set unambiguously in the middle of human history and experience. Christian theology in every age must address the question of how Jesus is significant for a culture.

## **The Situation after Vatican II**

Avery Dulles clearly perceived that in consequence Catholic theology moved "into a period radically unlike the past few centuries, necessitating an abrupt shift of theological style comparable in magnitude to the shift that occurred with the dissemination of printed literature in the sixteenth century." The process was not without problems because uncritical reception of modern trends in natural science, philosophy, sociology etc. by theology can mask the fact that "Catholic theology is always a reflection on the faith of the Church, practised within the community of faith, with a view to serving and enhancing the spiritual life of that community." But still, within this framework, the post-conciliar Church has thrown out remarkably powerful movements within theology which have proved the words of Karl Rahner right, that Vatican II signalled the emergence of a "world Church" from an initially Judaeo-Christian, and subsequently European, cultural matrix. Latin American Liberation Theology, which had tremendous impact on Asia as well, Asian Theologies in dialogue with the religions of Asia, Feminist Theology, Dalit Theology from India, Tribal Theologies from various parts of the world, African Theology, etc. are examples of the post-conciliar insight into the priority of the landscape of lived experience in the articulation of theological doctrine. The priority has been in establishing local theologies appropriate to the lived experience of the community. Theology since the Council has been rooted in the Church's experience of asking difficult questions about what it means to be the Church of Christ in the contemporary world; It has to find ways of understanding itself as a living, varied, changing com-

munity whose identity is established, not prior to, but as a function of, its relationship to the world in which God's Kingdom grows. This has led to a preference, on the part of theology, for inductive approaches, in which the context in which theology is conducted becomes a constitutive feature of theological reflection. If at the heart of human history is the mystery of Christ, and if at the heart of contemporary history is poverty, violence, oppression and injustice on a massive scale, then theology is led to see the contemporary form of its task as a reversal of the *maxi ubi ecclesia, ibi, Christus* (Where the Church is, there is Christ). It becomes instead, *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia* (Where Christ is, there is the Church), and is expanded to mean "Where the poor are suffering, there must the Church (and its theology) be." Thus the centre of interest has shifted to creating local theologies appropriate to the lived experience of the community. There are difficulties inherent in this approach as the Church wrestles with the place of pluralism in the Church. Repeated stress upon the benefits brought by diversity and pluralism is a recurrent theme of the Council documents. This returns again and again in a variety of contexts, and the Council has called for ecclesial, liturgical and theological pluralism. It calls for a genuine diversity "even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth" and speaks of "lawful freedom of theological enquiry to which laity and clergy alike have a right." Differing theological formulations, we are assured are "often to be considered as complementary rather than conflicting."

But it has not been easy to practice this value, especially in the decades following the Council. The Vatican had taken action against several theologians, requiring clarification on disputed points, silencing some of them for a period, and prohibiting publication or teaching, declaring that a theologian is not suitable to teach Catholic theology or withdrawing the right to be called a Catholic theologian etc. It signalled a determination, on the part of the Roman authorities to constrain theological development within narrow limits than were generally envisaged in the Council halls. Such actions have the potential of making Vatican II and

its aftermath just another brief aberration within Catholic history comparable to the conciliar movement of the fifteenth century. For the supporters of this view, the reforms of Vatican II could at best be considered administrative rather than theological. For them, in many aspects the Council has already gone too far and reining in the rebellious horses is absolutely necessary for its very survival.

On the other hand, there are others who believe that the pluralist forces within the Church cannot be and should not be tamed by anyone and the reforms envisaged by Vatican II should be taken to their logical conclusion. The pendulum should swing back with a new phase of more radical reforms and only a pluralistic Catholic Christianity will be able to respond without losing its core identity to the needs of a truly world Church and of the ongoing transformation of human consciousness and intellectual understanding. But there is the real danger of a third possibility. As both these groups are trying to vie with each other, the Church will decline. The pull factors of conservatism will sap the vitality of area after area of ecclesial strength, thus preventing the liberals from going any further. Clericalism in the Church, still widespread in most parts of the world, will make impossible the development of alternative models of ministry. The intellectual strength of Catholicism will fade under pressure of a rather fundamentalist theology taught in seminaries. The Church will irreversibly decline as in some parts of the world it is already doing. Manifestly, so vast a body does not collapse overnight, and much of the decline can be masked for decades. It will retain its strength more in some places than in others. It will continue to win some local battles but its overall role as a credible world community of faith and love, a body that can be ignored by no one, a living tradition that combines humanity and the most sophisticated rational understanding with divinity and mystical insight, will simply dwindle away leaving the Church as a narrowing fellowship upon the margins of history.

## Conclusion

It is, of course, impossible for the historian to foresee the future. It is undeniable that the Church was by and large quite slow in assimilating the spirit of Vatican II and implementing its decisions. But Vatican II was a revolution and revolutions can be stalled for a time, but cannot be stopped. Therefore, it may be wiser to conclude that the vast movement of transformation begun by Vatican II will not be easily ended either externally or internally. The Church will hopefully genuinely accept the spirit and implications of Vatican II in realizing a “people of God” ecclesiology, in a stress upon both a working collegiality and the genuine centrality of the Eucharist within the Church, especially the local Church in the warm recognition of the values of pluralism and freedom within and between particular Churches as within human society generally and in a commitment to work and find Christian holiness within the struggle for justice and peace in solidarity with the poor. But for that to happen, the Church has to become humble. Revelation makes no sense without the human being’s answer in faith. This response, that takes place in history as a definite experience, in a concrete language, also belongs to the content of revelation. We are not adding anything to revelation here but are interpreting revelation. Neither part is independently the whole of revelation. So a completely objective content of revelation outside of history is a questionable concept. The whole of revelation and faith exist in history. No zone is immune from the storms of man’s history, no zone of pure theology. But the Spirit who is constantly active in the Church, and whose ‘strength is revealed in weakness’, preserves the identity of the Christian faith intact, and helps it to ‘remain in the truth’ through the vicissitudes of history. Creative faithfulness to the Gospel is possible only in a changing and developing history. Therefore, to suppress the freedom of theology in the name of truth is no service to the truth.

It is a known fact all over the world truth claims are associated with violence, arrogance, intolerance and indoctrination. But

there is truth and it has to be found, and dialogue is the only possible way for it. But this dialogue is only reasoning together and learning together. Claiming that you have got the truth wrapped up breeds violence and intolerance. Believing that together, we may arrive at the truth can heal differences. We are all pilgrims. We do not know all the answers in advance. The Church must be seen as a community of those who teach, but also those who learn. The Church must have the courage to proclaim its convictions but the humility to learn from others. St. Augustine said: “Whoever thinks that in this mortal life one may so disperse with the mists of the imagination as to possess the unclouded light of unchangeable truth understands neither what he seeks nor who he is that seeks it.” The Church has to protect itself from runaway secularism masqueraded as *aggiornamento*, but the Church leaders have also a special responsibility to balance their legitimate concern for vigilance about Catholic identity against the urgency of fostering creative Catholic thinking and activism. Clarity does not have to mean paralysis, and discernment does not have to mean turning a deaf ear to new perspectives because of anxiety about their provenance or possible implications. In other words, even if personalities or movements in the Church sometimes give bishops and other authorities heartburn, that doesn’t mean they have nothing to contribute on any possible subject.

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## **To Call to Return to the Original Church**

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**Abstract:** Pope Francis' pontificate has signalled openness to different cultural approaches. This is being exploited differently by different cultures and power groups. The theologians in India inspired by R. Panikkar's Christophany have opened up to the Revelations in the Indic Religions. Regarding the Church, Panikkar has shown that the Church was understood in the New Testament and the Church Tradition till the Reformation as always existing and came to be on earth along with Creation. Today however the Church as an institution has replaced the original intuition so completely that the original now sounds strange.

**Keywords:** Pope Francis, Raimundo Panikkar, Christophany, Church.

He [the Christ] is the image of the Invisible God, the first-  
 born of all creation,  
 for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth,  
 visible and invisible,  
 whether thrones or dominations or principalities or  
 authorities  
 all things were created through him and for him.  
 He is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together.  
 He is the head of the body, the church;  
 he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead,  
 that in everything he might be pre-eminent.  
 For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell  
 whether on earth or in heaven,  
 making peace by the blood of the cross. Col 1:15-20 (RSV)

## Introducing the Theme

After the time of the Vatican II Council, some of the discussions among Indian theologians centred mainly on degrees of ‘belonging’. Behind this loomed the picture of concentric circles. The circles nearer the centre signified a deeper degree of belonging while the peripheral circles indicated a weaker link.

Undergirding this was the concern for our sisters and brothers from other [faith] traditions. It was a time when the question of identity (person, nature, culture, religion) was becoming gradually thematic. ‘Third-world’ nations had already become or were soon to become politically free from colonial rule.

Today, there is a much greater political self-consciousness among India’s theologians and also a certain inner theological freedom (thanks to Pope Francis), compared to the times when Cardinals Joseph Ratzinger and Gerhard Mueller headed the Office of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF). We have come so far that even Cardinals do not hesitate to criticize the Pope in public, as do Cardinals Mueller, Burke and Sarah, what in their own time as centres of power was unheard of!



Mueller claims he can be of service to Pope Francis in warding off potential schisms in the Church, schisms he sees looming on the horizon thanks to Pope Francis' ambiguous formulations due to his lack of theological background. Burke gives the impression that as a canon-lawyer he can clearly discern exactly where Pope Francis is going off the beaten doctrinal path, and Sarah is sure neither liturgy nor Vatican II is Pope Francis' cup of tea. There is a lot of .

Furthermore, all three of them have gone on record that they are willing to help the Pope to overcome the chinks in the different aspects of his theological armour. With friends like these, Francis will be well protected against doctrinal, moral, liturgical and other shortcomings. All this shows how the times they are a-changing!

However, there are other Cardinals like Walter Kasper, who support the Pope. Kasper is impatient with people who have been accusing the Pope of heresy. He insists that there is no sign of any heresy here. Kasper was a longtime Professor of Theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany. Later on, as a Bishop (and then as Cardinal) he was President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Pope Francis considers him "a good theologian", his kind of theologian; the Pope is impressed by his insistence on mercy in the guidance of divorced couples.

Some of the clergy and laity (in reality a small group) opposing the alleged new doctrine of the Pope on divorce in *Amoris laetitia*, seem to lack awareness of the nature of theology. Even some who are teaching (moral) theology take their subject as a collection of (juridical) propositions that over the years the Church has formulated "once and for all time". They forget that the Church's teaching is living guidance to concrete people of a particular time and culture who understand things in a definite manner, and differently from the way their ancestors did.

Take, for instance, the phenomenon of divorce and the simple, yes, almost simplistic, way our ancestors understood it and the

complex system that *we* are entangled in! There is a chasm of a difference between their pre-understanding and ours. We cannot overlook historical differences such as these, especially when discussing familiar matters. Faggioli is absolutely right when he insists, “Catholic teaching is not a mineral. It is an animal”. Everything is under the sway of the historical process, even the mineral (*pace* Faggioli). The pragmatic popular eye may be blind where the historical process is concerned but not necessarily the trained, discerning eye of the seasoned historian. Everything is registered in a person’s DNA. However, it requires a researching historian to bring out the processes hidden therein.

In addition to the overwhelming group that supports Pope Francis that Cardinal Kasper stands for there is a third group, the group (of Bishops) from Africa that has severe cultural reservations regarding gays, lesbians and transgender people. This African group, if it is to be taken seriously, needs to work out how this is connected with African culture specifically, and show how much of it is culture and how much cultural prejudice, and how much of it is doctrinally derived, etc. We from the outside have to wait, listen and observe – not only what African bishops and theologians say and assert, but also what their creative thinkers, writers and poets say in their traditions and in the literature they produce.

Having said this, we now proceed to the main theme of this contribution. There are two important reasons why the discussion on “belonging” has not reached even today the shores of relevance. The first is because the Christ of these discussions was ‘limited’ to the Christ of the Christians in spite of the fact that the Christ of the New Testament is a comprehensive and holistic Christ through whom this world and all that is, came into being and remains in being. This is the Christ that Raimon Panikkar highlights in his *Christophany*, the Christ who is open to and builds bridges with the cultures and Revelations of other religions as also with those who believe that they are outside the world of Revelation.

Secondly, the Church that was at the centre of the controversial reflections on the Church arising from the time of the Reformation were probably not derived from the world of such a Christophany but were, to a great extent, a product of doctrinal developments.

## **1. The Mystery, Hidden from the Beginning ...**

Panikkar spells out in nine Sūtras the specificity of Christophany, i.e., the Christic Experience! As is usual with Panikkar, he rarely goes into details, leaving it to us to work them out with the help of his other writings.

### ***a. "Christ is the Christian Symbol for the Whole of Reality."***

The first and most important statement of Panikkar's comment on Christophany can be treated as: (a) Christ as Symbol; (b) Christ as Christian Symbol and (c) for the Whole of Reality. From these themes a larger Christian understanding of the Christ should emerge, on the one hand; on the other, such a Christic understanding should make it unmistakably clear that it is only a Christian understanding that we are talking about and that the approach does not subsume all the other traditions regarding the Absolute Mystery!

In this context, it is necessary to clarify Panikkar's approach to the symbol. For him, a symbol *makes present* that reality of which it is a symbol. Straightforward as the statement seems to be, it means more than meets the eye. Here a symbol, unlike a sign, works on the ontological, not on the epistemological level because "symbolizes" says, "makes really present", not represents, what it symbolizes. A face, e.g., really makes present a person. When one sees a face, one sees the person whose face it is. Where the face is, there is also the being whose face it is. A symbol makes present the being it symbolizes. "Makes present" is indeed very different from "stands for" or "represents". Makes present is ontological, stands for is epistemological.

Thus, for instance, when we state that Christ symbolizes the whole of Reality it refers to makes present as a certain face makes a certain body present to one who knows a certain person. Our Sūtra insists that Christ is the face, the symbol, of all Reality. But the face is not the whole of Reality; it is the symbol for the whole of Reality. In Panikkar's words, it is *pars pro toto*, the part standing for the whole. Besides, it is only the Christian symbol, not the universal symbol for all believers. Other traditions have their own approaches to, other symbols for this Mystery. In our times, Christians need to affirm this belief because its nexus with Reality was not and is not always proclaimed thus. Sacred secularity is very relevant for our age. It is the functional equivalent of finding God in all things.

### ***b. "The Christian Recognizes Christ In and Through Jesus."***

The First Sūtra *might* put off believers from other traditions. The purpose of the Second Sūtra clarifies the place of Jesus with regard to the Christ for Christians. Their door to the Christ is different, not separate, from that of other traditions. The Christian door, so to say, is Jesus. There is no doubt about the historical nature of Jesus. But this historical character as such has been important for some cultures where history has played a dominant role. But the colonial powers that brought Christianity to the "colonized" countries used it as an argument against countries where history is not an important category and hence was not considered a positive factor in their respective cosmovisions. This turned out to be a real hindrance in the work of mission and evangelization. It hindered the growth of a positive attitude towards Christianity among the native religions because the Christianity they came in touch with was a colonial Christianity that pretended to speak for all Christians. Moreover, they [over-]stressed the historical character of Jesus

of Nazareth, which the others found hard to accept. And this overstress has come in the way of its interaction with Asian cultures. Speaking generally, Asian cultures have a different stance on time and history. Understandably, western Christian missionaries couldn't appreciate the specific contribution of Asian cultures with regard to time and vice versa. The transhistorical consciousness of their cultures has evoked a negative reaction from Christian missionaries, and the historical consciousness of the Christian traditions have hampered a free and open dialogue right up to our times. Actually, this Sūtra is a stepping-stone towards dialogue by stating where Jesus stands. Historical consciousness and transhistorical consciousness are two different kinds of time-experience.

### ***c. "The Identity of Christ Is Not the Same as His Identification."***

The Third Sūtra introduces a clarification that is as profound as it is philosophical. Identity has to do with the "who", whereas identification focuses on the "what". Identity is neither logically deducible nor is it externally perceptible to the senses. Identification refers to the articulation of the experience of a certain individual, but that is not to be confused with the identity of the person. We know so many individuals in the course of our lives (work, profession, etc.) that there will not be much difficulty in locating the differences between their identifications. However, in a deep relationship of friendship, we might get some "intimation" of identity. Coming to know the identification of Jesus as done by different Christian, Hindu, Muslim and other historical groups is a different kind of task. These descriptions are more of an external kind. However, coming to know the identity of a person like Jesus of Nazareth is possible, if at all, through meditative and ascetical practices, and this is a never-ending, life-long process. What the present Sūtra is

drawing attention to is the fact that even for Christians, it is far from being a cakewalk to the identity of the Christ!

**d. “Christians Do Not Have a Monopoly on the Knowledge of Christ.”**

This is one of the more fundamental Sūtras of Christophany. The Name Christ may lead Christians to imagine that Christ is exclusively theirs. Christophany makes it clear that this is not so. Christ is the Christian Name for, the Christian door to, the Absolute Mystery. One of the major tasks of Christophany from the Christian perspective is to confirm that Christ symbolises that Mystery to whom all belong and in whom all exist.

Furthermore, each Tradition has its own Name for this Mystery! To confirm this, the Sūtra explicitly asserts that Christians do not have a Monopoly on the Knowledge of Christ. Even to Christians, Christ remains a Mystery! It is to the Christians that he proclaims, I am the way, the truth and the life. He is not asking the followers of other religions to give up their religion and its teaching. But if anyone follows him (in both the senses of the word), then for that person too he is the way, the truth and the life.

**e. “Christophany Transcends Tribal and Historical Christology.”**

Sūtra Five is aware of its roots in “Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, a tribal God, one among many others, often more powerful or in any event equally cruel.” It was the merit of the prophets of Israel to convert the Hebrews’ tribal God into the God for all and of all. With prophetic insight Panikkar adds here: “The task of Christians – perhaps our *kairos* – may be *the conversion – yes, conversion – of a tribal Christology into a Christophany less bound to a single cultural current.*” The Christology that India has inher-

ited mostly from the West is ‘historical’ Christology. It has not only overstressed the historical aspect and is therefore somewhat of a misfit in the Indic context where the sense of history is not better but very different indeed. “Christophany does not contest the historicity of Jesus. It merely affirms that history is not the only dimension of the real and that *Christ’s reality is thus not exhausted with Jesus’s historicity*.” Panikkar asserts that the historical overstress is clear even in Vatican II. “The cosmovision of the council thereby effectively forgot the angelic and cosmic dimension of reality and ignored the perspectives of other cultures.” The concern here is about connectivity with other cultures – to be enriched by their insights and their critique. Very few refer to Panikkar’s diatopical hermeneutics – the effort to relate *topoi* of different cosmovisions!

**f. “The Protological, Historical, and Eschatological Christ Is a Unique and Selfsame Reality, Distended in Time, Extended in Space, and Intentional in Us.”**

We can paraphrase this thus: The Christ that always existed, the one who lived in history and the one whom we shall encounter at the end of time is the selfsame reality. This Sūtra is best understood on the backdrop of the cosmotheandric experience. Time is a constituent of Man who experiences continuity of time in the events of life (*distended in space*), not discrete moments. Man, also experiences things as *extended in space*; here there is continuity of space. However, Man does not stop with what he experiences in time and space but longs to follow this up. Man yearns for “more”, wants the narrative to go on beyond (*intentional*).

**g. “The Incarnation as Historical Event Is Also Inculturation.”**

Admittedly the language of the Sūtra vis à vis Panikkar’s comment might be somewhat confusing: “As a historical act

in time and space, the incarnation is also a cultural event, intelligible only within a particular religiocultural context, that of a specific history. The divine incarnation as such is, however, not a historical event but a divine trinitarian act.” I make sense of all this thus: The incarnation as a divine trinitarian act is *in* history but it is not *of* history. Our acceptance of this happening as a divine trinitarian act is an act of faith. The act of faith is not the product of a logical or rational process but as something that makes sense. We do this in so many cases without finding this to be irrational. Furthermore, the incarnation is intelligible, if at all, in the particular context of the prophets who opened up the people to God’s larger world of mercy and salvation. The uncritical acceptance of the world of history Panikkar calls ‘historiolatry’. His contention is that with the acceptance of the heliocentric system “not only was the earth no longer considered the center of the universe, but the angels, demons, and spirits, which constituted parts of that cosmovision began to vanish and Christ began to lose his cosmic function - which had been obvious in the canonical scriptures as centre of the entire universe (Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 2:10).” After that, the Church’s [implicit] surrender was to colonial thinking – “one single culture is sufficient to embrace and understand the whole spectrum of human experience”. Basically, Sūtra Seven intends to integrate traditional Christology (“in history”) with Christophany (“not of history”) - “the quintessence of Christ’s mystery – *totus Deus et totus homo* (‘the whole God and the whole man’). To understand the Sūtra we have to recall Panikkar’s distinction between *mythos* and *logos*. Their exigencies on the trinitarian level are different and we must be aware of them especially when Panikkar speaks of non-duality. As a further help he suggests: “We should distinguish *experiential Christianness* from *cultural Christianity* and *doctrinal Christendom*.” These distinctions are essential today for theologizing cross-culturally. What should be common to all Christians is *experiential Christianness*. This unites Christians and at the same time,



this will help keep them faithful to their cultural specificity and open to doctrinal diversity. The other really important point in the commentary on this Sūtra is about inculturation. One aspect of inculturation is the attempt to enter into a world of meaning that is not one's own, it is the endeavour to understand the world that one is trying to enter. Though the incarnation is a unique phenomenon, Panikkar considers the Judaic background a suitable site for the incarnation (obviously *a posteriori*) because the coming of the Divine into the Judaic world of meaning had been well prepared by their prophets for quite some time in its history - despite the unrelenting resistance of the Jewish leaders to Jesus in the Gospels; *and* despite the brave struggles of the early Councils to work out trinitarian and christological formulations to unite the Greek and the Latin faithful. As a historical note one may add that none of the trinitarian formulations has really found resonance among the faithful, resonance that is born of theological understanding.

#### ***h. "The Church Is Considered a Site of the Incarnation."***

*Pace* the modern mentality which considers the Church primarily as an *institution*, this Sūtra reminds us that from early tradition (*ecclesia ab Abel*) its prime understanding and role is that of an *organism* that expresses the Mystery of the Reality of the Cosmic, the Human and the Divine. In Panikkar's words:

In the first fifteen centuries, in contrast [to the 'image of the church as something similar to a civil institution' created by the Reformation clash], Christians were virtually unanimous in believing in what today is called 'the cosmic church' (*mystērion kosmikon tēs ekklēσίας*)-although immersed in secular affairs that it considered sacred.

He holds that Vatican II returned to the ampler understanding of the church as *mystērion tou kosmou* or the *sacramentum mundi* - that is, the mystery of the universe, not the mystery of the church! What was lost in translation from *mystērion* to *sacramentum* was “the global nature of the church’s sacraments”. That is why the ancients spoke of the church as existing from the time of Abel (*ecclesia ab Abel*). “The idea that God created the world out of love for the church was considered virtually synonymous with the idea of the mystical body. This meant that God created the world for the purpose of divinizing his creation by making it become his own body, with Jesus as head and we the members.”

Here Panikkar quotes a number of church fathers: Clement of Alexandria spoke of the church of the first-born – *ekklēsia prōtotokōn*. Panikkar goes on to quote Tertullian: “wherever the three are, that is to say the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, there is the church which is the body of the three”. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* was formulated by Origen and Cyprian and accepted by all. There *ecclesia* meant the “place of salvation”. St. Ignatius of Antioch said similarly: “Where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.” Panikkar reminds us that the primary meaning of the Greek word *katholikē* is cosmic and soteriological. Already Pope Pius XII had warned against identifying this church directly with an institution.

With a fresh critical consciousness, Christophany returns to these fundamental truths: the place of the incarnation is Man, indeed ‘the flesh’. The place of man is the earth, indeed the church in its journey. The goal of this pilgrimage is plenitude, not nothingness (not to be confused with emptiness). It is this, which constitutes Christian hope. The human adventure is ecclesial, cosmic, and divine.

Apart from Panikkar’s theology of hope that is clearly at work here, implied in the larger perichoretic process are

*creatio continua* and *incarnatio continua*. The former refers to the creative cosmotheandric dance of the Cosmic, the Divine and the Human, and the latter to the constant divinizing of all that is known as Man. It is good to remember that when we speak for heuristic purposes like this, we are converting theological poetry into prose and with that we are changing the focus from the moon to the finger that points to the moon.

### ***i. "Christophany Is the Symbol of the Mysterium Coniunctionis of Divine, Human, and Cosmic Reality."***

The ninth and last Sūtra is about the Sacrament of Networking of the whole of the cosmotheandric process. Panikkar, who was fairly familiar with the Texts of the Greek and the Latin Fathers of the Church employed polysemic words. The church was the *mystērion tou kosmou*, in Latin *sacramentum mundi*. Thus, *sacramentum mundi* was not so much or primarily the Sacrament of the World but the mystery of the universe. We too are part of this Mystery, this Sacrament, this holistic vision called Christophany. Man as poet is primarily tasked with making [sense] (=poēsis) of the universe around us through networking. This networking has to do with appropriating or, more precisely, realizing our ontic relatedness. True, for the Western Church, Christianity is a historical religion but its historicity is neither primary nor originary. It has exposed multiple negative historical developments, e.g. its rigorous defense of monotheism at the price of its trinitarian uniqueness; its claim of one centre of intelligibility at the service of colonialism where other independent centres have been made subservient; its acceptance of the historical monopoly of truth as if presence were necessarily and always of a historical nature, etc. Whatever its merits one needs to be made aware of the pernicious and perilous effects of historicity on transhistorical consciousness. Temporality, not historicity, is a basic characteristic of reality. Temporality

shares in Christophany, but it does not exhaust Christophany's essential transhistorical reality. What the last Sūtra sums up is this: Christophany *brings into being*, that is, *brings together* what it brings into being and *holds together* what it brings into being. Far from being a collection of dead objects, Man realizes, the universe is an organic living being. Treating this universe as a collection of dead objects will gradually spell the beginning of *our* end.

## 2. The Church of Reality

The First Sūtra spoke of the Christ as the Christian symbol for the whole of reality. That means that *outside of* and *apart from* [the cosmotheandric] Christ there is nothing. That is the reason that Panikkar asserts "that the Christian tradition does not separate the understanding of Christ from that of creation". This is obvious from Panikkar's foundational thesis of the cosmotheandric constitution of all reality. Every single being is real because of its cosmotheandric constitution.

From here Panikkar argues:

Precisely because religion, in the best sense of the word, is the most profound human dimension that 'binds' (*religa*) us to the rest of reality through its most intimate constitutive bonds, it is not reducible to an exclusive belonging to any particular human group. On the contrary, It is precisely the conscious belonging to reality that makes us Christians and happens precisely through a very concrete bond by means of which we are not only fully human but also fully real, although in a contingent and limited way. It is within and through this concreteness that we are able to realize, to the extent of our limitations, the fullness of our being-as microcosm and *mikrotheos*.

It is of paramount importance to understand the significance of these reflections and realize their consequences.

The threefold bond of the Cosmic, the Human and the Divine binds every single being, without exception - all of which constitutes the Real. Accordingly, the Reality of the Church includes every single being though obviously not in a univocal manner. This requires a twofold comment: The poetic task and the practical task of the Human. The first has to do with the task of meaning in life that all religions and philosophies have constantly and continuously struggle to provide; included in which are the pastoral and pedagogical concerns. The second focuses on the life-styles that societies develop, their efforts to respond to the patterns of meaning in life put forward, the question of whether Governments and institutions provide enough opportunities to implement them and the doubts and discussions of the public regarding all this.

Thus, the idea of Church far from being churchy harks back to the Mystery of the Christ who is the head of the body, the church. Here is a *paraphrase* of the Letter to the Colossians quoted at the beginning of this article (Col 1:15-20).

We look at the Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels – everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.

He was supreme in the beginning and – and leading the resurrection parade – he supreme in the end. From beginning to end he is there, towering far above everything, everyone: So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds his proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe – people and things, animals and atoms – get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood poured down from the Cross.

### 3. The Reality of the Church

Whatever one's stand *vis à vis* this argument may be, it should give us pause to think. The juridical-and-institutional approach that has prevailed in the Church in the last centuries of its history is neither the favourite nor the favoured way of the ancient traditions of the Church. More importantly, it is abundantly clear that in some, if not in most cases, the mystical dimension, the main constituent that authenticates the Church, have been minimized if not lost. It has to be urgently retrieved if it is to be the Church of Jesus the Christ.

More: If the Church is to become the *agora* of and for all peoples, then it has to be founded on Reality, which is the common foundation stone of all cultures and religions. No being, no group, no tradition can afford to neglect a foundation other than the cosmotheandric foundation. That is the commonality that every single being shares with every other being. That is the logic that has to be followed in the revision of our rights and duties. The perspective cannot anymore be anthropocentric or anthropic. Indeed, this was the root cause of the ecological crisis, making Man the centre of our concern. This mistake cannot be repeated. Henceforth all creative efforts, no matter in which field, have to be cosmotheandric. This is the path to wholeness and recovery.

Cosmotheandricism is not a school of thought or a direction of work or an area of spirituality. It is to be the background of all thinking, work and spirituality. Or to be more precise, cosmotheandricism is the structure of Reality. We do not construct it, it is always and already there as our basic structure. One has gradually to become aware of it and make it thematic.

Awareness is a short form for self-awareness; one cannot produce it on one's own. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Any one practising the Buddhist vipassana exercise knows how long it takes just to 'get into it'! Battling distractions, one does not know whether one will ever reach a point, that will be distraction-free!

Be that as it may, even self-awareness like every reality is cosmotheandric. This may seem far-fetched but it is not so. The *expressing* of this issue is the cosmic dimension as this makes us aware of what we are talking about. Our *awareness* itself is the human dimension. And what it embodies and points to is the *depth-dimension*, the inexpressible.

Awareness, the Christian word is discernment, is the secret of life. It heals all separations not by artificially juxtaposing things but by turning polarizations into polarity. “Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest.” Even the sun and the rain follow this love-commandment as it belongs to his Father’s order of the day, Jesus says, on the cosmic level! And in Jesus’ final commission, we are instructed: “Go forth to every part of the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation.” The mission-command appears to embody the *process* of the beautiful metaphor of the *anakephalaiōsis* of Ephesians 1:10.

## Notes

1. See the same in contemporary [American] language, Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs/Colorado: Navpress Publishing, 1993, footnote 42).
2. See Kurien Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation* (Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Publications, Pune, 1971).
3. Recently the Emeritus Pope has sharply criticized those who believe Pope Francis has no theology.
4. Critics of Pope Francis forget the resonance he is producing in secular circles. See [James Carroll](#), “The Transformative Promise of Pope Francis, Five Years On.” How the Leader of the Catholic Church became a hero of the secular world. *The New Yorker*. The Daily. March 13, 2018.
5. See *La Croix International* March 7, 2018: Stop accusations of heresy, says Cardinal Kasper. Pope Francis’ views on allowing the Sacraments for those who remarry not heretical — criticism of ‘Amoris laetitia’ misplaced.
6. As Villanova University’s theologian Massimo Faggioli puts

it, “Francis is not interested in reformulating church doctrine... Catholic teaching is not a mineral. It is an animal. It moves and adapts, it grows”. See Peter Feuerherd’s report on the dialogue between Ross Douthat (“the skeptical conservative and columnist for the New York Times”) and Massimo Faggioli (“an unabashed Francis booster and Villanova University theologian”) at Fordham’s Lincoln Center. See Peter Feuerherd’s report on the dialogue on Jan. 31, 2018 between Ross Douthat and Massimo Faggioli in *National Catholic Reporter*, Feb 2, 2018.

7. I have no numerical evidence to support all this, except to report what we read in the media. The head of Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Asia, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, a canon lawyer and member of the Pope’s G-8, when asked in an interview on a national television programme about his position regarding catholic gays and lesbians replied that, like Pope Francis, he too held that they were legitimate members of the Catholic Church.
8. Like e.g. cultural prejudice against blacks and coloured people in some first-world countries.
9. See Keshub Chunder Sen, “That Marvellous Mystery– The Trinity,” in: *Keshub Chunder Sen’s Lectures in India* (London/ Paris/New York/Melbourne: Cassel & Company, 1904), 32: In the midst of this large assembly I deny and repudiate the little Christ of popular theology, and stand up for a greater Christ, a fuller Christ, a more eternal Christ, a more universal Christ. I plead, for the eternal Logos of the Fathers, and I challenge the world’s assent. This is the Christ who was in Greece and Rome, in Egypt and India. In the bards and the poets of the Rig Veda was he. He dwelt in Confucius and in Sakya Muni. This is the true Christ whom I can see everywhere, in all lands and in all times, in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in America, in ancient and modern times. He is not the monopoly of any nation or creed. All literature, all science, all philosophy, every doctrine that is true, every form of righteousness, every virtue that belongs to the Son, is the true subjective, Christ whom all ages glorify.
10. Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Maryknoll/ New York: Orbis Books, 2004).
11. *Christophany*, 141.
12. *Christophany*, 144ff.
13. See Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), *passim*, esp. 4-6.
14. Panikkar, A Self-Critical Dialogue, in: Joseph Prabhu (Ed.), *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* ((Maryknoll/Ney York: 1996), 244-245.
15. *Christophany*, 149ff.



16. See my Time, History and Christophany, in: Peter Phan/Youngchan Ro (Eds.), *RAIMON PANIKKAR. A Companion to His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., U.K., 2018), 171-193.
17. For a brief general discussion on this see R. Panikkar, "Time and Sacrifice: The Sacrifice of Time and the Ritual of Modernity," in *The Study of Time III: Proceedings of the Third Conference of the International Society for the Study of Time, Alpbach, Austria* (New York: Springer, 1979),
18. Panikkar *The Cosmotheandric Experience. Emerging Religious Consciousness*. Ed. by Scott Eastham (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Book, 1993). Also, Panikkar, "Concepts of Time: Ancient and Modern - Kalasakti: The Power of Time," in: Kapila Vatsyayana/Côme Carpentier de Gourdon (Eds.), *Raimundo Panikkar: A Pilgrim Across Worlds* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016), 222-247.
19. *Christophany*, 153.
20. *Christophany*, 39-140.
21. *Christophany*, 156.
22. *Christophany*, 161ff.
23. *Christophany*, 162.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.* My italics.
26. *Ibid.* My italics.
27. *Christophany*, 163.
28. Raimon Panikkar's Diatopical Hermeneutics: Meister Eckhart's World of holistic Thinking and the Bhagavadgītā's Experience of the World of Wholeness, in: *Jnanadeepa. Pune Journal of Religious Studies*. Befriending the Other. Vol. 20/1-2. Jan-Dec 2016, 107-128.
29. *Christophany*, 165ff.
30. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 1993).
31. *Christophany*, 170ff.
32. *Christophany*, 170.
33. We smile back when a child smiles at us, we laugh when we hear a joke, we cry when we share in the sorrow or pain of a friend, we rejoice when our team wins a game, etc., etc. The Rational is only one level of our being! There are many other levels of our being where things make sense without the Rational.
34. *Christophany*, 170, Panikkar writes: "...I have often criticized the implicit 'historiolatry' of a certain kind of theology".
35. *Christophany*, 170.
36. *Christophany*, 171.
37. *Christophany*, 172.

38. *Christophany*, 175.
39. *Christophany*, 176ff.
40. *Christophany*, 177.
41. *Christophany*, 177.
42. *Christophany*, 177.
43. *Christophany*, 178-179.
44. *Christophany*, 180ff.
45. *Christophany*, 176.
46. In such a cosmovision only the historical is taken to be real, to be true!
47. *Christophany*, 167: "Our experience of the world shows that everything of which we are conscious is temporal, etc." See footnote 43.
48. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience, Part Two: The End of History*. The Threefold Structure of Human Time-Consciousness, 79-137. Most thinking on history, whether Indian or Western has been partial and one-sided. Panikkar, "Time and Sacrifice: The Sacrifice of Time and the Ritual of Modernity," in *The Study of Time III: Proceedings of the Third Conference of the International Society for the Study of Time, Alpbach, Austria* (New York: Springer, 1979). Also, his "Concepts of Time: Ancient and Modern - Kalasakti: The Power of Time," in: Kapila Vatsyayana/Côme Carpentier de Gourdon (Eds.), *Raimundo Panikkar: A Pilgrim Across Worlds* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016), 222-247.
49. *Christophany*, 165.
50. *Christophany*, 169.
51. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs/Colorado: Navpress Publishing, 1993), paraphrase of Col 1:15-20. See the RSV translation of the same text at the head of this article.

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## **Catholicism and Modern Science: Vatican II on Science and Technology**

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**Abstract:** Although the Second Vatican Council touched extensively and profoundly practically all the important aspects of the Church, in this paper, the author focusses on its groundbreaking spirit and statements on the relationship of the Catholic Church with modern science and technology. The *aggiornamento* inaugurated by Vat II is a long and challenging process that needs to continue. Both the Church and modern science need to collaborate in this noble task. Science, with its amazing findings of the secrets of nature and its well-proven powerful methods, can be a great boon in this process. The perennial truths and the rich tradition of the Church too should serve as facilitators rather than obstacles in this venture. The truths and insights of religion can ensure that the ongoing process does not deviate from the right path of holistic progress of humanity and the cosmos. The Christian tradition can make available centuries of rich experience as a source of inspiration and guidance. Vat II has opened the door

for such a constructive and collaborative mission to respond responsibly to the challenges of our contemporary world.

Keywords: Vatican II, *aggiornamento*, Science-Religion Dialogue, Technology, Science.

## Introduction

Although the Catholic Church is expected to be a Spirit-initiated, Spirit-filled and Spirit-governed institution, certain events in its 2000 odd history lead a critical mind to question this expectation or claim, particularly in our own time. However three events in recent times assure me that the Spirit is very much present and active in the Church: First the gift of Pope John XXII, second the Second Vatican Council and third the gift of Pope Francis.<sup>1</sup> To me, arguably, these three unexpected, out of the blue, happenings come across as a special Epiphany of the Spirit leading, guiding and protecting the Church of Christ. The central player and connecting link of these three, is, of course, Vatican II, undoubtedly the most important event in the history of the Catholic Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pope John is intimately linked to it as the inspirer and convener of Vatican II and Pope Francis as the one who has been making a heroic effort to put the path-breaking spirit and ideals of the Council into the practice, particularly since they went through a “lukewarm period” for several decades, mainly due certain conservative and vested interests within the Church. As the Apostolic Brief *In Spirito Sancto* rightly points out, “The Second Vatican Council... must be remembered without doubt among the greatest events of the Church.”<sup>2</sup> Several details about this Council unmistakably reveal

1 It is interesting to note the tremendous similarity between Pope John XXIII and Pope Francis, particularly in their lifestyle, general attitude and the special circumstances they were elected to be the Successors of St. Peter. See “The unlikely election of John XXIII,” <https://www.catholicireland.net/the-unlikely-election-of-john-xxiii/>, accessed on 11/12/2018.

2 “Papal Brief Declaring the Council Completed,” Walter M. Abbott, SJ, General Editor, *The Documents of Vatican II* (London: Geoffrey Chapman,

the hand of the Holy Spirit in initiating and carrying through this special event. As Pope John XXIII said in his opening speech, “It (the first announcement of the Council on January 25, 1959, within merely three months of his Pontificate) was completely unexpected, like a flash of heavenly light, shedding sweetness in eyes and hearts.”

Furthermore, historically in the past, an ecumenical council was convened when there was a crisis, particularly a doctrinal one, and the Church was seriously threatened. This was not the situation when Vat II was convened. According to the “Opening Speech” of Pope John XXIII, “The salient point of this Council is not, therefore, a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church which has repeatedly been taught by the Fathers and by ancient and modern theologians, and which is presumed to be well known and familiar to all. *For this no Council was necessary.*”<sup>3</sup> But there was a pressing and potent reason: “Today the Church is witnessing a crisis underway within society. While humanity is on the edge of a new era, tasks of immense gravity and amplitude await the Church, as in the most tragic periods of its history. It is a question in fact of bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the gospel, a world which exalts itself with its conquest in the technical and scientific fields, but which also brings the consequences of a temporal order which some have wished to recognise excluding God. This is why society is earmarked by great material progress to which there is not a corresponding advance in the moral field.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the Council was intended to remedy the serious mismatch between the advances in the world of science and technology and in that of religion and morality. The Pontiff was quick to add that the Church has not been caught unaware of this situation: “If we turn our attention to the Church, we see that it has not remained a lifeless spectator in the face of these events, but has followed step by step the

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1967), p.738. Henceforth Abt.

3 Abt, p.715. Emphasis added.

4 “Pope John Convenes the Council,” Abt, p.704.

evolution of peoples, scientific progress, and social revolution.”<sup>5</sup> The convening of the Council gives clear evidence to this ever vigilant and solicitous attitude of the Church. These statements of Pope John XXIII clearly indicate the importance he and the Church attach to scientific and technological developments and the well-recognized impact they have on society, particularly the Church.

Although the Council touched extensively and profoundly practically all the important aspects of the Church, in this paper, my principal focus will be its groundbreaking spirit and statements on the relationship of the Catholic Church with modern science and technology. Vat II commenced on October 11, 1962, under the Pontificate of Pope John XXIII and closed on December 8, 1965, under the Pontificate of Pope Paul VI. Not only was this Council unprecedented in its goal, but several other firsts also distinguished it. It had the largest number of participants – the attendance at the Council peaked up to 2540. Furthermore, it was considered the richest experience of its kind because of the careful, profound and open-minded way the questions were discussed all through its four long sessions. Another factor that made it special was its timing: it came at the opportune time, when the world needed it most, “bearing in mind the necessities of the present day, above all it sought to meet the pastoral need.”<sup>6</sup> Its universal and open spirit also made it a special event. It was conspicuous by the presence of non-Catholics who were invited as observers, particularly from the Eastern Orthodox Churches. “Nourishing the flame of charity, it has made a great effort to reach not only the Christians still separated from communion with the Holy See, but also the whole human family.”<sup>7</sup>

## 1. The Goal of Second Vatican Council

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5 Ibid., ABT, p.704.

6 “Papal Brief,” Abt, p. 738.

7 Ibid., p. 738. See also Second Vatican Council Ii Closing Speech - Papal Encyclicals, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6closin.htm> (accessed July 14, 2019).

Since the circumstances that led to the convening of Vat II and hence its stated goals were intimately interlinked with developments in science and technology, a brief discussion of these goals is quite appropriate. *Lumen Gentium*, “Dogmatic Constitution of the Church,” often considered by the topmost scholars in the field as “the most imposing achievement of Vatican II,”<sup>8</sup> describes this point in detail.<sup>9</sup> Today humans are “buffeted between hope and anxiety and pressing one another with questions about the present course of events, they are burdened down with uneasiness.”<sup>10</sup> According to the Council, this spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution. Giving a careful and precise analysis of the situation it continues: “Intellectual formation is ever increasingly based on the mathematical and natural sciences and on those dealing with man himself, while in the practical order the technology which stems from these sciences takes on mounting precedence.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, “Technology is transforming the face of the earth, and is already trying to master outer space.”<sup>12</sup> The advances in the biological and social sciences too are equally powerful and effective: “Advances in biology, psychology, and the social sciences not only bring men hope of improved self-knowledge. In conjunction with technical methods, they are also helping men to exert direct influence on the life of social groups.”<sup>13</sup> In short, in our contemporary world, intellectual formation is very much coloured and controlled by science and technology. The impact is not confined to the intellectual field only; it reaches out to the cultural field and plays a major role in shaping our mode of thought and value system. Indeed, a new age has ushered in, thanks to developments in science and technology.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned earlier, Pope John correctly diagnosed that there was no proportionate growth in the moral

8 Avery Dulles, SJ, “Introduction,” Abt, p. 13.

9 See “Gaudium et Spes,” nos. 4 and 5, Abt, pp. 203-204.

10 Ibid., p. 203.

11 Ibid., p. 203.

12 Ibid., p. 203.

13 Ibid., p. 203.

14 See “Gaudium et Spes,” no. 54, Abt, p.260.

field to ensure balanced and harmonious growth of contemporary humans. The Council was intended as a timely move to remedy this serious imbalance.

## **2. Aggiornamento, the Catchword of Vatican II**

“Aggiornamento,” making up-to-date, which became the catchword for the Council, expressed its set goal better than any other word or concept. The Church must be brought up-to-date, must adapt itself to meet the challenges of modern times, mainly due to the astounding developments in science and technology. Pope John called for a renewed, serene and tranquil study and reflection on all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness, in the light of these developments. He wanted the Church to make use of modern means and methods, well proven for their efficaciousness and accuracy, to expound and explicate the ever-alive Christian teaching and rich heritage. Thus the Council would be “a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity.”<sup>15</sup> Far from being intimidated by modern developments and techniques and then taking the negative and defensive attitude of debunking them, he wants to welcome them as effective tools from the ever-solicitous God to render the Church more relevant and meaningful to contemporary men and women.

Aggiornamento in the theological context should not be reduced to an exercise of rephrasing conventional theological teaching in contemporary terminology. The Council clearly states that such “old wine in new skins” simply defeats the purpose “for recent studies and findings of science, history, and philosophy raise new questions which influence life and demand new theological investigations.”<sup>16</sup> Pope John Paul II in his letter to Fr. George Coyne, SJ, Director of Vatican Observatory, on June 1, 1988, was even more emphatic: “Contemporary developments in science challenge theology far more deeply than did the

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15 “Pope John’s Opening Speech to the Council,” Abt, p. 715.

16 “Gaudium et Spes,” no. 62, Abt, p.268.



introduction of Aristotle into Western Europe in the thirteenth century.”<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, it must be emphasized that this *aggiornamento* in no way meant any break with the fundamental teachings of the Church. To dispel any doubt on this matter Pope John clarified: “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and how it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.”<sup>18</sup>

The scientific developments had a pivotal role to play in motivating the Pope to convene the Council, and the predominant atmosphere was one of optimism and appreciation for scientific advances. But this allowed no compromise with spiritual values the Church has always stood for. Nor has the Church failed to admonish humans against the wrongs that often accompany an excessive emphasis on the material and the scientific. In Pope John’s own words: “The Church has not watched inertly the marvelous progress of the discoveries of human genius, and has not been backward in evaluating them rightly. But, while following these developments, she does not neglect to admonish men so that, over and above sense – perceived things – they may raise their eyes to God, the Source of all wisdom and all beauty.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, this *aggiornamento*, far from diminishing the importance and relevance of the spiritual dimension, should enhance and strengthen it. “Illumined by the light of this Council, the Church ... we confidently trust will become greater in spiritual riches

17 Letter of Pope John Paul II to Reverend George V. Coyne, SJ, Director of the Vatican Observatory, 1 June, 1988, in Robert Russell, William Stoeger, SJ, and George Coyne, SJ, eds., *Physics, Philosophy and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1988), p. M12. Henceforth Ppt. See also Father Tomislav Vlasic’s Letter To Pope John Paul II, <http://www.medjugorje.org/vlasic1.htm> (accessed July 14, 2019).

18 “Pope John’s Opening Speech,” Abt, p. 715.

19 Ibid., p. 714.

and, gaining the strength of new energies therefrom, she will look to the future without fear. In fact, by bringing herself up to date where required, and by the wise organization of mutual cooperation, the Church will make men, families and peoples really turn their minds to heavenly things.”<sup>20</sup> Clearly, one of the goals of this Council was to help contemporary humans living in a world dominated by science and technology to achieve a delicate balance between the scientific and the religious, between the material and the spiritual – an extremely challenging but crucially vital task.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Some Special Features of Second Vatican Council

In order to understand and appreciate adequately Vat II’s attitude towards science and technology, we need to look at the overall spirit that animated the Council. Some of the special features of the Council had a major role to play in determining the attitude it took towards modern developments, particularly towards those in the field of science and technology.

It could be said that Vat II ushered in a new age in the life and attitude of the Catholic Church. Gone was the age of unhelpful comparison and unhealthy competition, instead the spirit of humility and fraternity was ushered in. Gone was the spirit of confrontation and condemnation, in its place the spirit of understanding and compassion was ushered in. As Pope John announced, “The Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than of severity.”<sup>22</sup> Taking a positive approach, “she considers that she meets the needs of the present

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20 Ibid., p. 712.

21 It may be noted that several eminent scholars around this time also sounded alarm bells about the serious mismatch between the wealth of the material, scientific developments, on the one hand, and the poverty of the spiritual in humans, on the other, together with the consequent *monstrous growth* the world was experiencing. In this context the writings of the humanist Martin Luther King Jr. and the scientist Louis de Broglie, both Nobel winners, are particularly remarkable.

22 Ibid., p. 716.

day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnation.”<sup>23</sup>

All these developments brought in a newness and a positive spirit, thereby justifying the new appellations conferred on the post-conciliar Church. Pope John XXIII referred to it as a “New Pentecost,” Pope Paul VI called it an “Epiphany,” and Pope John Paul II spoke of a “New Advent.” Pope John Paul II went further to say that it has brought about a substantially new relationship: “The Second Vatican Council laid the foundation for a substantially new relationship between the Church and the world, between the Church and modern culture.”<sup>24</sup> I discuss below some of the most salient elements at the foundation of this new relationship.

### ***a. Emphasis on the Pastoral Rather Than on the Doctrinal Dimension***

Vat II can best be characterized as a “people-friendly” council, in the sense here the focus of attention was meeting the pastoral needs of the faithful rather than affirming or clarifying some doctrinal details. Time and again in his opening speech Pope John challenged the Fathers of the Council to a positive and pastoral attitude. The documents of the Council, particularly “*Gaudium et Spes*” and “*Lumen Gentium*,” took special pains to understand the present predicament of contemporary men and women, and explored the best ways to meet their needs.

### ***b. Spirit of Magnanimity, Universality, Optimism and Openness***

The newness of the Council became most manifest in the spirit that animated it all through the many deliberations and, in some ways, afterwards: a universal outlook that cut

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23 Ibid., p.716.

24 Pope John Paul II, College, December 22, 1980. Quoted in <http://www.wandea.org.pl/second-vatican-council.htm>

across geographical, racial and cultural boundaries; a spirit of magnanimity that expressed itself in respectful acknowledgement and warm acceptance of non-Catholics and non-Christians; a spirit of optimism and positiveness that readily appreciated the good in other religions and systems; and a spirit of openness to new possibilities even when they looked challenging and demanding. In the words of Pope Paul VI, “From the start the Council has propagated a wave of serenity and of optimism, a Christianity that is exciting and positive, loving life, mankind and earthly values ... an orientation of making Christianity acceptable and lovable, indulgent and open, free of medieval rigorous and pessimistic understanding of man and his customs.”<sup>25</sup> Unity in some ways became the central theme: unity within the Church, unity with our non-Catholic brothers and sisters (the Separated Brethren), unity with the whole humankind, irrespective of creed, race, caste, colour, nationality, etc. According to Pope Paul VI, “The Council is a solemn act of love for mankind, love for men of today, whoever and wherever they may be, love for all.”<sup>26</sup> The Council gave official and solemn testimony to this spirit of unity and universality when “The Constitution of the Church,” considered by many the most important document of Vat II, called the Church “the sacrament of union with God, the sacrament of unity of the whole of the human race.”<sup>27</sup>

This spirit of unity and universal outlook contrasts conspicuously with the ideas of certain past theologians and other scholars. For instance, in the past theologians and other teachers used to describe the Church as “a perfect, independent society, often in competition with other social systems.”<sup>28</sup> Also in the past at times a narrow legalism and a consequent self-referential and

25 Pope Paul VI, Doc. Cath. No. 1538, in <http://www.wandea.org.pl/second-vatican-council.htm>

26 Pope Paul VI, Bodart, La Biologie et l’avenire de l’home, in <http://www.wandea.org.pl/second-vatican-council.htm>

27 This idea is found in many passages of “Gaudium et Spes,” although the exact phrase occurs in the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” no. 26, Abt 147.

28 “Second Vatican Council,” <http://www.chisturex.org/www1/CDHN/v1.html>

self-righteous mentality used to dominate certain sections of the ecclesiastical milieu. Debunking and belittling of other traditions, cultures and religions was another trademark of this attitude. The successful expansion of colonialism and Church's association, in some ways, with it added to this spirit of triumphalism and elitism which placed other religions at loggerheads with Christianity, particularly in the East, isolated it from other cultures, thereby undermining the universality of Christ and his mission. Vat II was a heroic and much-needed initiative to undo the harm done by such uncalled for superiority feeling and triumphalism.

A spirit of humility and brotherly attitude was also very visible in Vat II. As Abbott points out in his footnote, there were several speakers in the Council calling for a reconsideration of the Galileo episode and for taking appropriate steps to forestall any recurrence of such embarrassing events.<sup>29</sup> In fact, Pope John Paul soon after taking over as the Supreme Pontiff in 1979 appointed a Pontifical Commission to reexamine the Galileo case in order to set the record straight. This Commission completed its work in 1992 and presented the Pope a report of its findings which found that mistakes had been committed by the Church officials involved in handling Galileo's case. The Commission's recommendation that "these mistakes must be frankly recognized" was endorsed by the official Church. A more dramatic demonstration of humility and brotherliness was witnessed on December 7, 1965, when the Roman Pontiff Pope Paul VI and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I, formally and publicly expressed their regret for the mutual excommunications pronounced by their respective predecessors Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Cerularius in 1054.<sup>30</sup>

A genuine openness by the Church to new ideas without losing its rootedness in tradition was another hallmark of Vat II, particularly from the world of modern physical and social sciences. Pope John emphasized this point already in his opening speech: "The Church should never depart from the sacred patrimony of the truth received from the Fathers. But at the same

29 Abt, p. 234, note 99.

30 See Abt, p.xiii.

time she must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world, which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate.”<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore, one of the prominent members of the Council, summarized his view of the Council: “Taken as a whole, the documents are especially noteworthy for their concern with the poor, for their insistence on the unity of the human family and therefore on the wrongness of discrimination.”<sup>32</sup>

### ***c. Willingness to Embrace a Dynamic Worldview***

The Aristotelian world was very much a static one and gave rise to a static worldview. One could say that in this ancient Greek system also there was room for change and growth, but it certainly was very limited, being confined to the limits set by the intrinsic nature of each species. The species themselves were immutable and the world as a whole could not change and evolve. Christianity, through its process of Hellenization, subscribed to this static worldview, with far-reaching theological and moral implications. According to this perspective, in the beginning God created humans and the universe in the perfect stage. Through Adam’s fall this original pristine perfection was lost. The whole redemptive mission aimed at restoring the lost purity and perfection. Progress in this context is achieved by going back to the good old days and state, not in going forward to a better and glorious future.

The scientific worldview, although it remained somewhat static in the initial stages of its development, gradually became dynamic and progressive, particularly with the advent of the theory of evolution. Today, thanks to further developments in science and the philosophy of science, it is claimed that everything is subject to change – everything in the universe changes and evolves, and everything in science is subject to change and evolution.

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31 “Pope John’s Opening Speech,” Abt., p. 714.

32 Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, “Introduction,” Abt. p. xvii.

The scientific worldview and its consequent idea of evolution and progress are alien to the traditional Christian worldview. Vat II in some ways announced a departure from this static view and initiated a move towards a dynamic one. “Gaudium et Spes starts with a long tale of changes affecting humankind, the perpetual justification for innovation. Everything changes – the world, time, but especially man who is described as participating in a perpetual ‘progression.’ John XIII believed there had been a ‘real progress of humankind’s collective moral awareness through always deeper discovery of its dignity... and that divine providence was leading us to a new order of human relations.... Vatican II proceeded to make this principle magisterial.”<sup>33</sup> Vat II gave evidence of this view when it said: “The human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one.”<sup>34</sup> The consequences of this paradigm shift are enormous and the Council, well aware of this fact, observes: “In consequence, there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as important as can be, calling for new efforts of analysis and synthesis.”<sup>35</sup> Pope Paul VI echoed some of these consequences when he said: “If the world changes religion should also change.... the order to which Christianity tends is not static, but an order in continual evolution towards a higher form.”<sup>36</sup> This sensitivity to the dynamic worldview of modern science and this openness to its consequences are crucial for defining the Council’s attitude to science and technology. They can play a pivotal role in fostering a constructive and creative dialogue between Christianity and modern science.

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33 <http://www.wandea.org.pl/second-vatican-council.htm>

34 Gaudium et Spes,” no. 5, Abt, p. 204.

35 Ibid., p. 204.

36 Pope Paul VI, “Dialogues, Reflections on God and Man,” quoted in <http://www.wandea.org.pl/second-vatican-council.htm>

#### ***d. Concern for a Balance between the Divine and the Human***

Some scholars point out a sharp contrast between Christ and Socrates when confronted with death. The Gospels tell us that in the Garden of Gethsemane Christ was extremely disturbed and frightened at the thought of his impending death. “My soul is sorrowful to the point of death,” he told his apostles. (Mark 14:34). On the other hand, Socrates laughed and cracked jokes at the moment of his death. Whatever interpretation scholars may give to this remarkable contrast, it brings out the marked difference between Christ’s way of looking at human life and the Hellenistic way. The Socratic school of philosophy, particularly Plato and Aristotle, made a sharp distinction between the celestial and the terrestrial, assigning the former a far superior status and value. Life on earth was neither desirable nor significant compared to the life after death in the celestial world. On the other hand, Christ had a balanced view towards human life on earth. He certainly was not attached to the world and to life in this world, but he did find true meaning and value for human life on earth.

As Christian theology developed, particularly in the Middle Ages, the Socratic view became dominant and the life of the world-to-come was given all the attention at the expense of life in the present world. Connected to this was the over-glorification of the spiritual at the expense of the material, of the supernatural at the expense of the natural, of the divine at the expense of the human. Critics point out that this lopsided and unchristian view was exploited by the powerful and influential, both in the religious and in the secular world, to their selfish advantage – they could indulge in their selfish exploitation of the underprivileged and console the oppressed with the thought of the great reward to come in the next world. This exploitation was used by atheistic-minded critics of the Church to unleash their vehement attack on religion and God. For instance, Karl Marx called religion “the



opium of the people,” Frederick Nietzsche accused the Church of transferring all the good things to the world to come.

Although there have been several attempts by the official Catholic Church to rectify this one-sided view, many still felt that enough was not done to give a balanced Christian perspective. It seems to me that Vat II took special pains to remedy this imbalance. In this context the following words of Pope Paul VI are very pertinent: “We must never forget that the fundamental attitude of Catholics who wish to convert the world must be, first of all, to love the world, to love our times, to love our civilizations, our technical achievements, and above all, to love the world.... The Council puts before us, a panoramic vision of the world; how can the Church, how can we, do other than behold this world and love it?”<sup>37</sup> No doubt, this is not the usual traditional expression and language of Pontiffs. But it seems to me that the Pope has captured the sentiments of the Council quite aptly and accurately. A very positive attitude towards the world that was created by God who “found it good” can never be alien to the Church of God.

From this positive attitude towards and appreciation for the world of God’s creation follows an equally positive appreciation for human activity, particularly in the positive sciences. The Council clearly states that there is a close bond between human activities like the sciences and religion. In fact, “Such is not merely required by modern man but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstances of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws, and order.”<sup>38</sup> An important footnote to this text clarifies the matter even better: “The Council shuns any fundamentalism in dealing with the findings of science, whether ecclesiastical or natural.”

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37 Pope Paul VI, Bodart, *La Biologie et l’avenir de l’homme*, in <http://www.wandea.org.pl/second-vatican-council.htm>

38 “*Gaudium et Spes*,” no. 36, Abt, p.233.

In conclusion the Council states: “Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accordance with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith. For earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God.”<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, it must be emphasized that the Council’s was no blind endorsement of everything scientific. It has taken pains to distinguish between “excesses associated with a spirit of scientism and the permanently valid achievements of the positive sciences over the past few centuries. In doing so, it remains faithful to the spirit of Leo XIII, Pius XII and John XXIII, Pontiffs who made notable efforts to establish fruitful contact and collaboration with the sphere of modern science and culture.”<sup>40</sup>

## **4. The Main Ideas of the Council on Science and Technology**

### ***a. Warm and Positive Attitude***

It is quite clear that a very warm and appreciative attitude prevailed towards science and scientists before, during and after the Council. As we have seen, one of the prime motivations for convening this historic Council came from the recognition of the importance of scientific developments and the urgent need to update the Church in the light of them. During the long course of it also the same spirit persisted, as was evident from the deliberations of the Council and the repeated reference of several council fathers to set aright the Galileo controversy. As we will see, after the Council, there was an even more appreciative and collaborative attitude. Perhaps the words of the “Closing Messages” give us the best testimony to this spirit. The importance the Council gave to science can be seen from the fact that it had a specific closing message “To Men of Thought and Science” read out by Paul Emile Cardinal Leger of Montreal,

39 Ibid., p. 234.

40 See “Gaudium et Spes,” no. 57, footnote 190.

assisted by Antonio Cardinal Caggiano of Buenos Aires and Norman Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney, Australia.<sup>41</sup> It is remarkable to note that the special message begins with a special salutation: “A very special greeting to you.”<sup>42</sup> Although there were closing messages addressed to many other groups, to none was extended such a special and warm greeting. For instance, immediately after greeting the scientists, the Council addressed the artists. But it began with the cold words “We now address you, artists.”<sup>43</sup> It seems to me that this small detail should not be overlooked: this indeed was an indicator of the importance the Council attached to the world of science and scientists. That this special greeting was not perfunctory but was really intentional became clear from the very first sentence of the message: “Why a *special greeting* to you?”<sup>44</sup> The Council itself answers this question in terms of the common quest the Church shares with science: “Because all of us, bishops, and Fathers of the Council, are on the lookout for truth.”<sup>45</sup> That this warmth and cordiality was not a passing formality, but was a foundation for a lasting relationship and a plea for close collaboration was evident in the memorable letter of Pope John Paul II to Fr. George Coyne, SJ, Director of Vatican Observatory: “We (science and Catholicism) need each other to be what we must be, what we are called to be.”<sup>46</sup> He specified the point further in the letter: “For the truth of the matter is that the Church and the scientific community will inevitably interact; their options do not include isolation.”<sup>47</sup>

## ***b. Scientists as Friends and Fellow-seekers of Truth***

The common bond linking scientists and the Fathers of the Church is the truth and the untiring quest for it. The scientific community and the Christian community share a common goal

41 “Closing Messages of the Council,” Abt, p. 730.

42 Ibid., p. 730.

43 Ibid., p. 732.

44 Ibid., p. 730. Emphasis added.

45 Ibid., p. 730.

46 Ppt, p. M14.

47 Ppt, p. M13.

and a common quest. “Hence our paths could not fail to cross. Your paths are never foreign to ours.”<sup>48</sup> The Fathers of the Council reassured the scientists of their support and collaboration in the different aspects of their challenging search for truth: “We are friends of your vocation as searchers, companions in your fatigues, admirers of your successes and, if necessary, consolers in your discouragement and your failures.”<sup>49</sup> These are deeply personal and intimate words of encouragement. I wonder whether even the secular world has ever expressed their support to the scientific community in such touching words.

The Council has a very specific message for the scientific community: “Continue your search without tiring and without ever despairing of the truth.”<sup>50</sup> The spirit that should animate this untiring quest is the same as that of St. Augustine who said: “Let us seek with the desire to find, and find with the desire to seek still more.”<sup>51</sup>

The specifically Christian contribution to this common quest for truth is “the light of our mysterious lamp, which is faith.”<sup>52</sup> Only when genuine scientific efforts are coupled with deep faith in the one who said “I am the light of the world, I am the way, and the truth and the life,” can we hope to apprehend real truth, the whole truth. Today the time is ripe for such a meet between science and faith: “Never perhaps, thank God, has there been so clear a possibility as today of a deep understanding between real science and real faith, mutual servants of one another in the one truth.”<sup>53</sup> Finally, the “Closing Message” exhorts scientists “not to stand in the way of this important meeting [between science and faith]. Have confidence in faith, this great friend of intelligence.”<sup>54</sup>

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48 “Closing Message,” Abt, p. 731.

49 Ibid., p. 731.

50 Ibid., p. 731.

51 Ibid., p. 731.

52 Ibid., p. 731.

53 Ibid., p. 731.

54 Ibid., p. 731.

### ***c. Appreciation for the Achievements of Science***

Gone is the stormy, confrontational attitude that clouded the sky of the relationship between science and religion in the past. Instead a healthy attitude of dialogue and collaboration is moving in, thanks to a positive approach towards science and its achievements. According to Vatican II, far from being the devious devices of the devil, they are a boon to humanity, ordained by divine dispensation. "By divine favour, especially in modern times, human genius has produced from natural material astonishing inventions in the field of technology."<sup>55</sup> In her solicitude for the wellbeing of humanity, the Church is happy about these developments, and gladly welcomes them. "As a Mother, the Church welcomes and watches such inventions with special concern... Mother Church, to be sure, recognizes that if these instruments are rightly used they bring solid nourishment to the human race."<sup>56</sup>

In a way, science is a powerful affirmation of human dignity and greatness, and provides humans with a most effective means to collaborate with the Creator in the ongoing plan of creation.<sup>57</sup>

For when, by the work of his hands, or with the aid of technology, man develops the earth so that it can bear fruit and become a dwelling worthy of the whole human family, and when he consciously takes part in the life of social groups, he carries out the design of God. Manifested at the beginning of time, the divine plan is that man should subdue the earth, bring creation to perfection and develop himself. When a man so acts, he simultaneously obeys the great Christian commandment that he places himself at the service of his brother men.<sup>58</sup>

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55 "Decree on the Instruments of Social Communications," no. 1, Abt, p. 319.

56 Ibid., p. 319.

57 See "Gaudium et Spes," no. 57, Abt, p. 262.

58 Ibid., p. 262. See also The Professions And Society - Aromagosa. easycgi.com, <http://aromagosa.easycgi.com/christianhumanism/professionsworkshop/professionsan> (accessed July 14, 2019).

A prudential, judicious engagement in science can elevate humans to a higher and more sublime level of moral and intellectual life. “Furthermore, when a man applies himself to the various disciplines of philosophy, of history, and of mathematical and natural science, and when he cultivates the arts, he can do very much to elevate the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty, and to the formation of judgments which embody universal values.”<sup>59</sup>

#### **d. Science as a Means to Meet the Challenges**

Continuing its positive attitude, the Council further says that science and technology provide us with the best means to respond to the challenges and exigencies of our contemporary world. After a penetrating and perceptive analysis of the various ferments in the air today and the accompanying restlessness and aimlessness, it rightly points out that “today’s spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution.”<sup>60</sup> In its attempt to spell out the far-reaching consequences of this revolution, it admits that the conditions of the world are changing profoundly. For one thing, the traditional base of intellectual formation is getting changed. Today science and technology constitute a powerful foundation for the intellectual formation of humans all over the world. The technological revolution afoot in our world is transforming the face of the earth. The sweeping wave of the new scientific spirit is reshaping both our cultural sphere and mode of thought. I have quoted earlier the words of the Council on this point. In more recent times Pope John Paul has reiterated the same sentiment in his letter to Fr. George Coyne, SJ: “The scientific disciplines too, as is obvious, are endowing us with an understanding and appreciation of our universe as a whole and of the incredibly rich variety of intricately related processes and structures which constitute its animate and inanimate components. This knowledge has given us a more thorough understanding of ourselves and

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. , p. 263.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., no. 5, p. 203.

of our humble yet unique role within creation.”<sup>61</sup> Not only the physical sciences, the social sciences and still more the life sciences also are affecting our world profoundly, especially in the wake of the genetic revolution with its astounding strides in genetic engineering, cloning, etc.

Another salutary outcome of this revolution principally triggered by developments in science & technology is the shift from an individual or person-centered worldview to a community-centered one. “The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own.”<sup>62</sup> The overall outcome of these revolutionary changes is that the old static worldview has given way to a dynamic one, with drastic consequences.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, because of all these developments, the living conditions of modern man have been so profoundly changed in their social and cultural dimensions, that we can speak of a new age in human history. Fresh avenues are open, therefore, for the refinement of the wider diffusion of culture. These avenues have been paved by the enormous growth of natural, human and social sciences, by progress in technology, and by advances in the development and organization of the means by which men communicate with each other.<sup>64</sup>

In this new world naturally a new series of problems has arisen,” a series as important as can be, calling for new efforts of analysis and synthesis.”<sup>65</sup> The Council believes that for tackling these problems, a new approach using new techniques is needed, and here the findings of science & technology should play an active role. Here too Pope John Paul II presents a more contemporary view when he talks of the great contribution technology has made in the field of transportation, communication, etc., and concludes: “Such knowledge and power, as we have discovered, can be used

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61 Ppt. PM5.

62 “Gaudium et Spes,” no. 5, Abt, pp. 203-204.

63 Ibid. , no. 54, p. 260.

64 Ibid. , p. 260.

65 Ibid. , no. 6, p. 204.

greatly to enhance and improve our lives or they can be exploited to diminish and destroy human life and the environment even on a global scale.”<sup>66</sup>

## **e. The Autonomy of the Sciences Upheld**

The Council takes special pains to acknowledge and uphold the rightful autonomy of the sciences.

The sacred Synod, therefore, recalling the teaching of the First Vatican Council, declares that there are ‘two orders of knowledge’ which are distinct, namely, faith and reason. It declares that the Church does not indeed forbid that ‘when the human arts and sciences are practiced they use their own principles and their proper method, each in its own domain.’ Hence, ‘acknowledging this just liberty,’ the sacred Synod affirms the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences.”<sup>67</sup>

Nor is it ashamed to admit its past lapses. It accepts that this principle of independence was not always preserved in the past and deplores the mistakes committed. “Consequently, we cannot but deplore certain habits of mind, sometimes found too among Christians, which do not sufficiently attend to the rightful independence of science. The arguments and controversies which they spark lead many minds to conclude that faith and science are mutually opposed.”<sup>68</sup>

Pope John Paul II took up this point more explicitly when he addressed the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 1979 and said: “Certain attitudes (not unknown among Christians) deriving from a short-sighted view of the rightful autonomy of science: they have occasioned conflict and controversy and have misled many into thinking that faith and science are opposed.”<sup>69</sup> The

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66 Ppt. P. M5.

67 “Gaudium et Spes,” no. 59, Abt, p. 265.

68 Ibid., no. 36, p. 234.

69 Pope John Paul II, “Proceedings of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,” November 10, 1979, PDF files, p.1. For more details see Mathew



Pope emphasized that he was following up on the declaration of the Council and he took up the Galileo episode as a concrete instance: “To go beyond this stand taken by the Council, I hope that theologians, scholars and historians, animated by a spirit of collaboration, will study the Galileo case more deeply and, in loyal recognition of wrongs from whatever side they come, will dispel the mistrust that still opposes, in many minds, a fruitful concord between science and faith, between the Church and the world.”<sup>70</sup> He echoed once again the same theme of respectful autonomy and mutually enriching collaboration between science and faith in his letter of 1988: “Both religion and science must preserve their autonomy and their distinctiveness. Religion is not founded on science nor is science an extension of religion. Each should possess its own principles, its pattern of procedures, its diversities of interpretation and its own conclusions.”<sup>71</sup> “Science and faith are called “to live in a collaborative interaction in which we are called continually to be more.”<sup>72</sup>

At the same time the Council is quick to point out that it does not endorse the false sense of independence, which “is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator.”<sup>73</sup>

Some of the excesses and consequent dangers the scientific spirit can lead to also have not escaped the Council.

No doubt today’s progress in science and technology can foster a certain exclusive emphasis on observable data, and an agnosticism about everything else. For the methods of investigation which these sciences use can be wrongly considered as the supreme rule for discovering the whole truth. By virtue of their methods, however, these sciences cannot penetrate to the intimate meaning of things. Yet

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Chandrankunnel, CMI, *Science and Religion: From Warpath to Wholeness* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004), p. 213.

70 Ibid., p. 213.

71 Ppt, p. M8.

72 Ppt, p. M14.

73 “Gaudium et Spes,” no. 36, Abt, p. 234.

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the danger exists that man, confiding too much in modern discoveries, may even think that he is sufficient unto himself and no longer seek any higher realities.<sup>74</sup>

For instance, at times a belittling of religious beliefs, an agnosticism towards matters of religious life, etc., are looked upon as “requirements of scientific progress or of a certain new humanism.”<sup>75</sup> But these areas of concern and possibilities of deviation should not be exaggerated and used as an excuse to close the door of science and technology. The document goes on to say that “these unfortunate results, however, do not necessarily follow from the culture of today, nor should they lead us into the temptation of not acknowledging its positive values.”<sup>76</sup>

### ***f. The Pastoral Dimension of Science***

The Council readily acknowledges and appreciates the positive values accruing from the scientific spirit. They are:

Scientific study and strict fidelity toward truth in scientific research, the necessity of working together with others in technical groups, a sense of international solidarity, an ever clearer awareness of the responsibility of experts to aid men and even to protect them, the desire to make the conditions of life more favourable for all, especially for those who are deprived of the opportunity to exercise responsibility or who are culturally poor.<sup>77</sup>

From these considerations flows the apostolic dimension of science & technology because the values mentioned above can prepare the ground for sowing the seeds of the gospel. “All these values can provide some preparation for the acceptance of the message of the gospel – a preparation which can be animated with divine love by Him who came to save the world.”<sup>78</sup>

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74 Ibid., no. 57, p. 263.

75 Ibid., no. 7, p. 205.

76 Ibid., no. 57, p. 263.

77 Ibid., pp. 263-264.

78 Ibid., p. 264.

In pastoral care too science and its findings can be beneficial. “In pastoral care, appropriate care must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology. Thus the faithful can be brought to live the faith in a more thorough and mature way.”<sup>79</sup>

### ***g. The Importance of Science Education***

Having appreciated the tremendous power science wields in our world by influencing not only how we live, but also how we think, the Council emphasizes the teaching of scientific ideas and methods in educational institutions. In its “Declaration on Christian Education” it takes special care to remind all that, although primary education is important and must be continued, “considerable importance is to be attached to those schools which are demanded in a particular way by modern conditions, such as so-called professional and technical schools,....”<sup>80</sup> It goes on to say that in institutions of higher learning, the Church wants “in a systematic way to have individual branches of knowledge studied according to their own proper principles and methods, and with due freedom of scientific investigation. She intends thereby to promote an ever deeper understanding of these fields, and as a result of extremely precise evaluation of modern problems and inquiries, to have it seen more profoundly how faith and reason give harmonious witness to the unity of all truth.”<sup>81</sup> The Council is even more direct and emphatic when it says: “Since the sciences progress chiefly through special investigations of advanced scientific significance, Catholic colleges and universities and their faculties should give the maximum support to institutes which primarily serve the progress of scientific research.”<sup>82</sup>

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79 Ibid., no. 62, p. 269.

80 “Declaration on Christian Education,” no. 9, Abt, p. 648.

81 Ibid., p. 648.

82 Ibid., no. 10, p. 649.

## ***h. Science and Priestly Formation***

From what has been said already, the conclusion follows naturally that the Council wants the imparting of the scientific spirit to be made an integral part of the priestly formation. This point is made explicit in the “Decree on Priestly Formation,” particularly when it talks about the teaching of philosophy. “Philosophy should be taught in such a way that students will be led to acquire a solid and coherent understanding of man, of the world, and of God. Basing themselves on a philosophic heritage which is perennially valid, students should also be conversant with contemporary philosophical investigations, especially those exercising special influence in their own country, and with recent scientific progress.”<sup>83</sup>

Speaking of theological study and research Pope John Paul urges all engaged in theological reflection to incorporate the findings of contemporary science to complement and enrich their service to the Church and the world. “As these findings [of science] become part of the intellectual culture of the time, however, theologians must understand them and test their value in bringing out from Christian belief some of the possibilities which have not yet been realized.”<sup>84</sup> At the same time he is quick to caution that “theology is not to incorporate indifferently each new philosophical or scientific theory.”<sup>85</sup>

## ***i. The Impact of Science on Theology***

The Council is of the opinion that theology is an important beneficiary of these scientific developments because they can “stimulate the mind to a more accurate and penetrating grasp of the faith. For recent studies and findings of science, history, and philosophy raise new questions which influence life and demand new theological investigations.”<sup>86</sup> Hence the Council

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83 “Priestly Formation,” no.15, Abt, p. 450.

84 Ppt, p. M10.

85 Ibid., p. M10.

86 “Gaudium et Spes,” no. 62, Abt, p. 268.

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urges theology to be in constant touch with developments in the sciences. “Through a sharing of resources and points of view, let those who teach in seminaries, colleges, and universities try to collaborate with men well versed in the other sciences. Theological inquiry should seek a profound understanding of revealed truth without neglecting close contact with its own times.”<sup>87</sup>

More recent proclamations of the Church are even more emphatic on this point: “Theology has been defined as an effort of faith to achieve understanding, as *fides quaerens intellectum*. As such it must be in vital interchange today with science just as it always has been with philosophy and other forms of learning. Theology will have to call on the findings of science to one degree or another as it pursues its primary concern for the human person, the reaches of freedom, the possibilities of Christian community, the nature of belief and the intelligibility of nature and history.”<sup>88</sup> Nor is the Pope content with a purely speculative theorization, he wants it to be implemented in the practical realm. “It would entail that some theologians, at least, should be sufficiently well versed in the sciences to make authentic and creative use of the resources that the best-established theories may offer them.”<sup>89</sup>

These developments in science and technology have significant bearings on morality as well since they put us in close association with the contemporary life situation. Hence the Council exhorts all Christians: “May the faithful, therefore, ... blend modern science and its theories with Christian morality and doctrine. Thus their religious practice and morality can keep pace with their scientific knowledge and with an ever-advancing technology.”<sup>90</sup>

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87 Ibid., p. 270.

88 Ppt, p. M10.

89 Ibid., p. M11.

90 “Gaudium et Spes,” no. 62, Abt, p. 269.

## Conclusion

Our brief study reveals that Vat II was not just another council convened to tackle a particular doctrinal problem vexing the Church. It was far more than that. It really aimed at an *aggiornamento*, a genuine, comprehensive effort to make the Church be at home in our contemporary world dominated by science and technology. It was a revolution-making event that brought about a paradigm shift not only in the Church's view of the world, but also in its attitude towards science and technology. Far from being intimidated by the impressive strides of science, the Council gladly welcomes them as God's special gift to the universe to be used for its betterment. Far from looking at it as a formidable rival, Vat II looks at it as a respectful partner with a common mission. We have seen that recent developments in science and technology not only gave impetus to convene the Council, they also in some ways helped to redefine Church's new role in the world and suggested some ways of using the findings of science to play that role expeditiously and effectively.

The *aggiornamento* inaugurated by Vat II is a long and challenging process that needs to continue. Both the Church and modern science need to collaborate in this noble task. Science with its amazing findings of the secrets of nature and its well-proven powerful methods, can be a great boon in this process. The perennial truths and the rich tradition of the Church too should serve as facilitators rather than obstacles in this venture. The truths and insights of religion can ensure that the ongoing process does not deviate from the right path of holistic progress of humanity and the cosmos. The Christian tradition can make available centuries of rich experience as a source of inspiration and guidance. Vat II has opened the door for such a constructive and collaborative mission to respond responsibly to the challenges of our contemporary world.

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## **Dual Faces of Human Dignity: Secured Worth and Required Recognition**

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**Abstract:** History informs us the varying use of the term human dignity from a status of a rank, an inherent value to a dignified way of living. Human dignity has intrinsic, attributed and inflorescent variants, inheres in human individuals as well as collectively in human species, plays positive and negative roles of empowerment and constraint, functions as principle as well as a rule and is a self-respect, self-esteem and social recognition in acknowledgement of the secured, inviolable, intrinsic worth. It prohibits self-degradation and social degradation of individuals and humanity as a whole. It inheres not only in rational-moral capacities but includes all basic human needs. Humanity is dignity and every human individual is a concrete, experiential face of the existential dignity. Human dignity is neither vague nor useless, but the supreme moral-legal watchdog principle of complementarity for bioethics, biolaw and biopolitics to protect humans against misuses under the mask of freedom of research in

biosciences and biotechnologies.

Keywords: Human dignity, Worth, Recognition. Philosophical Basis, Socio-Political Expressions

Professor Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ is an appreciable, admirable and inspiring personality. He is a reputed, renowned professor of theology and an expert of the second Vatican documents. As a man of clarity in his interactions, he was most of the time chosen to be a moderator of dialogues, meetings and conferences. He is gentle and a man of friendships across all walks of life. He respects every man and woman with dignity and equality. His contributions to academia of ecclesiology, formation of religious leaders, development of Indian church and promotion of human rights are enormous and praiseworthy. The eminent Indian ecclesiologist, Professor Kunnumpuram used to quote frequently the opening statement of the *Gaudium et Spes*: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (1965, no. 1). The Church is not an abstract concept but consists of people for the people. The term dignity is mentioned 51 times in this Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* by His Holiness Pope Paul VI. This document of the Second Vatican council talks all about human dignity, human community and human activity. Human dignity is the hallmark of his living and teaching. As his student, secretary and friend, I am privileged to write a *festschrift* in honour of Kurien on his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday on human dignity here.

## 1.What is Human Dignity?

Leszek Kolakowski says, “It is difficult to define what human dignity is. It is not an organ to be discovered in our body, it is an empirical notion, but without it we would be unable to answer



the simple question: what is wrong with slavery?”<sup>1</sup> History informs us the varying use of the term human dignity from a status of a rank, an inherent value to a dignified way of living. Today, however “there is a taken-for-granted assumption that dignity is good for the human condition and that it is part of our moral DNA. It has been acknowledged that violations of human dignity can be identified and recognized (torture and slavery are obvious examples) even if the abstract term cannot be defined with precision.”<sup>2</sup> The concept of human dignity, even without a clear definition, is increasingly used in the international and national declarations of human rights after the World War II and commonly accepted that human dignity is inviolable.

Mass killings with biotechnological weapons that have potentials to annihilate humanity prompted the framers of human rights constitutions, declarations and conventions to protect humans intuitively and more urgently and immediately than to look for philosophical, legal and socio-political justifications. They presumed however that the superstructure human rights have their foundation on human dignity, and violation of human rights meant the violation of human dignity which is sacrosanct or unfringeable. National constitutions and intergovernmental declarations explicitly or implicitly accept a hypothesis that humans have certain rights such as the right to life on account of inviolable dignity. Violations of human rights are vehemently opposed in these documents not only to preserve political peace in the society, but primarily because they are acts of indignity and desecrations of inviolable human dignity.

In this article, I aim to fathom the idea of dignity inherent in every human individual who (must) enjoy the value by virtue of being human prior to the state, society or social contract. I shall

- 1 Leszek Kolakowski, “What Is Left of Socialism,” *First Things* 126 (October 2002) 42-46, 46. Cited in Leon R. Kass, “Defending Human Dignity,” in: E. D. Pellegrino (ed.), *Human Dignity and Bioethics* (Washington, DC: The President’s Council on Bioethics, 2008) 297-331, 297.
- 2 Judy McGregor and Edward Sieh (eds.), *Human Dignity: Establishing Worth and Seeking Solutions* (London: Palgrave Macmillian – Springer Nature, 2017) “Preface” viii.

first analyze the meanings of human dignity and then discuss the relationship between human dignity and human rights. The article is an attempt to show intrinsic dignity to be a principle that protects humans and prevent them from adversary uses in biosciences and biotechnologies.

## 2.The Three Senses of Human Dignity

Daniel P. Sulmasy categorizes the one and the same human dignity into three senses, namely, intrinsic, attributed and inflorescent dignity.<sup>3</sup> *Intrinsic* dignity means “worth, stature, or value that human beings have simply because they are human, not by virtue of any set of biological, psychological, social, economic, or political conditions, nor of the views of other persons, nor of any particular set of talents, skills, or powers.”<sup>4</sup> Intrinsic dignity is present in each and every human being, thus in whole human species, simply by virtue of the fact that they are human. This sense of human dignity reveals and designates a pre-existing value which is not conferred or created by human choices. It is prior to any human attribution and all that humans must do is to recognize and respect the intrinsic dignity in others. Discriminations against humans are vehemently opposed not because they would violate or destroy or remove the intrinsic dignity but because the discriminated humans who have dignity get insulted. Insult is incompatible with human dignity. The affected entity is not the abstract concept of dignity, but individual humans who have dignity.

The second sense is an *attributed* human dignity, which is a value conferred upon others by acts of attribution. It is always a

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3 See Daniel P. Sulmasy, “The Varieties of Human Dignity: A Logical and Conceptual Analysis,” *Medical Health Care and Philosophy* 16 (2013) 937-944, 938; Daniel P. Sulmasy, “Dignity and Bioethics: History, Theory, and Selected Applications,” in: E. D. Pellegrino (ed.), *Human Dignity and Bioethics* (Washington, DC: The President’s Council on Bioethics, 2008) 469-501; See Daniel P. Sulmasy, “Death, Dignity and the Theory of Value,” *Ethical Perspectives* 9 (2002) 103-118,

4 Sulmasy, “The Varieties of Human Dignity,” 938.

choice. It is attributed to dignitaries in acknowledgement of their talents and skills. The attributed human dignity is not intrinsic but a conventional social value that can be gained or lost depending on social rank or political power. Some speak of the need of attribution, since attribution is the duty of recognizing the dignity in others as one claims in oneself. There is a nuanced distinction between intrinsic and attributed human dignity. Attributed dignity need not be understood only as a social value conferred on humans on account of their public offices, but it could also be interpreted to be a mere recognition through attribution of the intrinsic dignity. In any case, attribution seems to be important, since humans cannot live alone but in society. Therefore, attribution can be thought to be a mere acknowledgement of the intrinsic worth of humans. This aspect demands the respect for intrinsic dignity.

The third sense is called *inflorescent* dignity, which describes the worth or value of a process that is conducive to human excellence. Inflorescence refers to flourishing or flowering or blossoming as human beings in consistent with and expressive of the intrinsic dignity. This sense of human dignity can be compared to the understanding of dignity as a virtue – “a state of affairs by which a human being habitually acts in ways that express the intrinsic value of the human.”<sup>5</sup> It expresses an idea of dignified or undignified behaviour, which is different from that of intrinsic dignity of humans. Alan Gewirth elaborates:

The sense of ‘dignity’ in which all humans are said to have equal dignity is not the same as that in which it may be said of some person that he lacks dignity or that he behaves without dignity, where what is meant is that he is lacking in decorum, is too raucous or obsequious or is not ‘dignified’. This kind of dignity is one that humans may occurrently exhibit, lack, or lose, whereas the dignity in which all humans are said to be equal is a characteristic that belongs permanently and inherently to every human as such.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Sulmasy, “The Varieties of Human Dignity,” 938.

6 Alan Gewirth, *Human Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)

While we may admire a dignified conduct, we know that this does not add anything to the intrinsic dignity of those whose conduct is admirable. The three senses of human dignity are not mutually exclusive. It is the same intrinsic dignity that is simultaneously at play and present in all human beings requiring an “attribution” creating blossoming conditions for “inflorescence.” Intrinsic dignity is essentially prior to the attributed and inflorescent dignity. Thus, Sulmasy concludes that “the attributed and inflorescent uses are logically and linguistically dependent upon the intrinsic sense of the word.”<sup>7</sup> Sulmasy uses the debate about euthanasia to explain how proponents and opponents use the same notion of dignity differently conveniently in favour of their arguments.<sup>8</sup> Realists like American Physician Leon Kass (1939- CE) who was also Chairman of the President’s Council of Bioethics (2001-2005) argue that euthanasia ought to be illegal because it is undignified for humans to flee from realities of life and avoid confrontation with human limits or finitude.<sup>9</sup> Proponents want to legalize euthanasia arguing that human beings should not be forced to prolong life and accept the indignities caused by terminal illnesses. Proponents seem to equate dignity with autonomy to have control over the circumstances of their own situations including death.<sup>10</sup>

Harris, Macklin and Cochrane contested the usefulness of human dignity in bioethics because it is too general or vague.<sup>11</sup>

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7 Sulmasy, “The Varieties of Human Dignity,” 941.

8 See Daniel P. Sulmasy, “Death, Dignity and the Theory of Value,” *Ethical Perspectives* 9 (2002) 103-118.

9 Leon Kass “A Commentary on Paul Ramsey: Averting One’s Eyes, or Facing the Music? One Dignity in Death,” *Hastings Center Studies* 2/2 (1974) 67-80.

10 Sulmasy, “The Varieties of Human Dignity,” 938; T. Quill, “Death and Dignity: A Case of Individualized Decision Making,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 324 (1991) 691-694.

11 Their argument, as summed by Sulmasy (937), is that “If dignity can mean one thing to one person and another thing to another person than (sic) [then] it cannot serve to resolve any ethical disputes.” Ruth Macklin, “Dignity is a Useless Concept,” *British Medical Journal* 327 (2003) 1419-1420; J. Harris, “Cloning and Human Dignity,” *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare*

while others find the generality or vagueness of the concept of human dignity to be a blessing to allow many interpretations in the interests of the human society in order to be used in a variety of ways in a variety of settings.<sup>12</sup> The problem does not really seem to be about existence, ambiguity of definition, moral content or normativeness of the concept of human dignity, but the application of the various senses of dignity differently in practical issues make the concept appear ambiguous. However, the concept itself is not unambiguous and it is not useless either. The loaded term dignity is rich with boundless but at least three meanings mentioned here that people interpret it the way they want, but that actually that need not compromise but complement the intrinsic value of humans.

### 3. Dual Philosophical Faces of Human Dignity

The legal and state philosopher Paolo Becchi speaks about the two faces of human dignity that continues to exist down the

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*Ethics* 7 (1998) 163-167; A. Cochrane, "Undignified Bioethics," *Bioethics* 24 (2010) 234-241. Roberto Andorno, "The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics," *Medical Health Care and Philosophy* 16 (2013) 967-973, 968: "Lack of definition does not by itself prove that dignity is an empty concept or a purely rhetorical notion. As a matter of fact, defining dignity in clear-cut terms would be as difficult as defining 'freedom,' 'justice,' 'solidarity', or whatever other key social value (which by the way are never defined by law). It is not because the idea of human dignity is too poor, but because it is too rich that it cannot be encapsulated into a straightforward definition with which everybody agrees. In reality, its core meaning is quite clear and simple and embodies a very basic requirement of *justice* towards every individual."

- 12 P. R. Johnson, "An Analysis of Dignity," *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 19 (1998) 337-352; A. Gewirth, *Self-fulfillment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) 159-174; L. Nordenfelt, "The Varieties of Dignity," *Health Care Analysis* 12/2 (2004) 69-81; D. P. Sulmasy, "Human Dignity and Human Worth," in: N. Lickiss and J. Malpas (eds.), *Perspectives of Human Dignity: A Conversation* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2007); D. Schroeder, "Dignity: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Still Counting," *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 19/1 (2010) 118-125; M. C. Jordan, "Bioethics and Human Dignity," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35 (2010) 180-196.
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history from the Roman antiquity to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> It was used in twofold meaning and continued to develop in history without losing its core substantially: human dignity designates a special status of humans in the universe as well as a self-achieved social status. The former is ontological and the latter is relational and evaluative. The expression of dignity thus refers both to the reality that human differentiates himself from the rest of the nature because the human is the only animal rationale as well as to the active role of a human in the public life that distinguishes him/her from other individuals and confers a special value. In the sense of the first variant of the meaning, the human as such has dignity because the human stands at the top of the hierarchy of nature; in the sense of the second variant, dignity is graduated depending on the status in the social hierarchy. For Cicero, who was the first to emphasize these two meanings, a human who relinquished the enjoyment of the senses, violated the dignity of his/her rational nature; whereas a personal dignity grew out of the deeds which he had brought to the common good.<sup>14</sup> The first refers to the very being and the second refers to the aspect of becoming human(e). The rational nature and behaving rationally is the key point for Cicero.

The first meaning of dignity is universal, which the human species possesses the universal dignity essentially as a natural gift or endowment. The second meaning is particularistic and dependent on performance or accomplishments that some individuals generate and others not.<sup>15</sup> Dignity in the first meaning is absolute that a human can neither increase nor diminish it, but in the second is a social dignity that a human can acquire or lose it. Social dignity was first equated to public office as such and

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13 Paolo Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde – Eine Einführung* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt GmbH, 2016) 11-19.

14 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 11; M. Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, ed. and trans. W. Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913) I.30: 105-6.

15 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 11; For the twofold meaning, see H. Hofmann, “Die versprochenen Menschenwürde,” *Archiv des öffentlichen Rechts* 118 (1993) 353-377.

not to the human who held the appointment. Subsequently, social dignity was associated with the title that s/he had as member of a specific standing and not on account of own achievements. Finally, social dignity was also attached to any occupation or function with which a human contributes to the material and spiritual progress of the society.<sup>16</sup> The two faces of the same intrinsic and social dignity continued to survive in history similar to the two side sides of the same coin.

During the Renaissance, the ontological understanding of dignity took a back seat behind the thought that dignity must be earned that it becomes a special value only when it is attained by humans gifted with reason. The Italian Renaissance philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494 CE) expressed the idea of the human as the master of own destiny and for the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626 CE), scientists and researchers stood first in the grade of dignity for their contribution through new knowledge to the society.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, there is a possibility for the *homo faber* to obtain more dignity. While the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645 CE) considered that a respectful handling of the dead would confer dignity, for the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679 CE), humans, according to their (cap)abilities, had a market price, which could be fixed and changed by the needs of the judgement of the buyers.<sup>18</sup>

The German jurist and political philosopher Samuel Putendorf (1632-1694 CE) seems to be the first to speak of human dignity based on moral abilities of humans going beyond the rational ability and social status of humans to the fundamental freedom which is prerequisite for the existence of moral order. He makes

16 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 12.

17 See G. Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate* (Bologna, 1496), German translation: A. Buck (ed.), *Über die Würde des Menschen*, trans. N. Baumgarten (Hamburg: 1990); F. Bacon, *Novum Organum* (London: 1620) 1: CXXIX; Francis Bacon, *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum*, London: 1605.

18 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 15, T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, J. Schlösser (trans.) and H. Klenner (ed.) (Hamburg, 1996) 72.



a clear distinction between *entia physica* and *entia moralia* of the natural order. It is not simply the nature but the moral freedom of humans that alone confers them dignity.<sup>19</sup> Putendorf believes that human species in the natural world is the only being that can set limits to own acts and subject to laws that are naturally given. Therefore, human dignity belongs to humans not because of any special place in the nature but because s/he is a morally acting subject. To appreciate the whole meaning and originality of this new approach, it could be contrasted with two other concepts for nuances: a contemporary thought of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662 CE) from whom Putendorf sharply differs and later with the view of Kant (1724-1804 CE) whose view is already anticipated by Putendorf. For Pascal, the whole dignity of humans lies in thinking faculty.<sup>20</sup> Naturally Putendorf does not deny that the human stands out in the order of nature through thinking capacity. However, this capacity does not confer dignity but in that moral capability which alone reveals the true human nature. Without doubt Putendorf anticipated the unmatched, well-known, decisive, effective potential concept that we find at the culmination of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment Age of Reason in the works of Kant.<sup>21</sup>

The distinction between *entia physica* and *entia moralia* by Putendorf is parallel with the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of ends (*Reich der Natur und Reich der Zwecke*): dignity belongs to humans not on account of their primacy in the nature, but because of their affiliation to the kingdom of ends. For both Kant and Putendorf dignity of humans meant that they are certain beings that morally act and follow the rules of the universally commanding reason. The real difference between Putendorf and Kant is: while Putendorf considered God as the guarantor for obtaining the highest good, Kant remained within

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19 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 15, S. Putendorf, *De jure naturae et gentium*, 2. Buch. 1. Kapitel, §5). See H. Welzel, *Die Naturrechtslehre Samuel Putendorfs* (Berlin: 1958).

20 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 15. B. Pascal, *Pansées* (1670) in: *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: 1963).

21 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 15-16.

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the bounds of reason that can at best be a motivation for moral conversion.<sup>22</sup> Kant signifies the clearest break with hierarchical notion of dignity that seems to be the best-known articulation of the idea of intrinsic human dignity that anchors for human rights and duties.<sup>23</sup> According to Putendorf and Kant, the foundation of human dignity does not lie in mere biological existence but in a moral practical reason that prescribes us to treat the humanity (dignity) in one's own person as well as in the person of the other always as an end and never as a means.<sup>24</sup> Human dignity is violated through the instrumental use of reducing a person to a thing, as the Italian legal philosopher Cesare Beccaria<sup>25</sup> seems to have incidentally remarked about 20 years before Kant. Unlike the Hobbesian a market value of Humans, the Kantian human has a priceless, non-exchangeable intrinsic value.<sup>26</sup> In critique of the

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22 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 16.

23 See Deryck Beyelle and Roger Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 52.

24 "Handle so, dass du die Menschheit sowohl in deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden anderen jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals bloß als Mittel brauchst" (Immanuel Kant: *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) in: W. Weischedel (ed.), *Werke*, Vol. IV (Wiesbaden: 1956) No. 429. Only in the later work on *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), Kant speaks of human dignity explicitly: "Die Menschheit selbst ist eine Würde; denn der Mensch kann von keinem Menschen (weder von anderen noch sogar von sich selbst) bloß als Mittel, sondern muß jederzeit zugleich als Zweck gebraucht werden, und darin besteht eben seine Würde (die Persönlichkeit)" Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, No. 462. For the English editions, see: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1795) in: H. J. Paton (trans. with introd.) *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson, 1948); *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

25 Cited in Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 17. See C. Beccaria, *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764), ed. F. Venturi (Torino: 1965): "Non vi è libertà ogni qual volta le leggi permettono che in alcuni eventi l'uomo cessi di essere persona e diventi cosa" (50), in: T. Vormbaum (trans.), *Von den Verbrechen und von den Strafen* (Berlin: 2004): "Wo die Gesetze erlauben, dass der Mensch unter gewissen Voraussetzungen aufhört, Person zu sein, und zur Sache wird, dort gibt es keine Freiheit" (77).

26 See M. A. Cattaneo, "Menschenwürde bei Kant," in: K. Seelmann (ed.) *Menschenwürde als Rechtsbegriff*, SVRSP, Beiheft 101 (Stuttgart, 2004) 24-32.

Kantian source of dignity, we might say that humanity (dignity) should not be reduced to a single aspect of moral reason. Humans are more than mere rational autonomy and moral capability.

The Scottish moral philosopher and behavioural political economist Adam Smith (1723-1790 CE) emphasized the intrinsic principle of sympathy that helps us experience the passion of others. This accounted for dignity and equality of self-regarding and other-regarding.<sup>27</sup> The empiricist philosopher David Hume (1711-1776 CE), a friend of Smith, however, considered that human dignity occurs only through social action.<sup>28</sup> The dignity must be awarded to the human by others, when his/her conduct with others evokes impressions. With Kant, the recognition of others grounds on the moral value of the human as end (with) in himself, even if the behaviours of someone do not make any good impact on others. Indeed, the formulation and propagation of this idea of human dignity had a quite effective contribution to the abolition of torture and conquest of humiliating and cruel punishments. Despite excessive criminal rigorism, Kant entangled himself at times in self-contradictions, when he pleaded for castration and capital punishment.<sup>29</sup>

Despite strong philosophical roots of human dignity in history and occasional references in early legal text, a full legal legitimacy, juridification or legalization of the moral principle of human dignity happened only after the World War II. Only

27 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), trans. Walther Eckstein (Hamburg: 2004). Remy Debes, "Adam Smith on dignity and equality," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20/1 (2012) 109–40.

28 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* 1751, Appendix IV: On Some Verbal Disputes (London: A. Miller, 1777) 314: 4.3.: "But on the whole, it seems to me that although everyone agrees that there are virtues of many different kinds, what we chiefly have in mind when we call a man 'virtuous' or 'a man of virtue' are his social qualities, which are indeed the most valuable. All the same, an honest good-natured man wouldn't get that honourable label if he were notably lacking in any of the non-social virtues: such as courage, temperance, economy, industry, understanding, dignity of mind."

29 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 18.

thereafter it became legally obligatory as an ethical imperative to treat humans as humans as such.<sup>30</sup> Following disasters after the world wars, the *UNO Charta* invoked the faith in fundamental human rights, in dignity and value of human person and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* began with the statement: “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” While addressing the origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt wrote: “We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights [...] only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation.”<sup>31</sup> Arendt believed that dignity is the “right to have rights,” which “needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, the new international order witnesses the attempt to make a new beginning through recognition of human dignity as universal and absolute value.

To be treated as humans and to guarantee the right to treat every other human independent of gender, race, language, religion, political affiliation, economic and social position means to restore *humanitas*, that has fought against the national socialist (Nazi) ideology with the introduction of the category of *Untermenschen* (subhuman) and the myth of Aryan race.<sup>33</sup> A comparison of the German (Bonn) Grundgesetz 1949 and the Constitution of the Italian Republic (CIR) 1948 may be useful. According to the Grundgesetz, the constitution of fundamental

30 For example, many juridical documents, that refer to the concept of human dignity, were written down according to the *Charter of United Nations* (1945), the *Universal Declarations of Human Rights* (1948) and *Grundgesetz (Constitution or Basic Law) of Federal Republic of Germany* (1949) See P. Tiedemann, *Menschenwürde als Rechtsbegriff: Eine philosophische Klärung* (Berlin: 2007).

31 Quoted in: Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 19. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland/New York: 1951) 296.

32 Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, IX.

33 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 22.

rights derives from the human dignity. Precisely because humans possess a dignity differentiating them from other living beings, the humans possess basic rights. Since the Grundgesetz grounds its foundation indissolubly on human dignity<sup>34</sup> and the inadmissibility of any change is explicitly prescribed in Article 79 (3),<sup>35</sup> universality, unavailability and unchangeability (so-called *Ewigkeitsgarantie* = eternal guarantee) of that principle is confirmed.

Naturally, due to the Nazi context that led to the World War II, philosophers, jurists, sociologists and theologians of the Land of Ideas, Germany, more than those of other countries, reflected upon human dignity extensively, since inhuman treatments representing a profound violation of human dignity took place at the concentration camps.<sup>36</sup> The psychologist Victor Frankl (1905-1997), who suffered in the KZ at Auschwitz himself, shares his experiences in *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* on inner freedom and will to meaning. Any amount of humiliation and suffering may not take away the intrinsic worth of humans, which is never lost though affected and disfigured. He says, "an incurably psychotic individual may lose his usefulness but yet retain the dignity of a human being."<sup>37</sup> This is a sort of Stoic understanding of dignity. All that one needed was to have a hope to live.<sup>38</sup>

34 Art. 1 (1) GG: Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar. Sie zu achten und zu schützen ist Verpflichtung aller staatlichen Gewalt.

35 Art. 79 (3) GG: Eine Änderung dieses Grundgesetzes, durch welche die Gliederung des Bundes in Länder, die grundsätzliche Mitwirkung der Länder bei der Gesetzgebung oder die in den Artikeln 1 und 20 niedergelegten Grundsätze berührt werden, ist unzulässig.

36 See Deryck Beyleveld and Roger Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 16-17.

37 Victor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, trans. Ilse Lasch (Allahabad: St. Paul Press, 6th Print 2000) 119.

38 The original title of the book was "trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen: Ein psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager" (1946), Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* 1959 (USA: Beacon Press, 2006). He says that "even in the most absurd, painful, and dehumanized situation, life has potential meaning and that, therefore, even suffering is meaningful."

The Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977 CE), the legal philosopher Werner Maihofer (1918-1978 CE) and the sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998 CE) dealt with the theme of human dignity intensively in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The emphasis shifted from the maxim “to respect” to “to protect,” that should be achieved through a politics of *welfare*. The protection of human dignity contains the realization of basic needs of humans through the social state. The earlier understanding of protection is thus not abandoned but much more extended in order to include the basic needs of humans in the practical world.<sup>39</sup> Luhmann did the initial analysis of the breakthrough concept of the Tübingen state law professor Günter Dürig (1920-1996 CE) who considered that human dignity is the highest constitutional principle of all objective rights and human dignity cannot undergo subjective considerations or be limited through other basic rights,<sup>40</sup> but spoke in favour of a “dynamic” against a “static” understanding of human dignity. Against the understanding of natural gift of dignity by virtue of being human, Luhmann advocated the dignity as a socio-cultural variable that must be established in the first place. The human can attain or lose in his self-representation as partner of social interaction. Dignity is the result of hard performance of representations that are subjected to constant risk of loss of dignity.<sup>41</sup> Luhmann thus revived the the social role of individuals signifying the dynamic character of human dignity. It is in social interaction that an individual realizes one’s being of human and self-awareness. However, his original and

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39 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 30; Ernst Bloch, *Naturrecht und menschliche Würde* (Frankfurt a. M.: 1961); Hans Wagner, *Die Würde des Menschen* (Würzburg: 1992); Werner Maihofer, *Rechtsstaat und menschliche Würde* (Darmstadt, 1962) 40-41.

40 See Günter Dürig, “Der Grundgesetz von der Menschenwürde: Entwurf eines praktikablen Wertsystems der Grundrechte aus Art. 1. Abs. 1 in Verbindung mit Art. 19 Abs. 2 des Grundgesetzes,” *Archiv des öffentlichen Rechts* 81 (1956) 117-175 and “Kommentar zu Art. 1 Grundgesetz,” in: *Grundgesetz: Kommentar* (1958).

41 See Niklas Luhmann, *Grundrechte als Institution: Ein Beitrag zur politischen Soziologie* (Berlin: 1965) 53-83. See See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 31.

unconventional interpretation did not get due attention in his time.<sup>42</sup>

## ***Taking stock***

The two faces of intrinsic as well as social human dignity continues to be unwithering in history while shining forth as ever and unfolding in every branch of science and resist to lose their relevance even today. We can infer from history that the two aspects of human dignity can inclusively play a complementary role rather than exclusively one against the other. It seems to be two sides of the same coin. It requires only an acknowledgement that social dignity is the external recognition of the intrinsic dignity.

## **4.The Socio-Political Expressions of Human Dignity**

The approach of human dignity shifted in a new direction since the beginning of the 1970s. The philosophical, legal and political debate was dominated by the significant work of *A Theory of Justice* by the US-American political philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002 CE) who postulated the construction of a *fair* and in the sense of *well-ordered* society against the prevailing Utilitarianism that allowed harm against individuals in the interest of the greater common good of the society. The priority of the right over the good became the central and the basic principle of Rawls.<sup>43</sup> The new attention focused on more practical principles of liberty, equality, social contract and justice as fairness that a theoretical foundation of human rights was not of greater importance. However, the theme of human dignity

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42 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 31; R. Stoecker, "Die Würde des Embryos," in: D. Gross (ed.) *Ethik in der Medizin in Lehre, Klinik und Forschung* (Würzburg, 2002) 53-71; K. Seelmann, "Repräsentation als Element von Menschenwürde," *Studia Philosophica* 63 (2004) 141-158.

43 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Revised Edition (New York: Belknap Press, 1999); Otfried Höffe, *John Rawls. Eine Theorie der Gerechtigkeit*, Klassiker Auslegen. 2. Auflage (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006).

gained the centre of discussion increasingly since the early 90s especially in Germany, where two prominent legal philosophers Hasso Hofmann (b.1934) and Ulfrid Neumann (b.1947) brought the concept dignity back. Neumann warned against a tyranny of dignity that could become a burden and block the discussion on ethically sensible themes. On the contrary, Hofmann goes beyond the understanding of dignity as gift (*Mitgift*) and achievement (*Leistungstheorie*) to a social recognition (*soziale Anerkennung*).<sup>44</sup>

The legal philosophical debate on human dignity found an interim endpoint in the new commentary of Mathias Herdegen (b. 1957) on Article 1 of the Basic Law, which introduces a classic of the constitutional commentaries.<sup>45</sup> Herdegen attempted to make a difference of core and marginal areas in human dignity and suggested that one the core area is not available for consideration (*Abwägung*). Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde accused him of having made an “Epochenbruch” over the previous interpretation of Günter Dürig known as object formula (*Objektformel*). According to Dürig, human dignity is moral value (*sittlicher Wert*), prepositive foundation (*vorpositives Fundament*) and natural law anchor (*naturrechtlicher Antiker*) of the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) and its human image. Herdegen degrades it to a constitutional norm on an equal level. Not only jurists, but also philosophers and moral theologians involve themselves in the extensive discussion about the normative content of human

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44 H. Hofmann, “Die versprochenen Menschenwürde,” *Archiv des öffentlichen Rechts* 118 (1993) 353-377 and “Methodische Probleme der juristischen Menschenwürdeinterpretation,” in: I. Appel, G. Hermes (eds.), *Mensch-Staat-Umwelt* (Berlin: 2008) 47-79; Ulfrid Neumann, “Die Tyrannei der Würde: Argumentationstheoretische Erwägungen zum Menschenwürdeprinzip,” *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 84 (1988) 153-166 and “Menschenwürde als Menschenbürde – oder wie man ein Recht gegen den Berechtigten wendet,” in: U. Neumann (ed.) *Recht als Struktur und Argumentation*. Beiträge zur Theorie des Rechts und zur Wissenschaftstheorie der Rechtswissenschaft (Baden-Baden: 2008) 35-55.

45 Mathias Herdegen, “Kommentar zu Art. 1 Abs. GG,” in: T. Maunz and G. Dürig (eds.), *Grundgesetz: Kommentar* (München: Beck, 1996).



dignity.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that human dignity appears as the new key concept (“*neues Schlüsselkonzept*”) in a widely spread legal philosophical textbook.<sup>47</sup>

The debate on human dignity, after the considerable decrease in the discussion on Rawls’s theory of justice, emerged with much more vigour in the ethical as well as legal philosophical areas in the Anglo-American contexts. The American philosophers Martha Nussbaum<sup>48</sup> (b.1947-) and Ronald Dworkin<sup>49</sup> (1931-2013 CE) are the two most prominent and important personalities in this discussion. Nussbaum seems to take up the idea of Bloch and Maihofer that dignity does not only belong to the abstract person as legal subject but to the concrete individual in his dependency on socio-economic conditions that at times do not even guarantee the minimum subsistence required for a dignified life. When a human is forced to live below the level of minimum subsistence and falls into an extreme poverty line, it indicates a violation of human dignity. Thus, the correlation between human dignity and material needs became decisive.<sup>50</sup>

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46 Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, “Die Menschenwürde war unantastbar. Abschied von den Verfassungsvätern: Die Neukommentierung von Artikel 1 des Grundgesetzes markiert einen Epochenbruch,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung FAZ* (3. September 2003) 33, 35, also in: *Recht, Staat, Freiheit*. erweiterte Ausgabe (Frankfurt a. M.: 2006) 379-388.

47 K. Seelmann, “Menschenwürde: ein neuer Schlüsselbegriff,” in: K. Seelmann, D. Demko (eds.), *Rechtsphilosophie*, 6th ed. (München: 2014) 241-260, (2004) 3rd ed. 212-228; See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 32.

48 Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capability Approach* (New York: 2000), *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (Princeton: 2004), “Human Dignity and Political Entitlements,” in: *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President’s Council on Bioethics* (Washington, DC: 2008), and *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: 2011).

49 Ronald Dworkin, *Is Democracy Possible Here? Principles for A New Political Debate* (Princeton: 2008) and *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2011). In this book, Dworkin develops the principles of “self-respect” and “authenticity,” pp. 203-204.

50 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 33.



For Nussbaum, the human, in the first place, is neither an *animal rationale* nor is s/he an *animal morale*, but basically, phenomenologically and existentially a “*being with needs*.” The dependency on Karl Marx by Bloch, Maihofer and Nussbaum is evident. The more a state and the society is able to fulfill these needs, the more is the dignity realized through them. Dignity is deprived not only when/where basic sustenance is lacking but also where the realization of *capabilities* is hindered by the exploitative social conditions. Dignity is due to all humans, but special efforts are required to create such conditions under which it can effectively unfold itself. The state must enable every citizen to make *capabilities* into flourishing. This is somewhat similar to Sulmasy’s third sense of inflorescent dignity. Nussbaum’s discussion on dignity is enhanced by a strong emancipation: The addressees of dignity are no longer only the rational, self-conscious and autonomous individuals, but children, women, old, persons living under degrading conditions and at the same time are not able to realise own capabilities. An abstract Stoic understanding of intrinsic dignity is insufficient and problematic in many ways and “respect for human dignity is not just lip service, it means creating conditions favourable for development and choice,”<sup>51</sup> and thus her main emphasis is on social dimension

51 Martha Nussbaum, “Human Dignity and Political Entitlements,” in: *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President’s Council on Bioethics* (Washington, D.C.: 2008) 351-359. Nussbaum preferred “an Aristotelian-Marxian account of dignity, which sees the dignity of the human being as squarely a part of the world of nature and does not posit a sharp split between rationality and other human capacities. I shall show how such an account might ground basic political entitlements (in a non-metaphysical way suited to a pluralistic society)” 352. She critiques that “Stoics not only split humans off from other animals more sharply than the evidence supports, refusing to grant animals any share in intelligence, they also denied without argument that there is any dignity or end-like worth inherent in those human capacities in which animals also partake, such as sentience, everyday (non-moral) practical reasoning, emotion, and the capacity for love and care. Thus, the split not only slights the other animals, it also slights elements in human life that would appear to have worth, urging us to respect only a small sliver of ourselves” (354-355). She says that Stoics would still hold that a woman would not lose her dignity despite rape, Nussbaum says that rapes violate the bodily, mental, and

of dignity that ensures the conditions for realization of basic needs and capabilities.

Granting equal rights would mean, in the sense of capability approach of Nussbaum, a single political goal but people “are actually able to do and to be” with their capabilities for basic needs to live a life with dignity. In other words, respecting equal rights would mean to enable a human to obtain the basic needs without deprivation. Nussbaum explains that “there is dignity not only in rationality but in human need itself and in the varied forms of striving that emerge from human need.”<sup>52</sup> Political entitlements must therefore be equal and the same for all citizens including people with disabilities who must be respected as fully equal citizens. What happens if some individuals cannot attain the capabilities because of a disability? Nussbaum clarifies that “they still have these capabilities, for example, the right to vote and the right to own property, but that these capabilities in some cases will have to be exercised in a relationship with a guardian... Moreover, even with guardianship it is always better if the guardian can act as a facilitator rather than a substitute.”<sup>53</sup> A human with disabilities will have all the same political entitlements equal to a normal human. An individual who has an intrinsic dignity lives in and represents the self through the society, therefore, basic needs, social recognitions and political entitlements are significant. In this sense, Nussbaum has made a good contribution to take capabilities seriously. It could be interpreted that Nussbaum’s understanding is referring to inflorescent conditions for a dignified life and she does not see the human uniqueness, without which, I believe, the very aspect of morality within humans and the claims of animal rights become baseless. Despite similarities in basic needs, there is definitely a clear distinction between humans and non-human animals. Otherwise, the old norm of survival of the fittest will return to rule. It is precisely the uniqueness and moral sense

emotional life of woman, affecting all her opportunities for development and functioning (358).

52 Nussbaum, “Human Dignity and Political Entitlements,” 363.

53 Nussbaum, “Human Dignity and Political Entitlements,” 364.

of humans that pleads for respect for humans as well as non-human animals. While we should not exalt the gift of reason, it is precisely the same gift of reason that would be able to ensure the political entitlements. Her theory of political justice does not substantiate the source of human dignity, it only ensures what could contribute to respecting human dignity or making a life worthy of dignity.

Dworkin highlighted primarily the individual dimension of dignity, which contains two basic principles of self-respect and authenticity. The first suggests that “each human life has a special kind of objective value,” that belongs as “intrinsic value” to every human in the form of a “potentiality”. That is why, the society has to facilitate basic conditions for realization of dignity from the beginning of life. The second principle on the other hand supports that “each person has a special responsibility for realizing the success of its own life.” This means that it is rightly a predominant duty of every individual to actualise the “intrinsic value.” According to Dworkin, “these two principles together [...] the basis and conditions of human dignity.”<sup>54</sup>

In the ongoing debate on human dignity, the publication of *The Decent Society* by the Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit gained a great significance in the German speaking regions. Margalit aimed at a “decent society” that always remained in the background of Rawls’ “well-ordered society.” Decent is a society, whose institutions do not humiliate humans, rather protect the self-esteem of every individual. Humiliations violate a human in self-esteem, because dignity according to Margalit is nothing other than “a representation of self-respect.”<sup>55</sup> The connection

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54 See Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 34. Becchi also makes a comparison of Dworkin’s position with the European tradition: “Diese zwei Würdedefinitionen stehen den Bedeutungsvarianten nahe, die wir in der europäischen Tradition ausgemacht haben: Würde als Mitgift oder aber als Leistung.” Dworkin, *Is Democracy Possible Here?* 9-10.

55 Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1996), trans. Politik der Würde (Frankfurt a. M.: 1999) 53; P. Schaber, “Menschenwürde und Selbstachtung: Ein Vorschlag zum Verständnis des Menschenwürde,” in: *Menschenwürde/La dignité de l’être humain*, in: *Studia Philosophica*

between human dignity and self-respect is far from self-evident.<sup>56</sup> To begin with, a human may not be in a position to determine whether dignity is humiliated or not; namely, someone can be seen from outside as humiliated through certain acts, without feeling the humiliation in oneself. A human may still uphold self-respect, when s/he is actually humiliated, and vice versa a human can forfeit self-respect without being subjected to degradations. The dignity of a raped woman is certainly violated but she has not lost her self-respect due to the rape. On the other hand, a man who becomes drunk every evening loses his self-respect, even though no one has violated his dignity. It is not however disputed that humiliation plays a role in violation of dignity. Humiliation violates dignity. Strictly speaking, the moral evaluation of the matter does not depend on self-respect but on violation of the due respect by mutual partners.<sup>57</sup>

The dignity thus has to do with social interaction.<sup>58</sup> Whoever cannot bear the gaze of the others, loses the social face and loses social dignity. Understood this way, humiliation effects a disturbance in self-representation of the image that one wanted to give about oneself. Dignity is violated due to the infringement of private domain of self-representation. Every person has the right to positive protection of what s/he owes to the public as well as to the negative protection of what s/he reserves to oneself in privacy. Right to self-representation can be limited only in exceptional circumstances. The more we become transparent to the public,

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63 (2004) 93-106, 101: "Jemanden zu erniedrigen heisst demnach, ihm die Möglichkeit zu nehmen, sich selbst zu achten." Cited in Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 34.

56 Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 34. See R. Stoecker, *Menschenwürde und das Paradox der Entwürdigung*, "in: *Menschenwürde: Annäherung an einen Begriff* (Wien: 2003) 133-151 and "Selbstachtung und Menschenwürde," in: *Studia Philosophica* 63 (2004) 107-119.

57 Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 34-35.

58 Considered from a social point of view, see R. Sennet, *Respect in a World of Inequality* (New York/London: 2003). Paolo Becchi suggests a literature on social recognition: see H. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung und Missachtung* (Frankfurt a. M.: 1994). Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 35, f. 15.

the greater is the need for the protection of a core privacy. Here, the respect for private life finds the philosophical justification. Becchi enlists the following acts intrusion into privacy: tapping of telephonic conversations, unauthorized disclosure of protocols, personal documents or pictures, also through the procedural use of lie detector, are therefore problematic, since they come in conflict with the exclusive right of self-representation that is due to every human.<sup>59</sup>

The application of human dignity is extended to a whole range of other offences as well. The dignity of a human can be not only violated through torture or degrading treatment, but also public insult, publication of sensitive private affairs in text or picture or through disclosure of statements that are inconsistent with a public position. In all these instances, the affected person is harmed in his image that s/he wants to present to the public. Humiliation is worse, when it has affected the self-image, self-respect and self-esteem. If s/he does not get an opportunity to present the actual image, then the reputation of the person is permanently damaged. This understanding of dignity, too, has to accept an objection: not every abatement is condemnable; sometimes it is justifiably revealed, what is really behind some facades since the right to respect for private and family life cannot be stretched indefinitely. Hence, the difficult task remains to define precisely, which contemptuous behaviours violate the human dignity. Legally seen, it is certainly easier to implement the protection of dignity against discrimination and misuse than condescension.<sup>60</sup>

The journey through the new understandings of dignity makes it clear that the old idea of dignity is still valid. The ethnic cleansing in Ex-Yugoslavia, the genocide in Ruanda as well as in Sri Lanka, the tortures and humiliations of Iraqi prisoners through US soldiers in Abu Ghraib as well as the inhuman conditions of detentions of suspected terrorists in Guantanamo, the ongoing killings through infiltrations in Kashmir are a few examples to

59 Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 35.

60 Becchi, *Das Prinzip der Menschenwürde*, 36.

mention in recent times that testify the importance of protection of human dignity against violation of human rights in armed conflicts. More concerned than a mere fact is the justification of using torture even today as a weapon against terrorism.<sup>61</sup> Should torture belong to the catalogue of police investigation methods on grounds of internal state security, it would be a dangerous regression that must necessarily be avoided at all costs if we do not want to fall back to the barbarianism. However, if we invoke the principle of human dignity as protective shield of every person, including those who have committed the heinous crimes, then there would be a greater justice in the light of the basic and unconditional character of this principle.

### ***Taking Stock***

The concept of human dignity has assumed new meanings in the light of human rights traditions. Human rights are natural rights corresponding to inherent human dignity and they are not conferred by the society, rather they are to be recognized, asserted and protected, while interpretations and applications of human rights may vary especially when they are weighed against in conflict situations by the society and the state, namely, by the constitutions and jurists. Natural law may undergo changes in the sense that interpretations are subject to contexts. Among all philosophical and legal traditions, the modern Kantian understanding of human dignity has greatly gained a universal significance that prohibits to degrade a human to a thing.

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61 See Linus Sonderegger, *Die Rückkehr der Folter? Anwendung von Zwang bei der Vernehmung im Deutschen und US-amerikanischen Recht*, Schriftreihe des Max-Planck-Instituts (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 2012). Sonderegger says that there is a distinction between the use of coercion during interrogation for criminal procedural purposes and those that serve to avert an imminent danger or to combat terrorism.

## 5. Dual Roles of Dignity: Empowerment and Constraint

The historical-philological enquiries, philosophical-religious traditions or empirical-legal examinations discuss the question: *who has the dignity?* Many of them indicate that dignity does not only belong to individual humans but to the whole humanity as a whole.<sup>62</sup> Some of them defend that it is the special value of humanity as a species that demand the same value to be shared among its members. It is obvious that every human being is (and grows as) a member of the species *homo sapiens* and nothing else. Particularly in the contexts of modern biotechnological threats through cloning and germline interventions to the identity and integrity of the human species, it is important “not only to promote respect for the intrinsic worthiness of every individual, but also of *humankind as a whole*.”<sup>63</sup> There is a challenging question: which takes precedence in conflicting situations: is it the individual human dignity or the dignity of the society, namely, the public order?<sup>64</sup> For example, can the state justify the death

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62 For example, Micha Werner, “Individual and Collective Dignity,” in: M. Düwell, J. Braarvig, R. Brownsword, D. Mieth (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 345-352; Deryck Beyleveld and Roger Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 25-28; Marcus Düwell, “On the Border of Life and Death: Human Dignity and Bioethics,” and “Human Dignity and Future Generation,” in: M. Düwell, J. Braarvig, R. Brownsword, D. Mieth (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 526-534 and 551-558;

63 Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 970.

64 Brownsword says that, “there is a fault line in international jurisprudence of human dignity. Whereas, on the one side, we find a liberal ethic that treats human dignity as the underpinning of human rights, on the other, we have a conservative ethic holding that the fundamental duty is not to compromise human dignity.” Quoted from R. Brownsword, “Human Dignity from A Legal Perspective,” in: M. Düwell, J. Braarvig, R. Brownsword, D. Mieth (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 1-22, 7. See also R. Brownsword, “Bioethics Today, Bioethics Tomorrow: Stem Cell Research and the Dignitarian Alliance,” *University of Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy* 17 (2003) 15-51.



penalty to a terrorist? Can we permit homosexuality which may be contrary to certain religious or cultural beliefs? A conservative communitarian approach may treat “human dignity as the ground not only for permitting individuals to make their own choices but also for setting limits to the sphere of free choice.”<sup>65</sup> Feldman explains that

We must not assume that the idea of dignity is inextricably linked to a liberal-individualist view of human beings as people whose life-choices deserve respect. If the state takes a particular view on what is required for people to live dignified lives, it may introduce regulations to restrict the freedom which people have to make choices which, in the state’s view, interfere with the dignity of the individual, a social group or the human race as a whole... The quest for human dignity may subvert rather than enhance choice... Once it becomes a tool in the hands of the lawmakers and judges, the concept of human dignity is a two-edged sword.<sup>66</sup>

It may not be correct to put the whole weight of human dignity on the respect for autonomy and self-determination. Dignity, whether individual or collective, is larger than self-respect. Robert E. Goodin is right in saying that the “entitlements arising out of [respect for dignity] may vary somewhat with time and place... [For] what [others] mean by their actions is crucial, and performance intended to humiliate in one culture might be intended to honour in another.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, there is always room for careful considerations to see what promotes human dignity at best and what violates human dignity at worst. There is no ready-made, clear-cut answer to problem of indignities either. One area where we can easily understand that dignity is at risk is when the right to life is violated, since (i) it is only in and through a body that a human life can exist at all, (ii) bodily-life is the most

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65 Brownsword, “Human Dignity from a Legal Perspective,” 8.

66 David Feldmann, “Human Dignity as a Legal Value: Part I,” *Public Law* (1999) 682-702; 685. See also “Human Dignity as a Legal Value: Part I,” *Public Law* (2000) 61-76.

67 Robert E. Goodin, “The Political Theories of Choice and Dignity,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 18 (1981) 91-100, 99.



fundamental good of human life and (iii) the right to life is the most fundamental right. In such cases, there is no weighing of human dignity against any principle. Dignity is neither available for compromise nor can it be subjected to autonomy.

A tension between human dignity as empowerment of autonomy and human dignity as constraint existed in the German legal decision on the well-known Peep-Show case:<sup>68</sup> The Federal Administrative Tribunal denied a licence for the peep-show on the ground that the performance would violate Article 1(1) of the Basic Law. Affirming that “respect for and protection of human dignity are constituent principles of the Basic Law,” and that in the peep-show, “the woman is placed in a degrading position” and “treated like an object,”<sup>69</sup> the Tribunal said:

The consent of the women concerned can only exclude a violation of human dignity if such a violation is based only on the lack of consent to the relevant actions or omissions of the women concerned. However, this is not the situation here because in the case at issue... the human dignity of the women concerned is violated by the exposition typical of these performances. Here, human dignity, because its significance reaches beyond the individual, must be protected even against the wishes of the woman concerned whose own subjective ideas deviate from the objective value of human dignity.<sup>70</sup>

The objective value of human dignity is present in the whole species of humanity going beyond the individual. If an act violates the objective value in anyone, then human dignity is said to be violated irrespective of whether the concerned party freely agrees to perform such act or not. Free choice is irrelevant when human dignity is at stake. The individual as well as collective

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68 BVerwGE 64 (1981) 274. Cited in Beylerveld and Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw*, Ch. 2: “Human Dignity and the New Bioethics: Human Dignity as Constraint,” 29- 47, 34.

69 Beylerveld and Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw*, 34.

70 BVerwGE 64 (1981) 277-279. Quoted in Beylerveld/Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw*, 34.

recognition of human dignity as an objective value, namely, in particular human being and in humanity as a whole, can be used in two specific ways: human dignity as a moral principle or norm for the empowerment of human life and as a rule of constraint to restrict undignified individual and collective human acts. At the legal level, human dignity can be used as a constitutive norm to guide the public as well as the private human life. Brownsword says, “human dignity is deployed not only to give protection to human life from the point of conception (including human embryos) but also to constrain actions which, although *prima facie* merely self-regarding, are judged to compromise human dignity (whether located in the actor’s own person or humanity or, so to speak, in the community’s collective conscience).”<sup>71</sup>

Seen from a liberal-individualist and conservative-collective approaches, human dignity can pose a challenge that one can stand against each other. While the former stresses upon respect for individual choices, the latter will set limits to individual freedom. While the former focuses on rights of individuals, the latter speaks of duties of the state and the society. While the former speaks of empowerment of human choices, the latter constrains actions contrary to the individual and collective human dignity. Unlike many might see these two perspectives in a conflictual manner, there is a possibility of seeing them in complementarity. That is possible in a shared common understanding of human dignity that it is foundational and prior to human features and activities, the state and the society. Clearly, human dignity precedes human autonomy. It is not autonomy that renders human dignity, rather autonomy is only an indicative factor to authenticate human specialness for protection-worthiness. In this sense, neither the individual nor the society can impose something against each other. As Feldman cautions that, “once it becomes a tool in the hands of lawmakers and judges, the concept of human dignity is a two-edged sword.”<sup>72</sup> This double-edged sword needs to be carefully used.

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71 Brownsword, “Human Dignity from A Legal Perspective,” 6.

72 David Feldman, “Human Dignity as a Legal Virtue: Part I,” *Public Law* 14

## ***Taking Stock***

We have seen the two natures of human dignity: (i) as an inherent property of individual humans and (ii) as a collective conscience. Further, the inherent human dignity operates as an empowerment of individual human life and as a constraint on free choice. While the former plays a background role and the latter plays a foreground role. As a background justification for the recognition of human rights and as the source of the fundamental freedoms, the idea of intrinsic human dignity as empowerment comes with the right to respect for one's dignity as a human as well as the right to the conditions in which human dignity can flourish. Thus, human dignity as empowerment plays a double role: (a) as a negative right will oppose unwilled interventions by others and through the freedom of researches in biosciences and biotechnologies,<sup>73</sup> (b) and as a positive right will render support and assistance to secure circumstances and conditions essential to flourish as a human. Thus, any hurdle to the dignity as empowerment is thus a double offence: (i) a denial of rights and dignity as well as (ii) a denial of responsibility.<sup>74</sup> In the background court of human dignity as empowerment, autonomy is prioritized and the informed consent rules empowerment bioethics.

Human dignity as constraint does exactly the other way. Dignity in the foreground puts constraint on free choice. In its rule, either paternalism or social defence prevails and autonomous consent

(1999) 682-702, 685; Quoted in: Brownsword, "Human Dignity from A Legal Perspective," 8.

73 Leon Kass explains: "In [...] domains of clinical medicine and research involving human subjects, appeals to human dignity, while tacitly employing an ideal of proper treatment and respect, function explicitly as bulwarks against abuse: patients should not be reduced to "thing-hood" or treated as mere bodies; research subjects should not be utilized as mere means or treated only as experimental animals. This "negative" function of the concept of human dignity in these domains makes perfect sense, inasmuch as it is intended – and needed – to restrain the strong in their dealings against the weak." Kass, "Defending Human Dignity," 301.

74 Beylveled and Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw*, 11-16.

(no matter how free or informed) is no more decisive. Human dignity as a rule of constraint can restrict autonomy in favour of collective good of society's vision and rules that it is wrong to compromise one's own dignity as it is to compromise the dignity of others.<sup>75</sup> Yet, it is the one and the same intrinsic human dignity that is at play with roles of empowerment and constraint. In the constraint mode, we refer to the dignity of human being to prevent indignities, and in the empowerment mode, we promote the dignity of being human. And we can be friends of both concepts. They are complementary and not opposites. The principle of respect for human dignity thus as a *negative* requirement forbids certain practices without any balance with other principles, and a *positive* requirement promotes improvement of quality of life.<sup>76</sup>

## 6. Human Dignity: Foundation of Human Rights

Habermas says that morality is a unified code and dignity is the moral source from which all of the basic rights derive their meaning.<sup>77</sup> The equal human dignity of everybody demands the membership of everyone in a constitutional political community, which in turn must protect human dignity by granting equal rights and preventing violation of these rights.<sup>78</sup> Habermas states that human rights that arose against despotism and oppression have always been associated with dignity in its appeal for justice to remedy suffering and humiliation. In fact, the moral content of human rights lies in the normative character of human dignity. In the line of thinking of Habermas, Misztal says that “the centrality of human dignity in all historical struggles against various forms

75 Beylvelld and Brownsword, *Human Dignity in Bioethics and Biolaw*, 11, 29-47.

76 This can be also connected to the concepts of sanctity of life and quality of life. The former is the mirror of human image; the latter is facilities for human life for instance, better schools, hospitals, transport system, etc. see Roberto Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” *Medical Health Care and Philosophy* 16 (2013) 967-973, 969.

77 Jürgen Habermas, “The Concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights,” *Metaphilosophy* 41/4 (2010) 464-480, 466.

78 Habermas, “The Concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights,” 464.

of domination and humiliation explains why, in order to prevent mass crimes and to construct just political order, there has always been the need to fulfil 'the moral promise to respect the human dignity of every human person equally'."<sup>79</sup>

The first and the most fundamental right of humans is the right to life, whose moral credence springs forth from human dignity. Life is the most fundamental good of any living entity. Taking away a life is the violation of the right to life. Taking away any life does not pose the same weight of a moral problem, but in humans, the right to life becomes absolute in the sense of practical moral reason, and in the natural world, no life is absolute. Every physical entity dies one day. As Kant equates humanity with dignity, we could say that dignity is inseparably intertwined with the right to life. There is no more any possibility for the talk of human dignity, when the life is interrupted as in the case of abortion or suicide or euthanasia. We may still treat a dead body with certain respect, but death brings the end to life, all dignity-talks and moral considerations.

The concept of human dignity is nowhere clearer than in bioethics to defend humans against life-destroying choices or decisions. Human dignity makes no compromise, when the right to life is at risk. In this sense, it functions not only a principle but becomes a norm or rule. The exception to this rule or norm can happen only when two lives are in conflict with each other. Therefore, it is "the most useful and the primary and supreme concept" as against all criticisms of dignity as a "useless concept" by Ruth Macklin who equated dignity with "respect for autonomy." Andorno speaks of a minimal threshold of dignity of every human being in the legal systems:

The meaning of dignity can indeed be better grasped by considering what is contrary to it rather than what is in conformity with it. Evil is easier to identify than goodness. It is when we are confronted to the worst things that can

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79 Barbara A. Misztal, "The Idea of Dignity: Its Modern Significance," *European Journal of Social Theory* 16/1 (2012) 101-121, 113-4.

be done to a human being that we better understand, by contrast, what “dignity” means. Even the Kantian categorical imperative according to which on one is to be treated as a mere means to another’s end can be regarded as example of this via negativa. Therefore, it can be claimed that the first and primary task of the principle of human dignity is to set a minimal threshold of respect for human being, i.e. to clearly indicate what practices are absolutely incompatible with a civilized society. Only after having established that minimum, the legal system can seek to promote people’s well-being in positive terms.<sup>80</sup>

Human rights systems and declarations have an assumption that people have an inherent dignity and therefore are entitled to fundamental rights to protection and non-humiliation. Andorno says it succinctly that “legal norms do not create from nothing; [...] people’s rights are not the capricious invention of lawmakers, who could legitimately revoke them in a change of humour. Rather, individual states, as well as the international community, are morally *obliged* to recognize that all people have basic rights (i.e. that they have equally valid claims to basic goods) because these latter derive from the dignity which is inherent in every human being.”<sup>81</sup> Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that “everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.” Recognition denotes the formal acknowledgement of what is already existing.<sup>82</sup> It is noteworthy that legal systems do not define human dignity as an arbitrary legal fiction or as a metaphysical hypothesis or as religious symbol. The reason behind this is also to avoid any affiliation to a particular culture or religion or school of thought.<sup>83</sup> It creates a sense of plurality and a universal validity.

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80 Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 969.

81 Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 968.

82 J. Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights: Philosophical Reflections on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 968.

83 Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 968.

Legal systems present human dignity as the “*indispensable basis for the fair functioning of human society*. All human beings qua humans are regarded as really deserving to be treated with unconditional respect and entitled with basic rights regardless of age, sex, physical or mental abilities, ethnic origin, religion, political ideas, socio-economic status, or any other particular condition or circumstance. This is the core idea behind the concept of human dignity.”<sup>84</sup> In this sense, humans have no rights apart from human dignity, rather human dignity is the only word that stands under carrying human rights on its head. Thus, human dignity is the overarching and shaping principle of international bioethics. Human rights require state recognition but the ultimate validity of human rights is the acknowledgement of dignity that already exists. In other words, “basic rights are grounded on the inherent worth of every human being and not on a merely contingent decision of lawmakers or of the international community, [and] they cannot be taken away by any authority.”<sup>85</sup> Andorno gives a fitting, precise explanation on the relation between human dignity and human rights:

why do we need the notion of dignity if we already have that (much more concrete) of human rights? Is dignity not a mere collective term to refer to rights? The fact is that international law clearly distinguishes between dignity and rights: rights *derive* from human dignity; human dignity is not a kind of super-right, but rather the ultimate source of all rights. The idea of human dignity intends to respond to the question “why do human beings have rights?” And the answer is that they are entitled to rights precisely because they possess intrinsic worth.<sup>86</sup>

Far from being a ‘vacuous figure of speech’<sup>87</sup>, human dignity, as the ‘primacy principle’ (Principle I.5 in Helsinki 1964), reveals

84 Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 968.

85 Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 968.

86 Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 970.

87 G. Helgesson and S. Eriksson, “Against the Principle that the Individual Shall Have Priority over Science,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 34/1 (2008) 54-56.

the fundamental idea that “the person does not have to reach any functional standard to be valuable as a person or to be treated with full respect.”<sup>88</sup> Human rights belong to existing individuals yet are insufficient to cope with the new biotechnological challenges that affect humanity as a whole. Hence, human dignity plays the role of an overarching objective principle to protect human image and humanity as a species against biotechnological threats as well as of a concrete subject standard for self-respect and self-esteem. Both human dignity and human rights recognize the inherent value of humans. They are complementary and inhere in human being(s). Human rights derive from human dignity and should never violate their source. There are no human rights without human dignity.

## Conclusion

Human dignity has intrinsic, attributed and inflorescent variants, inheres in human individuals as well as collectively in human species, plays positive and negative roles of empowerment and constraint, functions as principle as well as a rule and is a self-respect, self-esteem and social recognition in acknowledgement of the secured, inviolable, intrinsic worth. It prohibits self-degradation and social degradation of individuals and humanity as a whole. It inheres not only in rational-moral capacities but includes all basic human needs. Humanity is dignity and every human individual is a concrete, experiential face of the existential dignity. Human dignity is neither vague nor useless, but the supreme moral-legal watchdog principle of complementarity for bioethics, biolaw and biopolitics to protect humans against misuses under the mask of freedom of research in biosciences and biotechnologies.

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88 Colin Parker, “The Moral Primacy of the Human Being,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 36/9 (2010) 563-566. Quoted in Andorno, “The Dual Role of Human Dignity in Bioethics,” 969.





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## **God in the Religious Other and the Experience of the Divine in Shared Religious Spaces**

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to examine the meaning of ‘the other’ encountered in situations of shared religious spaces and to understand them as potential venues of divine encounter. Focusing upon such instances in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nations of South Asia, the essay draws the reader’s attention not only to the kinds and contexts of shared religious spaces but also to the characteristics of divine encounter in the shared religious spaces. In our world wherein fundamentalism, religious bigotry and communal violence are steadily on the increase, the other is seen as a threat. Thus the hope for a peaceful and harmonious human life in our world seems very bleak. To restore humanity’s hope, we need to identify and acknowledge existing sites of optimism in contemporary times. This article on shared religious spaces has drawn our attention to one such site wherein the others’ religious spaces are accepted, and their divinities are worshipped, venerated and celebrated.

**Keywords:** Shared experience, shared religious space, institutional space, the other, sacredness of space.

## **Introduction**

Most of the philosophical or theological works have deliberated upon the question of ‘the other’ with the help of sources such as scriptural, philosophical or theological traditions. Departing from such approaches, this paper seeks to examine the meaning of ‘the other’ encountered in situations of shared religious spaces and to understand them as potential venues of divine encounter. Focusing upon such instances in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nations of South Asia, the essay draws the reader’s attention not only to the kinds and contexts of shared religious spaces but also to the characteristics of divine encounter in the shared religious spaces.

## **What is a shared religious space?**

More than ever before, our contemporary era is marked by the co-existence of a multiplicity of cultures, faiths and ethnicities. While western scholars call this multiculturalism in the context of the globalized world, scholars of South Asia and Asia contend that diversity, plurality and heterogeneity have always been the constituent characteristics of South Asian ethos and culture. A fund of beliefs, customs and practices have been held in common by the people of different faith traditions living in a given geographical location. These religious overlaps which transcend religious boundaries set by the organized and institutionalized religions have given rise to the emergence of shared religious spaces. These shared religious spaces include not only the sites and locales, but also the occasions and situations that make it possible for the people of one faith to participate in the religious events and experiences of another faith tradition. What makes some sacred places

different from others is that people, irrespective of gender, caste and religious affiliation, can gain access to the divine energies and sacred powers in these places through certain customs, events and religious practices.

## **Kinds and Contexts of Shared Religious Spaces**

One witnesses different kinds of shared religious spaces in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nations of South Asia. These spaces can be either public or domestic; permanent or transient; institutional or popular. While public shared spaces refer to famous shrines and pilgrimage sites, domestic shared spaces are those homes that accommodate divinities from different faith traditions. While both these spaces are more or less permanent in nature, transient or temporary shared spaces refer to public roads and streets that are temporarily turned into a sacred space when religious events like processions take place and make available a particular deity's power to the people of other faiths. Institutional sacred spaces refer to the interfaith sacred spaces produced in Indian Christian ashrams by the religious elites, namely, the clerical class, while the popular sacred spaces refer to those produced by the lay people in shrines and homes. That said, the following pages will describe each of these categories at length.

## **Shrines as Shared Spaces**

To the category of public shared spaces belong numerous shrines or holy sites in South Asia like temples, churches and Dargahs, either well-renowned or locally known to the people in a given area, which attract people of different faith traditions. The works of Selva J. Raj (2002, 2004, 2006, 2017), Vasudha Narayanan (2004, 2006), Paul

Younger (1999), Joanne Punzo Waghorne (2002), Margaret Meibohm (2002), Brigitte Luchesi (2008), Damaris Luthi (2008), to name a few, have discussed how the rituals performed by the people of different religions in a given shrine render it as a shared religious space which is open to common public. People of other faiths visit these shared spaces to access the supernatural divine power to overcome their limit situations.

What makes a shrine a shared religious space are its seven-fold characteristics. 1. It is not static but dynamic. What transforms this space into a shared religious space is that it is a site of dynamism and activity wherein religious subjects from multiple religious backgrounds come to worship the deity and perform rituals in search of supernatural power for varying purposes. 2. Shared religious space is an open, inclusive and democratic space. Its frontiers are open to all as everyone can gain access to the divine energies and sacred powers through certain customs, events and religious practices. It is inclusive as it remains accessible to people of different faiths, castes and classes. It is also democratic in the sense it is produced by ordinary people's investment of religious sensibilities. This investment process does not discriminate people on the basis of gender, caste or class. Nor does it privilege one set of people over others. It is also more democratic as it is least controlled by the religious elites, the clergy 3. It is fluid and less structured. In contrast to the rigid structures either of the official liturgy in Churches or of prescribed *agamic poojas* in temples, shared religious spaces are characterized by religious and ritual activities that are fluid and less structured. People enjoy more freedom here to chart the course of their ritual activities and follow their own sequence. It is not that there are no customs and traditions specific to a particular site.

But they are less rigid and remain open for improvisation by the practitioners. One of the important properties of fluidity is that it renders boundaries porous, admitting the influx of different traditions that intermingle and overlap with one another resulting in what some theologians would term as syncretism while scholars of religion call it hybridity. 4. It is a site of common ritual system. Various forms of ritual vows offered at shrines like Our Lady of Health at Vailankannie or Mount Mary Church at Bandra or Shaul Hamid Dargah at Nagore such as offering of facsimile (imitation of various bodily parts) or coconut saplings or shaving of head etc., show that Christians, Hindus and Muslims not only share a common ritual system. Selva Raj's works mentioned above draw our attention to the fact of not only the Hindus who come to Catholic shrines such as Vailankannie or Oriyur to perform rituals and fulfil their vows (in fact he notes that some of the Catholic shrines are frequented more by the Hindus than by Christians) but also the Christian devotees of St. John De Britto who visit famous Hindu deities like Karupasami in the neighboring village. Thus, just as the fulfilling of vows draws Hindus to Christian site and Christians to a Hindu place, such vow-related practices serve as important intersections "for the dialogue not only of rituals and devotees but of sites and deities as well." (Raj 2006: 62) 5. The shared space is fundamentally a liminal space to borrow Victor Turner's idea. In the context of a shared shrine or a religious procession that takes place on a public road, what happens is the temporary suspension of the regular identity of places and peoples. For instance, when the devotees in Vailankannie perform Hindu-like vow rituals of shaving the head and offering coconut saplings, the religious boundaries of what is Christian and what is Hindu is temporarily suspended, transcended or at times violated and as a result, the religious places in question or

the people therein are neither this nor that. A Christian, rolling himself/herself on the ground in the fulfilment of a vow or a Hindu, joining the recitation of the Rosary and partaking in the central Catholic liturgy of the Eucharist is neither strictly Christian nor Hindu. Nor the Christian shrine which receives the offering of a basket of coconuts or/and flowers and gives it back to the devotees as *prasad* is strictly Christian. What prevails over such places and occasions is the loss of homogenous identity. 6. It represents the common heritage and cultural landscape of a given region. Shared religious spaces are characterized by local flavours that manifest themselves in beliefs, practices, performances, rituals, myths, arts and architecture. When we observe the way people discharge their religious beliefs, fulfill their vows, decorate their religious places, adorn their deities and carry out their religious processions, there is hardly any difference among Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Susan Bayly (1989) shows that the Hindu temples, Christian Churches and Muslim dargahs across South India imagine their deities as warriors who would protect them against any impending dangers. Accordingly, temples, churches and dargahs share a common form and structure of public religious processions that display a deity's protective power over a territory. David Mosse (2012), Susan Visvanathan (1993) and Rowena Robison (1998) have also confirmed the prevalence of such situations in Goa, Kerala and in other parts of Tamilnadu. Nathan Katz (2000), too, has shown how the synagogue in Cochin has drawn upon the customs and traditions of the temple for its architecture and ritual repertoire. More often than not, the local traditions and myths consider the local Hindu folk deities and the Christian divinities like Mother Mary as kinsmen and kinswomen as they fulfil a similar function. Hence the common folk among the Christians and Hindus visit each other's sacred sites and

worship the deities of the religious other. Their appreciation and celebration of these deities are also recorded in folk songs prevalent among both Christians and Hindus. The above-mentioned instances point to the existence of a common cultural universe in which religious traditions are embedded, and it is this cultural universe which provides the substratum for the emergence and continuation of shared religious spaces. 7. It is a site of exigencies of human life. What drives the common people to these shared spaces is their existential predicaments of limit or crisis situations. Faced with stalemates in personal lives like the loss of job or a mysterious illness or financial crisis the common people are compelled to seek supernatural interventions and find solution to their life-threatening issue. In such an impasse, contemporary religious subjects make all efforts to overcome their problems by transcending their traditional religious boundaries. Under such circumstances, as Selva Raj notes “the devotee deems cross-religious rituals and pilgrimages as necessary and salutary in the quest for a solution to a human or spiritual crisis or problem” (Raj 2006: 63).

### **Domestic Space as a Shared Religious Space**

People’s allegiance to such deities in the shrines is likely to continue when people install in their homes the statues or pictures of these deities which they have brought from the shrines and add them to the pantheon of domestic deities making a Christian deity become part of the Hindu household or vice versa. The deity that has come into this shared religious space is easily accessible to the veneration of the relatives and visitors to the Hindu household. Shared domestic religious spaces are brought about by default in the context of interfaith marriages. Homes of

such marriages, in most cases, as my study has indicated (James Ponniah, forthcoming), often have interfaith altars invariably transforming their home into inter-religious spaces. Such homes are bound to accommodate beliefs and practices from two different traditions. Such developments become more pronounced and conspicuous at the time of the celebration of the life cycle and other rituals, such as birth, christening, puberty, marriage, death etc., Practice of two faith traditions within a home on such occasions is not always possible without conflicts. However, such conflictual situations in most cases, lead to conversations and consensus among the couples making inter-faith homes more democratic and less structured.

### **The Procession as a Shared Religious Event**

While the above-mentioned spaces, be they public or domestic, enjoy the status of permanent shared religious space, there are other locales that are turned into shared religious spaces temporarily. The public roads during the time of religious procession of famous deities belong to this category. Religious processions are particular displays of religion that lay claim to public space. Just as processions move towards a sacred space of a temple or church or dargah, they make the public spaces en-route sacred as they progress. Transportation of gods through the streets makes public road a sacred ground, though temporarily. When a deity is taken around in procession on a public road, people of different faith traditions not only display deference towards the gods and goddesses of another faith tradition but also go to worship the deity to get blessings. When this takes place, a public road, though temporally, is turned into a shared religious space which functions for a while as an epicentre of multi-faith religious experiences



wherein a Hindu places himself or herself for the *darshan* of a Christian God and vice versa. Religious processions on public roads can invoke both positive and negative reactions from the religious other. In a positive reaction, the religious others place the significance of religious processions within their personal narratives of a deity's benevolence towards them and their family. In a negative reaction the religious others fail to share the rationale of the religious subjects in holding a religious procession. The latter takes place when the state is seen to act in favour of a tradition. For instance, when religious processions take place, the traffic on certain key roads get suspended and the vehicle-routes are diverted to facilitate processions. While such developments point to the state's policy of religious accommodation, they equally help unravel the soft power of religion to turn public places into liminal spaces in which the normal activities of the traffic and other behaviours are suspended in deference to a religious event. When this occurs, negative reactions can come from three camps: i) Internal religious other: opposition to the public religious events or process need not always come from the external religious other. i.e., (i.e., to a Hindu event from Christian groups or to a Muslim event from the Hindus) but from internal religious other, i.e., to a Catholic Christian procession from protestants or to a Pentecostal event from Catholic/Protestant Christians, or to a Sunni Muslim event of Muharram from Shias or to a Saivite religious celebration from Vaishnavites. ii) From communists/atheists/ rationalists: Celebration of religious events in public places and State government's support for the events can also face opposition from such people as communists, atheists and some rationalists who reject God and the influence of religion on society iii) From religious fundamentalists: opposition to such events can also come from religious fanatics who deny the legitimacy of any

religion other than their own to exist in this world. While the third group and their supporters tend to locate the narrative about the religious other within a larger political framework of pseudo-secularism, the second camp indicts the state for its failure to maintain neutrality. While the minorities tend to name this stance of the nation towards the majority as anti-secular, the majority would label the pro-minority stance of the state as pseudo-secular. Such attempts of politicisation of religion which are on the increase in recent years do impact the way the deity of the religious other is perceived and experienced as a source of divine experience.

### **Indian Christian Ashrams as Institutional Shared Spaces**

In addition to the publicly shared spaces, India also has a relatively new phenomenon called institutional shared spaces, namely Indian Christian Ashrams, produced by the mainline churches when they wanted to inculturate or indigenise Christianity in India. The movement of Indian Christian ashrams talked about and experimented with by Indian Christian leaders like K.T. Paul and N.V. Tilak in the 1910s, acquired a more permanent stature with the founding of Christukula (Family of Christ) Ashram by two Protestant Christians, Dr S. Jesudason and Dr E. Forrester-Patón in Tirupattur, about 140 miles southwest of then Madras city 1921. The first Catholic ashram was founded by Brahmachari Rewachand Animananda, also known as Swami Animananda, in Ranchi around 1940. Richard W. Taylor (1977) in his analysis of Indian Christian Ashrams classifies Protestant and Catholic ashrams in India as *khadi* and *kavi* ashrams, respectively. In his view, Protestant ashrams are more oriented toward social service and social transformation, following the Hindu ideal of *karma marga*, whereas Catholic ashrams are dedicated to contemplative and devotional spirituality enjoined in the Hindu ideal of *jnana-bhakti* yoga. However, both ashrams developed “within the

established churches, rather than in opposition to them,” as Helen Ralston (1989: 114) noted. Be that as it may, the practices such as vegetarianism, celibacy, adoption of Hindu symbols, wearing of saffron saris by woman, dhotis, *kurtas* and shawls by men, squatting on the floor during Mass and the chanting of Sanskrit *slokas*, and the incorporation of Hindu rituals, symbols, images, architecture, customs, and other institutional practices into their religious life etc., make these Christian ashrams become visible signs of indigenized Christianity, resembling Hindu monasteries known as *Mutts*. A more detailed description of the Catholic ashrams will prove this point.

To begin with, the chapels in these ashrams are built in the style of a typical Indian Hindu temple. Statues of Jesus, Mary, and other saints like Benedict, Francis of Assisi, etc., would adorn the chapel *gopuram* (towers). The inner sanctum of the chapel would be darkened to resemble the *mula sthanan* (inner sanctum) of a Hindu temple. One of the popular Hindu symbols like an inverted lotus may serve as the altar on which Eucharist can be offered. The Eucharistic liturgy is consciously crafted to incorporate various Hindu symbols and gestures. The sanctuary walls or pillars in the chapels are often dotted with dark triangular niches for little oil lamps (*deepa*). The tabernacle in the sanctuary is likely to be built in the shape of a *linga* or of a miniature temple. In the chapel, there would be a prominent stone cross in an enclosed circle with the symbol "OM" inscribed in the middle. Sanskrit *slokas* from the Vedas and the Upanishads, as well as readings from other Hindu scriptures and the Bible, would be part of their morning, noon, and evening prayers. These prayer services also include popular Hindu rituals such as prostrations or the *arati* (waving of the lamp in front of the tabernacle). In some places like Shantivanam at Thannirpalli near Trichy or Anjali Ashram in Mysore sandal paste is distributed in the morning as the symbol of grace and divinity, *kumkum* (auspicious red powder) at noon as the symbol of the third eye of wisdom, and ashes in the evening as the symbol of the impurities burnt away. *Bhajans* on Jesus – often sung in Sanskrit or Hindi – are

a regular feature in the liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations. The above-mentioned description of an ashram clearly shows that these Catholic Christian Ashrams, while preserving their Catholic identity, have Hindu forms in their art, architecture, inmates' style of life, dietary practices, worship and rituals. Thus they have become both Hindu and Christians spaces with a goal to facilitate Indian Christians to have Christ or God experiences through Hindu forms and frames.

## **The Characteristics of Divine Encounter in Shared Religious Spaces**

*1. Experience of the Divine Other through Darshan:* One of the important characteristics of the divine encounter in South Asia is the act of beholding and touching the deity's image. Known as *darshan*, this mode of encountering the divine power is not only central to South Asian religious life, but it also constitutes the shared religious spaces at the same time. *Darshan* is a reciprocal act, i.e., it involves not only seeing and touching the deity but also being seen and touched by the divine, which results in receiving a blessing from the deity. Thus ringing the bell in the temples or clapping the hands in front of the deity or approaching the deity's image as close as possible in religious processions or establishing contact with the deity's image through physical touch etc.. are all meant to ensure not only that the devotees get the maximum attention of the deity but also that the power of the deity imparted to a devotee is felt as powerfully as possible. It is the possibility of this aspect of the *darshan* that attracts the religious other towards a deity either in a religious site or in procession. The more powerful a deity is in the people's perception, the more diverse constituency of devotees it draws to itself, which in turn makes a religious site a better shared religious space.

In a similar vein, religious processions are meant to take the deity out of the temple or a church into the neighbourhood territories so that the deity's blessings and benevolence are made available to people of all faiths through the act of *darshan*. Thus *darshan* becomes an effective means of encountering the deities of the religious others, deities who reach out to people of other faith traditions and present themselves as kind, benevolent and powerful.

*2. Experience of the Divine through the Material and the Tangible:* It is through the embodied cultural practices that people experience the divine of the religious other. It is true of religious sites both public and domestic, permanent and temporary, the institutional and the popular. For instance, Paul Younger, Selva Raj, Vasudha Narayanan and others in their works on Catholic and other shrines detail how embodied practices and material objects in shared religious sites such as taking a cleansing bath in the sea or tank, rolling around the church, walking on the knees, tying pieces of cloth around tree branches or the flagpole as token of individual wishes, offering of hair at the shrine, offering of baskets with incense sticks, candles and coconuts and the presentation of flower garlands (which are touched to the feet of the image before being returned) etc., are found very commonly not only in Christian shrines as in a Hindu Temple but also in Muslims Dargahs. Many of these characteristic elements of the Christian veneration of Mary and other saints in Catholic churches and shrines play a central role also in Muslim Dargahs as in South Asian Hindu worship. In this regard, Selva Raj observes that "the Catholic system retains the basic principles, idioms, vocabulary, content, and the rubric of the Hindu system" (Raj 2006: 60). These common South Asian or Tamil cultural practices become very powerful means through

which the Tamil Hindus and Christians experience the divine power. It is through the world of material objects and the tangible ritual-based bodily expressions that a Hindu, an otherwise a disinterested outsider to the Christian world of ordered liturgy in the church, becomes an insider and a devotee of a Christian shrine. Luchesi (2008) and others have also discussed how the Catholic churches in Germany, Norway and Switzerland first allowed, then encouraged and facilitated the practice of vernacular Catholicism for the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora. By bringing in Tamil priests and creating Tamil chaplaincy in different places, they not only made the Christian Tamil diaspora feel welcome and took care of their religious needs, but also provided world of hope to the Tamil Hindus as well who regained their access to the divine power through the mediation of Mary and other saints who were part and parcel of their religious life back in their home country. Luchesi (2008) in her work has shown how practices such as going to have a glimpse of the miraculous picture, touching it, lighting candles inside and outside the churches in Kevelaer, are the same both for the Hindus and the Christians as these practices were followed back in their homeland. These religious possibilities provide a new sign of hope for the Tamil Christians and Hindus who were in a state of anxiety, uncertainty and fear in a foreign land as refugees.

*3. Experience of the Divine Other through Ritual Hospitality:* One of the common practices in shared religious space, be it shrine or home or ashram, is providing communal meal to the religious visitors and guests. The practice of the age-old Indian saying 'Atithi Devo Bhava' ('The guest is equivalent to God') is very evident in shared religious space. In the context of shrines, the climax of fulfillment of a vow often culminates in a communal meal served first to the poor, the beggars and the destitutes who are believed to take the place of the deity to whom the

cooked food is offered. This ritual hospitality assumes a special significance in the case of *asanam*. *Asanam* tradition requires that the vow-taker himself/ herself serves the food on banana leaves to a group of thirteen honoured “ritual guests,” who are basically beggars. The climax of this *asanam* is the act of reverse begging. Having served the meal to the “ritual guests” on banana leaves, the principal vow-taker goes on his/her knees in front of each of the thirteen invited beggar guests and begs for a handful of food from each. With the food collected through reverse begging, s/he sits beside the thirteen beggars and eats the ritual meal. Only after the “ritual guests” have been fed to their satisfaction, can family members partake of the “ritual meal.” What interests us in this tradition is that this ritual hospitality not only enables us to treat and encounter the divine in the vulnerable other, but also makes the host to totally identify himself/herself with the poor and the marginal people.

4. *Experience of God as a Consoler of the Afflicted*: One of the important reasons why hundreds and thousands of people go to the shared religious space of the shrines is to get rid of their sorrows and distress. This shared sacred space of shrines provides the afflicted devotees with comfort, motherly care, healing and hope. The experience of the divine power as a solace in these sites is equally shared by Christians, Hindus and Muslims. As South Asian scholars have noted, these shrine-based interreligious experiences point to how the common people see in the image of the divine other the reflection of their own deity’s divine attributes. For instance, they argue that just as Christians consider Blessed Mary as the Mother of God, Hindus understand her as the Divine Mother, which for the common people is unproblematic. ‘The Mother of God’ in Catholicism becomes ‘The Divine Mother’ in Hinduism. According to Annette Wilke (2013), this difference is expressed in two different Tamil words Christians and Hindus use to address Mary. Christians use

*mata* (Mother), whereas Hindus prefer *taye*, a Tamil word meaning ‘divine mother’ which is reserved for goddesses. It is this perception of Mary as *taye* (divine mother) that drives them to the shrines of Mother Mary whom they approach without any hesitation as she cares for those who suffer various forms of ills in life.

5. *Experience of the Divine in the Ordinarity of Life*: Another important characteristic of shared religious space, especially the one produced by religious processions is that it makes it possible to experience God on the streets. It is this availability of the divine presence on the road and in the hustle and bustle of the streets and markets that automatically elicits veneration and deference on the part of the religious others. What is significant about this sacred space is that it produces the experience of the divine other outside the deity’s regular abode (church or temple), namely, in the sacredness of the secular and the ordinary. Religious minded as they are, South Asians spontaneously tend to worship the divine figure who has come out of his/her regular abode on to the streets to visit them in their localities. As the deity on procession is believed to possess enormous power, it enlists the veneration of the onlookers and bystanders who, irrespective of religious traditions, welcome the deity into their area to obtain the blessings.

6. *Encountering the Divine in the ‘Sacredness of the Other’*: Shared religious spaces provide new possibilities to believers to encounter God by inviting them to partake in other’s ideas of the sacred. They make the believers respect and honour the religious sensibilities of the religious others, thereby enabling them to participate in the metaphysics of the religious other’s transcendence. Sharing other’s way of seeing involves sharing other’s way of knowing.



In doing so, shared religious spaces make people accept the differences in religious others. In other words, such developments are capable of mapping out new terrains of interfaith epistemologies and metaphysics.

*7. The Divine in the Intersectional Space:* In the globalised and digitalized world of today, no religious tradition can claim to be totally a sanitized religious space and to remain completely disconnected from the religious world of the other. Whether or not desired or intended, religions are faced with the situations of interactions, exchanges and at times of conversations between them. Religious sensibilities in today's world inform us that there are no religious 'heterotopias,' to borrow from Foucault's views, an autonomous religious space of a tradition that exists totally outside all other religious spaces. It means that today's world is an intersectional space between various religious traditions which are inter-related if not inter-dependent. Religions will do well by realizing their inter-relatedness to serve humanity by synergizing their resources and energies to tackle the issues of poverty, ecology and lack of human dignity in the world. That said, shared religious spaces illustrate an optimism that is predicative of intersectional space in that they embody appreciation, respect and positive outlook the people have towards the religious others and their sacred locales. Tapping the opportunities provided by shared religious spaces, religion can take the optimism of the intersectional space to the next level by addressing the issues and concerns of the people who frequent the shared religious spaces to enhance their well-being.

## Conclusion

In a world like ours wherein fundamentalism, religious bigotry and communal violence are steadily on the increase, the other is seen as a threat. Thus the hope for a peaceful and harmonious human life in our world seems very bleak. To restore humanity's hope we need to identify and acknowledge existing sites of optimism in contemporary times. This article on shared religious spaces has drawn our attention to one such site wherein the others' religious spaces are accepted and their divinities are worshipped, venerated and celebrated. This essay written in honour of Prof. Kurien Kunnumparam whose life and works had profound respect and appreciation for others, their views and ethos is also my humble tribute to an intellectual who stood strongly for peace and harmony between religious traditions of India.

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## **Called to be Free and Joy- ous: The Challenge of Being an Indian Christian Today**

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**Abstract:** Based on Kurien's last book, the author traces the person and theology of Kurien as "Freedom and Joy." The author shows that Kurien was a man of freedom and a larger vision. His commitment to the people was based on a deep and liberating experience of God. Truly, he was a man of joy. A liberated person who could accept and affirm everyone! A human (human, only and fully) and humane person, indeed! He was truly committed to the Church he loved and India, which was his home!

**Keywords:** Kunnumpuram, joy, freedom, Indian Christian.

Prof Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ, one of the most creative Indian theologians, is quite convinced that freedom and joy are essential characteristics of our Christian existence. This article, meant to pay homage to a creative Indian theologian, founder of *Jnana-Deepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* and author of more than 20 books explores the basic content of his final book, *Freedom and Joy*, which, I believe, characterises his own life!

We first familiarise ourselves with the person of Kunnumpuram. Then we focus on his understanding of freedom as essential to every Christian. This is followed by his appraisal of joy, the core experience of a Christian, in spite of all the suffering we experience. Then we briefly dwell on Kurien as a creative thinker and eminent theologian. Then we focus on freedom and joy as the essential features of being a Christian in today's world. We conclude by affirming the creative contribution of Kurien to the Indian Church in the light of Vatican II.

## **1. The Person: Indian Pioneer of Vatican II Reform**

Prof Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ (1931-2018) is no more physically present with us. He completed his PhD on Second Vatican Council from the University of Innsbruck, Austria, in 1968, just three years after Vatican II. The next year he joined Papal Seminary Community, teaching at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth and remained here till 2013. This means he has spent half of his years (44 years out of 87) in Pune. On September 25, 2018, he was admitted in the hospital in a coma state, due to a blood clot in the brain. Sadly, after 29 days in a coma, he breathed his last on October 23, 2018.

He is an eminent thinker and creative theologian. He started the journal *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* in 1998. He worked as editor of *Asian journal for Religious Studies* for more than ten years. Through both the journals, he has been attempting to promote an Indian Christian theology, which is rooted in the rich Indian tradition and the deep Christian heritage. He was the first editor of *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, published by Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. Author of more than 20 books in areas of Church (Ecclesiology), Anthropology and Spirituality, he has contributed significantly to theologising in the Indian context. On 17-18, October 2018 a seminar was organised in Kozhikode, to honour his contribution to Indian theologising, where more than 40 participants studied 18 papers and explored the adventurous journey of a Christian.

One of the creative and significant Indian theologians, Kurien's last book, aptly titled "Freedom and Joy"<sup>1</sup> signifies his own life. As you know, Gandhi, dared to say, "my life is my message." Kurien would not really make that claim, but his life came very close to the message of this book. He is quite convinced that freedom and joy are essential characteristics of our Christian existence. As the pioneer who introduced the reforms of Vatican II to the Indian situation in general and Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, in particular, he had a tremendous impact on the new understanding of the Indian Church.

He, along with Francis D'Sa and George Soares-Prabhu, belonged to the second generation of theology professors at JDV, who brought about the emphasis on freedom (liberation theology) and Indian orientation (inculturation) in the campus.<sup>2</sup> Further, as you know, he followed the footsteps of great personalities like Scripture scholar Fr Francis Pereira SJ (1931-2014), liturgist Fr Lorenzo Fernando (1947-2017) and Indian philosopher Fr Noel Sheth SJ (1943-2017). They tried to promote an ambience of freedom, transparency and joy in the campus and theological thinking.

## 2. Freedom of the Children of God

After a careful investigation of the Kingdom of God which was central to the life and ministry of Jesus, the great Scripture scholar George Soares-Prabhu has concluded that Jesus was the supreme example of the freedom of the Kingdom of God. Soares-

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1 Kunnumpuram, Kurien. *Freedom and Joy: Reflections on the Essential Characteristics of Christian Life Today*, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune and Christian World Imprints, New Delhi, pp. 177+viii, ₹ 325/- ISBN: 977-93-5148-320-5. Most of the quotes are from this book. See also Fr Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ Passed Away | Papal Seminary, Pune, <http://www.papalseminary.in/2018/10/25/1202-fr-kurien-kunnumpuram-sj-passed-away> (accessed July 14, 2019).

2 The first generation being Fr Lionel Mascarenhas, Fr Carlos D'Mello SJ and Fr Joe Miranda SJ.

Prabhu states: “Jesus moves through the pages of the Gospel as the supremely free man. He is driven by no demons of greed or ambition – for the Son of Man “has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58) and has come “not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45). He is daunted neither by the pressures of heteronomous law (Jn 8:1-10) nor by the violence of established authority (Lk 13:31-33). With supreme freedom, he challenges the most sacred institutions of his people when his concern for his fellowmen urges him to do so. He breaks the Sabbath (Mk 7:1-15), touches lepers (Mk 1:42), dines with the socially outcast and with sinners (Mk 2:15-17).”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus’ mission was to liberate people. He said that the Spirit of the Lord “has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Lk 4:18). Jesus frees human beings from sin and guilt (Mk 2:1-12). He frees us from the routine of ritualism (Mt 6:7) and the oppressive burden of the law (Mt 11:28-3 and 23:4). He liberates us from the terrible isolation to which we can be condemned by social ostracism (Lk 19:1-10), ritual uncleanness (Mk 1:40-45) or mental ill-health (Mk 5:1-21). He calls his followers to freedom from possessions (Mk 10:16-18; 10:21) and unhealthy family ties (Lk 9:61). He invites them to put all their trust in God so that they need no other security in life (Mt 6:25-34).

As a result of his personal encounter with Jesus, Paul exclaims: “For freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1).

In 2013 Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* affirms: “God’s mercy has willed that we should be free”. Kurien will agree with it fully. So Kunnumpuram reminds us of the powerful words of St Paul: “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters” (Gal 5:13). This call, issued many centuries ago, is most timely today.

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3 See Fr Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ Passed Away | Papal Seminary, Pune, <http://www.papalseminary.in/2018/10/25/1202-fr-kurien-kunnumpuram-sj-passed-away> (accessed July 14, 2019).



### 3. The Joy of Being a Christian

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, an angel of the Lord told the shepherds: "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" (Lk 2: 10). In the gospel of Mark, Jesus begins his public ministry by proclaiming the good news that the Kingdom of God has come (Mk 1:14-15). Now joy is one of the fruits of the Kingdom (Rom 14:17). Towards the end of his ministry, Jesus declared: "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11). After a careful examination of the life and ministry of Jesus, Kurien finds Albert's conclusion relevant: "Joy was, in fact, the most characteristic result of all Jesus' activity amongst the poor and the oppressed. The meals he had with them were festive celebrations, parties. Jesus, obviously, had a way of ensuring that people enjoyed themselves at the gatherings. This scandalised the Pharisees. Rejoicing and celebrating with sinners was incomprehensibly scandalous (Lk 15:1). They could only assume that he had become a pleasure-seeker, 'a drunkard and a glutton' (Lk 7:34)."

Jesus tried to explain this joy and this celebration to the Pharisees by telling them three parables: The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son (Lk 15). It is highly significant that each of these parables ends with joy and celebration. When the shepherd finds his lost sheep, he calls together his friends and neighbours and celebrates with them. And Jesus adds: "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk 15:6-7). Something similar happens when the woman finds her silver coin, which was lost. (15:9-10).

The last parable is extremely significant. After listening to the parable, one wonders: Who is the lost son? The younger son who went away from the Father and lived riotously with his women? Or the elder son, who, as a true Pharisee, kept the law most faithfully? The younger son was able to receive God's forgiving love, rejoice in it and celebrate it. But the elder son was not able to

do so. So, he is really the lost son! To quote Nolan once again: “There can be no doubt that Jesus was a remarkably cheerful person and that his joy like his faith and hope was infectious... The poor and the oppressed and anyone else who was not too hung up on ‘respectability’ found the company of Jesus a liberating experience of sheer joy”.

Pope Francis points out that the whole Bible speaks of joy. Jesus himself “rejoiced in the Spirit” (Lk 10:21). He promises his disciples: “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (Jn 16:20). Then he adds: “But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (Jn 16:22). The disciples “rejoiced” at the sight of the risen Lord. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the first Christians “ate their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46). Because of the preaching of Philip and the miracles he worked “there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:8). The newly baptized eunuch “went on his way rejoicing” (8:39), while Paul’s jailer and his household “rejoiced that he had become a believer in God” (Acts 16:34).

Similarly, Pope Francis points out that the whole Bible speaks of joy. Jesus himself “rejoiced in the Spirit” (Lk 10:21).

#### **4. Creative Thinker and Critical Writer**

He certainly was one of the best and most eminent theologians of India. He has written scores of books and many theological articles based on research. His thinking and writings were marked by originality and creativity. He was bold in his thinking. Certainly, he remained within the faith of the Catholic Church, which was shaped by his study of the documents of Vatican II. His own doctoral thesis on the document of Second Vatican Council. He certainly was one of the best read persons on Second Vatican Council. He would profusely quote and refer to the documents of Second Vatican Council. It is he who helped the student body and staff members in Papal Seminary and Jnanadeepa Vidyapeeth to get more and more acquainted with Second

Vatican Council. He certainly was an epoch in the history of the Catholic Church. I would say, he has greatly shaped, fashioned and impacted by Second Vatican Council, which opened the doors of the Church to the world.

*Gaudium et Spec* guided him to take the realities of the world seriously, with its hopes and dreams. This is how Kurien pursued his theological thinking and writing. Courageously, boldly and in the light of Second Vatican Council.

Fr Kurien, apart from being our friend, was an eminent theologian, a skilled writer and a good formator.

Through the two journals he has been editing and more than 20 books he has written, he has impacted the theological life of Indian Christianity. The six Volumes of the Collected Works of Samuel Rayan he has edited have been remarkably influential in fostering a climate of freedom, responsibility and dignity.

At a personal level: He and I lived in the Papal Seminary for many long years. I can assert that even when I was a student and later as a staff that Kurien became the rallying point for the seminarians. The seminarians will turn to him in moments of difficulty. Kurien was always welcome them and make himself available to them. They trusted him, felt supported and encouraged by him. I could see that they loved him and they were very fond of him. So I would say Fr Kurien was a good formator in the seminary for the generations of priests in the modern world, after Second Vatican Council.

I thank God for the person, the theologian and the formator that Fr Kurien was. He was a creative thinker, an innovative guide and a courageous dreamer. He certainly was a gift to the church in India and in his way to the Universal Church.

## **Conclusion: Empowering Presence**

These reflections based on Kurien's last book aptly entitled, "Freedom and Joy," published by Christian World Imprints,

was released on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018 in a gathering of about 45 Christian thinkers, at SRC, Kozhikode, Kerala. They came together to reflect on the creative contribution that Prof Kurien Kunnumpuram to the Indian Church. Prof Kunnumpuram was then in a coma after a stroke and fall at Kozhikode. A few days later, on October 23, 2018, he breathed his last. May his soul rest in peace! May his vision of a Christian who is both free and joyous! And of an Indian who is truly open to other cultures and religions.

This experience of the joy of the first Christians should inspire all of us to find great joy in our Christian life. Unfortunately, according to Pope Francis, “there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter”. Some of them walk through life as though they are taking part in a perennial funeral procession. Kurien reminds us of Pope Francis who invites Christians everywhere “to a renewed encounter with Jesus Christ”. For “with Christ, joy is constantly born anew.”

The freedom and joy that Kurien experienced and radiated make him an enabling, encouraging and empowering presence among us. He could accept and affirm everyone with their differences and unique qualities. It is because of persons like him that at Papal Seminary and Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, we can experience an atmosphere of freedom, joy and fellowship. Inspired by him, may we all become free and loving persons: enabling, encouraging and empowering each other, by accepting and affirming each one of us. In spite of our weakness, differences and inabilities!

In spite of his limitations, Kurien was a man of freedom and of a larger vision. His commitment to the people was based on a deep and liberating experience of God. Truly, he was a man of JOY. A liberated person, who could accept and affirm everyone! A human (human, only and fully) and humane person, indeed! He was truly committed to the Church he loved and India, which was his home!

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# Kurien Kunnumpuram in Wikipedia

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

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

## God: The Deepest Human Longing

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

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

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

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

## **The Church: A Divine-Human Reality**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **The Church: Its Vision and Mission**

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

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