

jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

Genuinely Christian, Truly Indian

Volume 24/1

January-June 2020

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune

www.jdv.edu.in

Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies

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Jnanadeepa ("Light of Wisdom" pronounced as *Gyanadeepa*) is a biannual interdisciplinary journal of religious studies from Indian Christian perspectives. It is closely associated with Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune 411 014, India.

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

All **correspondence** (requests for subscriptions, manuscripts, books for review-two copies, please exchange copies of journals, advertisements, etc.) to:

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Subscriptions could be sent from India either by Money Order or demand Draft. From foreign countries International Money Order or Crossed Cheque is preferred. From Commonwealth countries British Postal Order is preferred. All payments (Cheque, drafts, etc. are to be made in the name of *Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth*.

Typeset & Print: JDV Computer Centre

Publisher: Kuruvilla Pandikattu for
Jnana Deepa Publications.

Subscription Rates

<i>Country</i>	<i>One Year</i>	<i>Three Years</i>
India	₹ 250	₹ 600
SAARC Countries	₹ 300	₹ 750
Other Countries (Air Mail)	\$ 25 (€ 25)	\$ 55 (€ 55)
Institutional Rate	\$ 50 (€ 45)	\$ 110 (€ 110)



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Editorial:

Genuinely Christian and Truly Indian

How does the Church relate to the larger world? What is the relationship between the “spiritual” Church and the “political” country? For a Christian there is a necessary connection (though not identification) between worldly progress and the ushering in of the salvation that Jesus has brought about. So commitment to the country and devotion to the Church has to go hand in hand. There can never be real tension between the two, as illustrated in the life, writings and vision of Prof Kurien Kunnumpuram, an eminent Post Vatican Council thinker.

So these articles explore the creative relationship between the Church and the country.

A church in India is in need of continual metanoia, freed from clericalism with its legalism, authoritarianism and centralization. Dr Paulose Mangai, Vidyajyoti School of Theology, New Delhi, pleads for a Church, led by the Holy Spirit and enters into creative dialogue with political, economic and cultural factors of the nation. This needs a radical conversion, a continual metanoia, leading to a way of the beatitude.

Based mystical convergence between the Hindu advaita and Christian theosis, Dr Sebastian Painadath, Sameeksha, Kalady, pleads for a Church that is enculturated and fully at home in the Indian soil. That is a Church that draws from the rich heritage of Indian religiosity, both in its classical and subaltern diversities.

The next article talks of the leaders of the church as servants, based on Kurien's book *Called to Serve*. PT Mathew, Professor (Emeritus), Vidyajyoti School of Theology, New Delhi, deals with the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions of priestly formation.

Dr VM Jose SJ, Moral and Pastoral Theology, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, pleads for a genuine encounter with God which is both liberative and social. Based on such life-transforming experience, the Church should create spaces for critical reflection, spaces where poor people can meet and reflect about God's presence in their concrete situations. Also these spaces should be places of communion among equals, where real participation is lived out. These spaces should be witness of God's presence among the people, a presence of communion, equality and "new creation".

Love of the neighbour is the core Christian experience. So for them authentic human existence following the axiom of St. Irenaeus "*Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei*," Dr Mariapushpam Paulraj, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, affirms that Christian freedom and the consequent life in the Spirit needs to be expressed through love of neighbour which replaces law and fulfils it at the same time.

For Kunnumpuram, the Church is the home for all people and religions. As he acknowledges the salvific meaning of other religions, he encourages Christians to appreciate the positive values in those religions. Therefore, Anoop Anto MSMI, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, attempts to respond to Kunnumpuram's understanding of salvation in post-Council documents, knowing well that the Second Vatican Council articulated a paradigm shift in the church's self-understanding and her relationship with the people of other faiths.

The next article by Dr Nishant Irudayadason, Systematic Philosophy, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, analysis of collective praxis both in terms of conflict and co-operation is done so as to invite the readers to the constant need to be open to

new possibilities of appropriating the praxis of Jesus in changing times and contexts.

The proceeding article talks of the essentially relational nature of Christian life, including our understanding of the life and message of Christ. It asks the question: How does Jesus help the Christians in India in healing their own brokenness and guide the Church to respond to the existential brokenness in India? The first part deals the brokenness in the Indian Christian community in terms of her identity, her social existence and in the life of the Church leaders. The second part provides theological foundations for interrelatedness in the world. In the third part, Ghattamaneni Malleswararao, Systematic Theology, JDV, Pune, deals with Relational Jesus of the Gospels. Finally, he derives some social and ecclesial implications of the relational paradigm of Jesus for Christians in India.

The final article elaborates on Kurien's commitment to the Church and the country. As we all know Kunnumpuram was a person passionately devoted to the Church and the Nation. He was rooted in the rich heritage of India and that of the Church. He embraced the values, vision and ethos of India and the Church. He felt fully at home in the Indian culture and Christian fellowship. His was truly a life of devotion to the country and commitment to the Church. So the challenge to the Indian Christians to be both good citizens and committed Christians! They have to live lives of creative tensions and concrete fidelity!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ

Editor



To Be a Relevant and Responsive Church: The Indian Church in Need of Liberation from Clericalism

Poulose Mangai SJ

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Abstract: Prof Kurien Kunnumpuram's dream for a Church was radical and his thinking and teaching were both marked by sound learning, lucidity, rigour, solidity and depth. He wanted to see the reformatory process of the church initiated by the Second Vatican Council more fully realized in the life and practice of the church in India. With this aim and focus, he taught and wrote with passion and commitment. His theological writings aimed at the radical renewal of the church, the Indian church in particular, in its internal life and organization and also in its mission ad extra. He knew that without such renewal, the church would increasingly become irrelevant for the Indian people. Only a transformed church could read and relevantly respond to the signs of the times. This ecclesial and ecclesiological passion of Kunnumpuram is behind the choice of the topic of this essay in his honour. Then he elaborates on the challenges before the Indian Church, including the evil of clericalism. He pleads for a Church, led by the Holy Spirit and enters into creative dialogue with political, economic and cultural factors of the

nation. This needs a radical conversion, a continual metanoia, leading to a way of the beatitude.

Keywords: Indian church, clericalism, dialogue, metanoia, beatitude.

Introduction

I consider it a privilege to be invited to contribute to this festschrift that felicitates Prof. Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ, an accomplished theologian and passionate teacher. As a visiting professor he taught two ecclesiological courses—*theology of the church* and *theology of the magisterium*—at Vidyajyoti, Delhi in the years I was an undergraduate student of theology. As a professor he commanded the respect of all students. His thinking and teaching were both marked by sound learning, lucidity, rigour, solidity and depth. He wanted to see the reformatory process of the church initiated by the Second Vatican Council more fully realized in the life and practice of the church in India. With this aim and focus, he taught and wrote with passion and commitment. The conferences he gave as well as his theological writings aimed at the radical renewal of the church, the Indian church in particular, in its internal life and organization and also in its mission *ad extra*. He knew that without such renewal, the church would increasingly become irrelevant for the Indian people. Only a transformed church could read and relevantly respond to the signs of the times. This ecclesial and ecclesiological passion of Kunnumpuram is behind the choice of the topic of this essay in his honour.

The Challenges before the Indian Church

Dehumanizing poverty and iniquitous distribution of economic resources, caste-based social organization and all

attendant evils, and difficulties involved in proclaiming the gospel in a multi-cultural and pluri-religious environment are some of the perennial challenges before the church in India. There have been substantial reflections on how the church may face these challenges as it carries forward the mission Christ has entrusted to it. In recent times the church has come face to face with some other intimidating challenges. I have in mind some explosive developments during the past two or three years—developments which had been for a long time waiting to erupt. These include, *inter alia*, the more recent accusations and reports of i) irregularities in the administration of the temporal goods of the church, in which the accused included members of the episcopate, ii) sexual exploitation of minors and vulnerable adults by clerics, and iii) legal proceedings, which led to the arrest and judicial confinement in jail, against a bishop accused of repeatedly raping a senior religious woman.

These issues revealed not only the personal failures of the priests, bishops and religious involved but also—and this is more serious—the inability of the church-system in India to deal with these and derived issues in a pro-active, fair, transparent, prompt, effective, and dignified manner. Often the authorities involved either sought to take refuge in their not having ‘canonical powers’ or tried to push the ball into someone else’s court. Can we say that the authorities saw these happenings merely as canonical-legal cases? The church failed miserably and also in public view, thereby, taking a nosedive in its credibility as an effective organization and a public moral voice. It all pointed to a vacuum of moral and spiritual leadership in the Indian church. To some extent the church became the laughing stock of the people of this country.

Ordinary believers, lay people of goodwill, were shattered by these happenings. They felt let down, hurt and disillusioned. These developments also raised doubts in their minds about the faith—practical and also doctrinal and theological doubts. Can we believe our bishops, priests and religious when they teach us religion and morality? They seem to be teaching what they themselves don't practise. Maybe they don't believe in what they teach? The church authorities were reactive in their approach to the problems. The victims in these cases did not get the compassionate support and understanding that they deserved from the church of Christ. Apparently there were also attempts to shoot the whistle-blowers. Was it that the authorities were flummoxed and overwhelmed, and did not know what to do?

Financial irregularities, sexual exploitation of minors and vulnerable adults, accusation of rape of a senior religious woman by a bishop, absence of a fair and effective system to deal with such cases are real issues that need to be addressed. But there is a deeper issue which underlies all these and many other issues. That is clericalism.

The Evil of Clericalism

Writing mainly in the context of the media reports of widespread sexual abuse of children by clergy in many countries and the way the ecclesiastical authorities dealt (or did not deal) with the issue, a Jesuit journalist of India explains what clericalism is all about. It is “the sense of entitlement, the lack of accountability, and the arrogance of power. It is the smug awareness that ‘whatever I do, no one can touch me.’ It is this attitude seemingly held by the clergy and the upper echelons of power, as though they belong

to a superior caste, which lies at the heart of this sickness.” He also referred to the “corrupt system of governance” in the church that “can weaken and even destroy the very fabric of the Church.”¹

A 1983 Report submitted to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) in the United States offers a fairly detailed analysis of the phenomenon of clericalism in the church, especially in the United States.² It gives a working definition of clericalism “as the conscious or unconscious concern to promote the particular interests of the clergy and to protect the privileges and power that have traditionally been conceded to those in the clerical state.”³ It has “attitudinal, behavioral and institutional dimensions.” The Report lists its main manifestations: “an authoritative style of ministerial leadership, a rigidly hierarchical world view, and a virtual identification of the holiness and grace of the Church with the clerical state and, thereby, with the cleric himself.” Even though one cannot altogether exclude religious men and women and lay people from its stranglehold, it is basically a problem among the members of the ordained clergy. However, the Report points out that clericalism is not a necessary consequence of priesthood but its diminishment and distortion.⁴

Seán McNully understands clericalism as “the abuse of clerical power with regard to the people of God” and compares it to “the iceberg of which pedophilia is the tip. Exercising sexual power over minors is a small part of the larger abuse of exercising inappropriate power over the whole people of God.”⁵ McNully is speaking from the context of the Catholic church in Ireland. He considers that the issue is not only the personal and professional failures of individuals but also systemic. John J. Dubay brings a psychological component to the phenomenon of clericalism

when he says that “clericalism for many is an addictive way of life.”⁶ Addiction controls the life of the victim who in turn becomes powerless. The victim is not willing to give up addiction and make his/her life richer and fuller. The victim is even unable to see the reality—the elephant in the room—and opposes whoever speaks the truth and exposes the reality.⁷ However, the addiction of clericalism is not to be seen as having affected only individuals. McNully and Dubay both agree that the problem is more of a systemic nature. Such a system tends to defend itself always, seeks to control its members and demands compliance from them, tends to dehumanize those who make up the system and even affects their ethical integrity.⁸

Pope Francis is deeply aware of the evil of clericalism in the church, which he denounces at every available opportunity. In *Evangelii gaudium* he wrote:

Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God. The minority—ordained ministers—are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith. At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making (no. 102).

The pope knows that clericalism tries “to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the People of God to small elites” and the results is that “we end up creating communities,

projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives.” The pope says that this is manifest “in a peculiar way of understanding the Church’s authority, one common in many communities where sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience have occurred.” This is the problem with clericalism, “an approach that ‘not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people.’” He continues: “Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism.”⁹

Clericalism does not fully explain the sex abuses in the church and the disinclination of the authorities to deal with them as justice demands. But it is definitely a major contributing factor. The sexual predators of innocent children exploit the power and trust they command as ‘sacred persons’. Because of the culture of clericalism the bishops and religious superiors easily identify with the priest-predators rather than the abused children and their families.

Reflecting on the phenomenon of clericalism in the church, Jose Puthenveed points out: “Clericalism may command a superficial deference, but it blocks honest human communication and ultimately leaves the cleric practicing it isolated.”¹⁰ He also highlights how it negatively affects the Bishop-Priests relationship in the local church:

A bishop caught up in a clerical mode of functioning seldom enjoys the kind of fraternal relationship with his priests that both he and they need in order to meet the draining needs of pastoral care and to assuage the burden of loneliness inherent to celibacy. Episcopal clericalism often finds expression as arrogance and at times as pompous arrogance in an unconscious manner.”¹¹

Needless to say that the adverse consequences of the breakdown of normal bishop-clergy relationship are quite damaging for the unity of the local church, for its liturgical life, for its pastoral care of the faithful, and for its mission in the world.

Clericalism is a lie. Its source is not in Jesus Christ, nor in his gospel of God’s reign. It is an undesirable intrusion from a culture alien to the message of Jesus. The culture of clericalism is directly and destructively opposed to priesthood, both the ministerial priesthood of the ordained and the common priesthood of all the faithful. It also contradicts the true nature of the church. In order to liberate the church from the stranglehold of clericalism, it is important that we capture the true essence of the church.

True Nature of the Church

In order to be relevant and responsive, the life and practice of the church must always be true to its origin and at the same time creatively attentive to the needs of the time. The church being a community of fallible men and women, false developments and accruals are always possible. Therefore, it is imperative not to idolize the church in its phenomenological concretions. We must refrain from defining its nature from how it actually appears in history. The church has a fundamental nature, which is not its own

making but received. Every structure, every system, which is in vogue in the church must be tested against its authentic nature.

Some fundamental elements and perspectives are given to the church at its decisive origins in Jesus Christ and in the apostolic community created and guided by the Spirit of the risen Christ. However, the nature of the church may not be understood statically but in a dynamic sense. The church expresses itself in varying forms and shapes across geographical and cultural differences and over time. The nature of the church is permanent but the historical forms are not. These varying forms and shapes must, however, be in dynamic congruence with the evolving nature of the church. Without this congruence, the church will lack authenticity and fail in its mission to be a prophetic witness to and an efficacious instrument of the saving work of Christ today. The historical church has always been wanting in this regard, even in the apostolic times as is evident in the NT epistles. Heresy, disunity, corruption and manipulation have always been present in the church, sometimes to a lesser degree and sometimes to a greater degree. The holy people of God, whether of the first covenant or of the second covenant, has always been sinful and rebellious and so in need of purification, renewal and reform. To renew itself, while remaining true to its authentic nature, the church must constantly return to its origin, its source.

The foundation of the church is in the concrete act of God's saving work in Jesus Christ. The church is of the Lord in its origin and must always be. The NT gives different images of the church with different emphases, tensions and at times mutually conflicting. The NT church was not a perfect church. In fact a perfect church never existed in history. The message of the NT continues to be

the criterion to judge the church today and at any time. The *raison d'être* of the church is its mission to continually proclaim the message of Jesus to itself and to the world. The NT message and tradition have to be re-read and re-interpreted critically from the living context of the people of God and according to the signs of the times. The rereading and the re-interpretation must be done always in the light of Christ's Spirit, who is a living reality within the church. It is the Spirit who sustains the church in the truth of Christ.

To save the church as church calls for a new vision of the church, a new way of being church. Contemporary efforts at the renewal of the church calls for a retrieval of the pneumatological ecclesiology implicit in the NT.

A Church that Lives from the Spirit

The church had its beginning in the Pentecostal Spirit. The birth, the growth and the expansion of the church has been in the power of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit constitutes the church, animates it and guides its course. Referring to St. Paul, *Lumen Gentium* says, "The Spirit dwells in the church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple" (LG 4; cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). The Spirit constitutes individuals as Christians and the church as the community of faith, hope and love. Apart from the Spirit nobody is a Christian, and apart from the Spirit there is no church. The NT presents the church as a Spirit-filled community on a missionary pilgrimage. The church journeys as a fellowship of Christ in the power of the Spirit. This is our faith, which is true today just as it was in the NT times.

The Spirit empowers Christians, through manifold charisms, to participate in the life and work of the church. Jürgen Moltmann points out:

Every charisma is both gift and charge. ... The Spirit descends upon the talents and potentialities which an individual possesses and activates them for the kingdom of God, for the liberation of the world. ... Through the Spirit the whole of life—a person's profession, his political responsibilities, his relationships in the family, ...—is taken possession of by Christ and quickened for the liberation of the world. ... Charismatically, the whole people of God is involved religiously, politically and socially in the all-embracing liberation movement of God.¹²

The vitality of the church depends on the charismatic gifts the Spirit showers on its members. But we are aware how ecclesiastical structures and personnel can either promote or discourage the charisms of the faithful, from the parochial level to the level of the universal church. It grieves the Spirit when the many and varied charisms that the Spirit generously bestows on people are not allowed to mature and bear fruits in the church. Fostering the varied charisms of Christ's faithful is a sacred duty of the pastors in the church. Cardinal Suenens stated in the aula of the Vatican II:

Pastors must make efforts to hear out with open heart, and again and again enter into living dialogue with laymen who, each and every one of them, is enriched with his own charismatic gifts, and most often has a greater experience in the life of today's world. ... The complex of charismatic gifts and ministries cannot actually build up the church, or serve the church, except in the liberty of the sons of God, which after the example of St. Paul every pastor ought to protect—and also promote.¹³

Wherever in the church honest efforts are made to promote the charisms of Christ's faithful and to bring them to fruition in the church's life and mission, we can affirm the dynamic presence of the Spirit, who animates the church.

The Spirit guides the church not only through its pastors but also through its prophets. When prophets are silenced, the Spirit who is the source of prophecy is stifled. Paul cautions us against disregarding the gift of prophecy. “Do not stifle the Spirit or despise the gift of prophecy with contempt; test everything and hold onto what is good and shun every form of evil” (1Thess 5:19-22). Prophecy directs the church to repentance of hearts, to renewal of structures and to new experiences and adventures. A church that looks at whatever is different from the already known with suspicion and decides to suppress it without testing seeks its security not in the Spirit but in its structures and establishments.

The Spirit given to us is not of slavery but of freedom. The Spirit frees us from all sorts of fear—fear of one another, fear of the new, fear of changes. The Spirit helps us to open ourselves to new experiences, welcome one another and test one another’s views. Such an environment is possible only when we trust in the Spirit’s abiding and enlivening presence in the church and in its members. An environment of trust and freedom in the church is a clear sign of the living presence of the Spirit. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (1 Cor 3:17). Reflecting on “The Indian Church of the Future” Kurien Kunnumpuram writes:

The Indian Church of the future will be a community of radical freedom. Freedom is one of the parameters of the Kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed. ... One important aspect of freedom is the freedom to express one’s views fearlessly and frankly. ... Today the most effective way of arriving at truth while respecting the freedom and dignity of the faithful is through honest dialogue. And the pastors of the Church have a duty to foster it. ... The Church of the people will be a participative community. All the faithful will have a say in the making of decisions in the Church.¹⁴

The Spirit liberates us from servile submission to law equipping us to follow the law of the Spirit in freedom. The freedom the believers experience in the church is a measure of the freedom the church grants to the Spirit in it.

The freedom of the children is not an antinomian licence. It is a freedom for righteousness. Those who are guided by the Spirit are free. Those who are not, are slaves to self-indulgence and do not inherit the life of the kingdom of God (cf. Gal. 5:18-23). The Spirit dwells in us, makes us God's children. The Spirit infuses a new and fuller life into us today, liberating us from the slavery of self-indulgence to the freedom of God's sons and daughters. Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth: "Do you not realise that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you and whom you received from God?" (1 Cor 6:19). We live by the Spirit; so we ought to walk by the Spirit. The Spirit leads us out of enslaved service to law to a new service, that of the Spirit (cf. Rom 7:6; 8:2). The law of the Spirit is love which does not enslave us but, on the contrary, empowers us.

The Spirit moves our freedom to noble acts of love and we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice dedicated and acceptable to God (cf. Rom 12:1). The Spirit of God invites us and the church to be vehicles of freedom and justice. Guided by the Spirit, the church participates in the liberation of men and women from all that enslaves them. It participates in the struggles of the poor and oppressed for life and bread. The discerning church is able to recognise the movements within the church which affirm the freedom, equality and dignity of marginalized groups and classes as vehicles of the Spirit's action. Jürgen Moltmann says, "The community of Christ is a community of free and equal people (Gal. 3.28f.), who in the charismatic diversity of their gifts and vocations live with one another and for one another, and in

the unity of the Holy Spirit together serve the kingdom of God in the world.”¹⁵

Towards the Future

Even though Vatican II did not explicitly speak about clericalism in its documents, the bishops were aware of the reality of this evil entrenched in the pre-conciliar church and its theology, and wanted to liberate the church from its stranglehold. The conciliar vision of the church offers the basics for a shift towards a de-clericalized church, though in a seminal form. Accordingly, our focus must shift from the church as a hierarchical institution to the more democratic concept of the church as the people of God. In this vision, the church is a sacrament of the reign of God in the world. It is the privilege of the church to be at the service of God’s reign.

In order to avoid the pitfall of clericalism, it is important that priests understand, embrace and live out servant-leadership after the example of the Son of Man who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). The church hierarchy must embrace the spirit of Jesus’ servant-leadership and get rid of every image that is contrary to the servant-shepherd image of Christ. “Priesthood is not about your status, but about serving people by proclaiming the good news and attending to their religious needs, and the commitment to and solidarity with the poor or oppressed.”¹⁶ The church is a humble servant of the people of the world and so are its leaders. Kunnumpuram lays much emphasis on this gospel ideal of leadership and authority as service and its special significance in the Indian society and culture:

Ours is a country in which the priestly caste has for centuries oppressed and dominated over the Dalits. It is also a country where the rich and the powerful have been exploiting the poor and making them totally powerless. As a prophetic community, the Indian church needs to raise her voice in protest against the abuse of power and authority in the secular society. One way to make its protest credible is precisely to ensure that in the Church there is no place for power and domination over people. This calls for a return to the gospel ideal of leadership.¹⁷

What does such leadership style enjoin upon the bishop? *Pastores Gregis* has some indications:

This requires of the Bishop an attitude of service marked by personal strength, apostolic courage and trusting abandonment to the inner working of the Spirit. He will therefore strive to adopt a lifestyle which imitates the *kenosis* of Christ, the poor and humble servant, so that the exercise of his pastoral ministry will be a consistent reflection of Jesus, the Servant of God, and will help him to become, like Jesus, close to everyone, from the greatest to the least. ...

... Unless the episcopal office is based on the witness of a holiness manifested in pastoral charity, humility and simplicity of life, it ends up being reduced to a solely functional role and, tragically, it loses credibility before the clergy and the faithful.¹⁸

What is spoken of the bishop here applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the priests as well. As *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO) says, priests are consecrated, set apart, for the work of God. They are witnesses to Him and “dispensers of a life other than that of this earth” (no. 3). However, as the document says a little later, they are, “together with all Christ’s faithful, disciples of the Lord, made sharers in his Kingdom by the grace of God’s call. For priests are brothers among brothers and sisters with all those who have been

reborn at the baptismal font. They are all members of one and the same Body of Christ, the building up of which is required of everyone” (no. 9).

The church must increasingly become the dialoguing church envisioned by the council. In the very introduction, *Gaudium et spes* expresses the desire of the church to enter into dialogue with the world on all problems faced by humanity (cf. *GS*, 3). The council promotes dialogue as an ordinary way of the church in its inner life and in its external relationships. The church cannot promote the spirit of dialogue in the world for resolving conflicts, advancing common good, and strengthening human solidarity unless it promotes the same spirit in its inner life (cf. *GS*, 92). Within the church, the Council desires dialogue between the younger and older generations (cf. *AA*, 12), among laypeople (cf. *GS*, 43), between priests and people (cf. *AA*, 25), and between the bishop and the priests (cf. *CD*, 28). The priests must be willing to listen to the people whom they serve. The council recommends that young Christians and seminarians be adequately trained for dialogue (cf. *GE*, 1; *OT*, 19).

It is important that the laity claim its legitimate space in the ecclesial affairs. Myron Pereira suggests that bishops “share power and leadership with lay people.” He feels that “lay Catholics should be welcomed, not as an ad hoc response to the current crisis but as a fundamental structural support for a fully synodal Church.”¹⁹ He quotes the church historian Massimo Faggioli: “Our best path is to reclaim from the institutional Church those ecclesial spaces that belong to the people of God, and not to the hierarchy.”²⁰ The Indian church has to take strong and effective measures to become the people of God. The hierarchy is a charism of service not a power structure in the church. The laity should

be recognized for what they are, namely, the church. When the potentiality, resources and charismatic gifts of the laity are played down, the church cannot effectively announce the good news and anticipate the reign of God.

Conclusion

Clericalism is a deep-rooted sickness in the body of the church. It goes with and is reinforced by legalism, authoritarianism and centralization. This is true for the Indian church as well. The Indian church needs a radical conversion, a continual *metanoia*. Ordination does not exalt the ordained to a lordly status or to a holier domain. The primary truth is that in the Lord's church all are equal. In the church we need a culture of free, frank and fearless dialogue in an environment of equality. The ecclesiastical processes must be fair, prompt and transparent. The protection of the weak and vulnerable members of the Christian community—children, adolescents, young adults, women, the poor—need priority. The victims of sex abuse by the clergy need compassionate and sympathetic understanding. The rights of the accused come only after that. Victimization of those who dissent—many a time, not always, theirs is the prophetic voice of today—must end. There must be in the church a willingness to listen to them. An invitation to trust and dialogue is more helpful than show-cause notices. Finally, the way forward is the way of the Master, which is the way of the beatitudes.

Notes

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Article Received: November 28, 2019

Article Accepted: January 12, 2020

No of Words: 5296



Advaita and Theosis: The Spiritual Encounter be- tween the Spirituality of the Upanishads and the Experi- ence of Being in Christ

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Abstract: This article explores the mystical convergence between advaita and theosis. Five elements of the Upanishadic advaitic tradition are located first: the Divine as mystery, and as the ultimate subject, the divinisation of the human, the immanence of the Divine in cosmos, and the resultant freedom. Then the three-fold dimension of the divine consciousness of Jesus is articulated: being sent by the Father, being in the Father and being one with the Father. John's Gospel shows that Jesus wanted to communicate this threefold experience to us. This is what Church Fathers called theosis, the divinisation of the human; this is a birthing process. Having explained the terms advaita and theosis, the convergence and divergence between the two are explored. The article concludes with the proposal that Hindus and Christians could move on as spiritual co-

pilgrims, who share their deep mystical experiences with one another and get enlightened and enriched by each other.

Keywords: Aadvaita, Theosis, Divinisation, Mystical experience, Dialogue, Upanishads.

The Upanishads, composed in the light of the mystical experiences of the great sages between 800 and 400 BCE, contain an advaitic experience: deep oneness with the all in the Divine. The great Church Fathers (100-600 CE) described the core of Christian faith in terms of theosis, the divinisation of the human. In this paper I would like to explore the scope of a theological encounter between these two perceptions: advaita and theosis.

The Dynamics of Spirituality

Spirituality is the universal experience of being gripped by the divine Spirit, the experience of being awakened to the dimension of Transcendence: it is the sense of the Holy, the orientation to the Absolute, the ultimate concern. In spirituality, one experiences the Divine as Spirit: as breath, as movement, as vibration. In spirituality, one resonates with the expansion of the Divine into infinite horizons. The Spirit explores the depth of the Divine (I Cor. 2:11).

Often one gets access to spirituality through faith. Spirituality is universal; faith is particular. Spirituality is the unfolding of the Divine in consciousness; faith is related to a concrete revelatory event. Faith finds expression through symbols, which are taken from particular cultures: symbol is the language of faith. Through the mediation of symbols, spirituality evolves as religion.

Religious symbols evolve in four areas: creed, cult, code and community. In each area the believing community appoints authoritative persons: theologians, priests, teachers and leaders. In all these areas there are ambiguities rendered by social, political, economic and psychological factors. There is a constant struggle of the divine Spirit with these factors. This critique of the Spirit finds expression through mystics and prophets. Often mystics are silenced and prophets are killed by the authorities; every religion has a criminal history. Religious symbols in their function are ambivalent: they can open the way to the Divine, they may also block the way.

In this article we focus attention on the encounter of two mystical traditions of the East and that of the West: concretely on the interfacing of advaita and theosis.

The Spirituality of the Upanishads

The Upanishads offer an authentic source of the Indian mystical heritage. They have been composed at different times between 800 and 400 BCE. Though the Upanishads are not given the same revelatory value (sruti) associated with the Vedas, they are held in high esteem in the scriptural corpus of Hinduism for, these contain the recollections (smriti) of the sages who went into the depth of the unity of reality in the Divine. Upanishads uphold the absolute transcendence of the Divine (Brahman) as well as the deep immanence of God (Atman) in the world. The transcendent mystery of the Divine is revealed through its immanence in the world: Atman is Brahman – ayam ātma Brahma – this is a basic insight of the Upanishads.

Five elements can be located in the mystical worldview of the Upanishads:

a. The Divine is Absolute, Incomprehensible, Ineffable Mystery

An abiding sense of the all-pervading, and all-transcending mystery of the Brahman vibrates in all the Upanishads. When speaking of the Divine the sage says:

“There the eye does not reach, nor speech, nor mind: we do not know it nor do we know how to teach it. Indeed it is other than the known, and also beyond the unknown. Thus have we heard from the ancient sages who have spoken about it.” (Kena Up. 1.3-4)

This being the case, the only way to reach out to the divine mystery is the way of negation: *neti...neti...* (not this, not this) (Birth. Up.4.5.15). “That from which words return along with the mind not attaining it - that is the blissful Brahman.” (Tait. Up. 2.9.)

The Divine is “ungraspable, unperceivable, indescribable”, (Mund. Up. 1.1.6), “formless eternal silence” (Chand. Up. 3.15), “subtler than the subtlest” (Swet Up. 4.14). If asked what its form is, one should answer: “Its form is formlessness” (Swet. 4.19).

b. The Divine is the Ultimate Subject Of Consciousness

The human mind can grasp something only in so far the latter is objectified. The mind wants to put everything into a definite form. But the Divine is formless, and hence, it is not an object for the mind to grasp. Hence the only way to grasp the Divine is to dive into a deeper level of consciousness. Upanishads invite the seeker to dive from the mind (*manah*) to the introspective intellect (*buddhi*), from the mental level to the intuitive level, from analysis to awareness, from the objectified mode of perception to the experi-

ence of the true subject (Kath. Up. 3:10). This process is a matter of human effort that involves asceticism and renunciation, concentration and meditation. But the attainment of the experience of the Divine as the ultimate Self is a matter of grace.

“The Self cannot be attained by instruction, nor by mental exercises, nor through much hearing. He can be attained only by the one whom the Self chooses. To such a one the Self reveals his true nature” (Kath Up.1.2.23).

“That which is not thought by the mind, but by which the mind thinks, that is Brahman; not what people worship here. That which is not expressed through speech, but by which speech is expressed, that is Brahman; not what people worship here” (Kena Up. 1.5-6)

The Upanishadic sages demand that a true spiritual seeker should not get stuck at any particular image of God. Any categorical experience may be affirmed, but it should constantly transcend towards the Brahman that is ever-beyond. The seeker should constantly ask himself/herself: how can I know the Knower? Vijnātāram kena vijaneeyāt.

c. The One Who Knows the Divine Becomes One with the Divine

The true awakening to mystery of the divine subjectivity takes place not in the framework of the dualistic mind but through the unfolding of the intuitive buddhi. Only by becoming one with the Divine does one really know the Divine, for the Divine is not so much object of our knowledge, but subject of our consciousness:

“Only in oneness is it to be seen, the stable atman, immeasurable, free from blemish is it, beyond space, unborn,

great, unwavering” (Brh. Up, 4,4,20 cfr. Kath.Up.9,13; Svet.Up. 6,13; Mait Up. 6,17).

In the depth of consciousness, one enters into an experience of mystical union with the Divine. “The one who knows the Brahman, verily becomes Brahman!” (brahma-vid brahmaiva bhavati, Mund.Up.3.2.9) “By knowing the Brahman one merges into the Brahman” (Svet.Up.2.7). One has thus transcended the phenomenal level of consciousness (Tait.Up.2.2.1) and entered into the mystical awareness of the divine Self within. In deep oneness with the Self one may exclaim “I am Brahman!” (Aham brahmāsmi, Brih Up. 1.4.9) Here one touches upon a level of experience that is far deeper than the mental level. This experience of mystical union cannot be evaluated in terms of the conceptual framework or philosophical theories of the mind. Hence any attempt to label this experience as monism or self-annihilation, or to judge it as denying the reality of the individual and the world would be off the mark. What is essential is to see how such an inner pilgrimage and the unitive experience improve the quality of a person’s life.

d. The Entire Universe Is Permeated by the Divine Self (Atman)

With the intuitive experience of the Self inside one looks at the world outside. And one perceives “the same Self in all and all in the Self” (Isa. Up.6) It is an ecstatic experience of the universal theophany. The divine light shines through everything (Mund. Up. 2.2.1), the divine life permeates everything (Svet.Up. 1.6), the divine vibration - OM - resonates in everything (Chand.Up.2.23.3). The universe is the divine abode, the body of the Lord (Chand.Up.5.18.2). The entire universe is permeated by the divine Lord (Isa Up.1).

“Verily this whole world is Brahman. Everything takes birth from it, moves in it and finally merges with it. Tranquil one should meditate on it” (Chand.Up.3.14 “That from which these beings are born, that through which they live and that into which they finally enter - that is Brahman”(Tait. Up.3.1.1). “He who dwells within the earth (and everything), yet distinct from the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within, he is the Self, the inner controller (antaryāmin) the immortal One” (Brih. Up. 3.7.3). “This verily is the Lord of all beings. As the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so in this Self, are all beings, all gods all worlds, all living beings, all these selves, held together” (Brih.Up-2.5.15).

The Upanishadic sages use a highly poetic language to describe the experience of the universal immanence of the divine Self. They do not identify the finite world with the infinite Brahman; they taste and see the power and presence of the Brahman in every atom and every living cell. They realise that the whole universe is soaked in the divine energy sphere. The divine presence is felt as permeating and enlivening everything like butter in milk (Swet.Up.4.16), like salt in sea-water (Brih.Up.1.4.7), like oil in the seed (Swet. Up.1.15), like the vital sap in the tree (Chand. Up.6.11.1). This is a highly mystical worldview. This cannot be judged with logical categories or evaluated with the dogmatic framework of another religion. Any attempt to label this as pantheism or idolatry would miss the point. What is important is to see how this world view communicates a sense of ecological harmony. When the cosmos is experienced as the dance of the Divine, human persons would live with great respect for everything, animate and inanimate.

e. Inner Freedom Is the Character of the Enlightened Person

The experience of the divine presence within oneself and in everything makes one sensitive to the grace and demands of divine presence in the world. The basic characteristic of one's relation to realities outside would then be inner freedom. "The one who sees all beings in the Atman, and the Atman in all beings, is free from fear" (Isa Up. 6). If the Lord permeates everything, one cannot possessively cling on to anything. Hence the sage exclaims: "renounce and enjoy!" (Isa Up.1). The Upanishadic masters describe greed (kama) as the root cause of all suffering and alienation in life. (Mund. Up. 3.2.1) Through greed one gets fixated on one's ego (ahamkāra) and thereby the way to inner spiritual freedom is blocked (Swet.Up. 4.7). Besides, through greed, one destroys the resources of God-given nature and manipulates other human beings for one's ego-gratification. The way to overcome greed is to develop the attitude of non-possessiveness (aparigraha).

"Two motivations bind a person: that which leads to the auspicious (*srēyah*) and that which brings about the pleasurable (*prēyah*). Each has a distinct purpose to attain. The wise man pondering over them prefers the auspicious to the pleasurable. But the ignorant man chooses the pleasurable for worldly benefits, and thus fails of the true aim of life" (Kath.Up.1.2.1-2).

A man of inner freedom is above the duality of good and evil. The integral mystical vision of life gives rise to a holistic view of nature and society.

"On knowing the Self one becomes a liberated person. His whole life is oriented to the Divine. He has risen above the desire for wealth and worldly benefits. He has risen

above the feeling of having done something good or evil. What he does, does not bind him to this world at all” (Brih. Up. 4.4.22).

The one who perceives the Divine in all, becomes concerned about the integral welfare of the others. Compassion would be the hallmark of such an ethical attitude. When the Creator Lord was asked, about the basic virtues of life, he answered: be self-controlled, (dama) be generous (dat-ta), be compassionate (daya) (Brih.Up.5.2.1-3). The last instruction given by the master to the student as the latter enters upon his family life offers a summary of the ethical teaching of the Upanishads.

“Always speak the truth, incessantly pursue the dharma, continue the self-study. Never swerve away from truth and dharma. Let there be no neglect of your welfare and the prosperity of all beings. Let there be no neglect of the duties to the ancestors and the responsibilities to the life-forces of nature. May your mother and father, your teacher and guest be God for you. May the good dealings you found in me inspire you further. What you give to others, give in faith and humility, with sympathy and generosity. (Tait. Up.1.11.1-4)

Being in Christ

What happens when the Gospel of Jesus encounters the spiritual world of the Upanishads? What happens when faith in Christ meets the mystical experience of the Upanishadic sages? How would an encounter with the spiritual world of the Upanishads deepen the faith experience of a Christian?

The Foundational Experience of Christian Faith

The Logos became flesh in Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son to the world. In Christ God has reconciled the world to himself. The old is gone, everything has become new. We live in Christ – these are some of the key expressions (mahavākyas) of Christian faith. When a Christian says these words to a Hindu shaped by the Upanishadic heritage, he will be confronted with the question: have you experienced the power of these words? Has the Gospel really deepened your consciousness, and transformed your life? Experience is the primary source of authenticity in the mainstream Hindu heritage. Hence the insistence on asceticism, meditation, discipline and simplicity of life.

Experience of the Divine is basically the experience of oneness with the Divine. There is a constant insistence in the Upanishads that every form of duality conceived at the mental level has to be transcended by the consciousness of the unity of reality in the Divine. This is an invitation to a deep mystical consciousness. This is a challenge to Christians to awaken the mystical dimension of Christian faith. There is a tendency in us Christians to overemphasise the I-thou relationship with God. God is conceived primarily as Father, Lord, Saviour, King. This personification of the Divine with male symbols is evident in our prayers and liturgy, in our theology and Church structures. The mystical sages of the Upanishads bring our attention to the mystery dimension of the Divine, to the experience of God as the Subject of our being, to the consciousness of being one with the Divine. We are here helped to look deeper into the God-experience of Jesus: Jesus experienced the Divine as the inner source of his being, as that-out-of-which he came forth.

(The following references are from the Gospel according to John)

a. ‘The Father Sent Me’ (3:16, 4:34, 5:36-38, 7:28-29, 10:36, 17:3)

Jesus had an abiding consciousness of being sent by the Father. Here the Father is the one who sends the Son with the redemptive mission. The Son understands his mission as ‘doing the will of the Father’ (4:34, 5:30, 6:38), as ‘completing the work of the Father’ (4:34; 6:29; 9:3). What is perceived here is a certain distinction between the one who sends and the one who is sent. The relation between the Father and the Son is an inter-personal relation.

b. ‘I Am in the Father and the Father Is in Me’ (5:26, 8:28, 14:10; 17:21,23).

Jesus knew that the Father who sent him is with him, in him (8:16,29, 16:32, 14:10). Here the Father is the one who gives life to the Son from within. The Son constantly takes birth from the Father (5:26; 6:57; 8:24; 16:28). The Father is the source and generator of the Son. Between them there is total mutual immanence, intense compenetration (perichoresis). The Son is the expression and unfolding of the Father (14:10; 12:49). There is no Father without the Son, no Son without the Father. The relation between the Father and the Son is an intra-personal relation.

c. ‘The Father and I are One’ (10:30; 17:11,21,22.)

This is the articulation of the deepest experience of Jesus in relation to the Divine. He had the consciousness that his being and life and work have been totally transparent to the divine source, which he called the Father. Father and Son are essentially one. The being of the Father unfolds itself through the being of the Son. The Son is the self-

communication of the Father. There is absolute unity between them. The relation between the Father and the Son is a trans-personal relation, in the sense that it goes far beyond the personalist structures of the human mind. The oneness in the depth of the Divine cannot be expressed in personalist categories. These three aspects of Jesus' consciousness may not to be taken as three phases or spheres, but as the three integral dimensions of his God consciousness.

And Jesus wanted to communicate to us this inner experience:

Just as the Father sent me into the world, so do I send you into the world (17:18).

Just as the Father knows me, and I know my own (10:14)

Just as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you (15:9;17:26).

Just as I remain in the love of the Father, so will you remain in my love (15:10).

Just as I draw life from the Father, so will you draw life from me (6:57).

Just as I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, so am I in you and you are in me (17:21;14:20).

Just as the Father and I are one, so may you all be one in us (17-21-22).

The Greek preposition *kathos* (just as) has a great significance here. Jesus wanted all those who believe in him make the same inner journey that he made, and participate in the same inner experience that shaped his consciousness. Our life evolves not so much before Christ as in Christ, not before God as within the inner-trinitarian process of

life. We are called to participate in the filial experience of Christ: we are daughters/sons of God.

Theosis: The Divinisation of the Human

The early Fathers of the Church found in the process of the divinisation of the human (theosis) the core of Christian faith experience:

“God became man so that man may become God!” (Deus homo factus est, ut homo fieret Deus, Augustine, PL.38,1997).

“Through his immense love the Word of God became what we are, so that we may become perfectly what he is” (Iraeneus PG. 7,1120).

“When our consciousness is completely purified and through contemplation elevated above the material realm, it will be divinised by God.”(Origen, Comm. on John 32,27).

“With Jesus human and divine nature begin to be woven together so that by fellowship with divinity human nature might become divine, not only in Jesus, but also in all those who believe and go on to undertake the life which Jesus taught.”(Origen, Contra Celsum, 3,28).

“We have not only become Christians, but Christ himself. Stand firm in awe and rejoice: we have become Christ.” (Augustine, Commentary on John’s Gospel, 21,8)

“The Word became man, so that we humans may become Divine..Theosis means the re-forming of the Image of God according to which we have been created by the Word.” (Athanasius, De Incarnatione 3,101).

“In the Spirit the Word divinises us.” (Athanasius, PG.25, 192; 26,589). “Christ takes shape in us through the Holy Spirit who reinstates the divinity in us.” (Cyril of Alexandria, PG.75,1088).

“Theosis is participation through grace in the nature of God.”
(John of Damascus, *Expositio Fidei*, 88,18).

“Through theosis we are brought into the energy-field of God.” (Gregorios Palamas, *Holy Hesychasts*).

Divinisation means the reinstatement of the image of God fully in us. What humanity had lost through the Fall has been reinstated through the salvific event of Jesus Christ. What hides our true nature is being removed by the light of the risen Christ in us. In the power and presence of the Spirit we recognize who we truly are.

The Spirit makes us realize that we are no more slaves but daughters and sons of God, participating in the divine nature through Christ. The Fathers of the Church do not equate human soul with the preexistent divine Son, but they emphasize that through the Incarnation of the divine Word the Divine that is dormant in us is awakened in Jesus; through Christ we have been graced with the realisation that we participate in the new humanity that is one with the divinity of Christ. We are grafted onto the tree of Christ (Rom. 11:17). So we put on the new Man (Col. 3:10), and become a new creation (II Cor. 5:17). We live in Christ.

Faith in Christ means, therefore, participation in the divinisation process that takes place in and through the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit continuously transforms our life and makes us participate in the divine life. Everyone who is united with the Lord is “one Spirit with him” (1 Cor.6:17). We are called to “be partakers of the divine nature” (1.Pet.1:4), “to be transformed into the image (of God in Christ) that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory” (II Cor.3:18). In faith we find ourselves in a process in which “we get fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself” (Eph. 4:13), a process through which “we are filled with the fullness of

God” (Eph.3:19). And this process in the Spirit leads to the final state in which “God will be all in all” (1 Cor.15:28). For the early Fathers and the mystics of the Church the experience of divinisation (theosis) has been a foundational element of Christian spirituality. We do not participate in the divine essence, but in the divine nature.

This is a birthing process: God gave birth to us; we give birth to God. Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine use the imagery of the birth of God in the soul. We are all called to become not only children of God but also mothers of God. “What once happened in a bodily way in the virgin, Mary continues to happen in every human soul that is totally open to God: to become mother of God.”(Gregory of Nyssa, Comm. on Mathew, 12,50) “When God works in the soul, the soul receives the Word and becomes pregnant in the Spirit. Thus the soul becomes like a mother giving birth to God.”(Origen, Comm. on Song of Songs). Reflecting on what happened in Bethlehem Augustine preached: “Christ is born; may he be born in our hearts. Mary bore him in her womb; may we bear him in our hearts. The virgin became pregnant through the Spirit; may our souls be pregnant through faith in Christ. Our souls must bring forth God into the world.” (Quoted in Kurt Ruh, Meister Eckhart, Munich 1985, 142).

For Meister Eckhart we are all called to be virgins (fully open to the divine Spirit) and mothers (bringing forth God into this world). “I give birth to the one who gave birth to me.” (Sermon, Ave gratia plena). This perspective of the Fathers and mystics of the Church helps us to perceive what is happening deep within us: the divinisation of the human. Creation is experiencing the birth pangs of the divine Spirit, and this birthing takes place through human persons. Our consciousness is being transformed by the Spirit and elevat-

ed to a divine consciousness just as it came to a full blossoming in the consciousness of Jesus. We are being reborn in Christ, and we give birth to Christ in all the spheres of the Christification process. It is in this process of christophany that we discover our true identity.

What would be the concrete effect of theosis in human life? The person being reborn in God will be highly sensitive to the sufferings and agonies of people as well as of creation. The dealings of that person will be characterised by mercy. One who lives from a divine centre of life will be a merciful person. The face of God manifest in Jesus has been the merciful face of God. By being inserted to the birthing of the Spirit one experiences the birth pangs of the new creation. In the lives of the poor and on the faces of the broken humans one discovers the healing presence of the God who creates everything new. In their wounds, and in the woundedness of the mother earth, one discovers the wounded God. At the same time one experiences the regenerative power of resurrection too in this broken world. This world of ours is God's world, the body of the divine Spirit.

Christians Encountering the Upanishadic Vedanta

The inner experience of Jesus, and the Christian heritage of the mystical experience that evolved out of it, help us to look deeper into ourselves and discover our true identity within the inner-divine process. The 'Spirit that searches the depth of God' (I Cor. 2:11) enables us to realise that we are being reborn in the Spirit and that we give birth to the Word in the world. Those who drink from the divine fountain unfolded in Jesus will be impregnated by the Divine Spirit and hence will give birth to the new creation. (Jn.7:37-39). God gives birth to himself in and through us.

Our true self-identify consists of total transparency to the divine power and presence.

At the level of this mystical experience Christians meet the sages and seekers of the Upanishadic heritage. The Upanishads give witness to the experience of the sages who discovered their true identity within the inner-divine dynamics of sat-chit-ānanda (Being-consciousness-bliss). They felt that they were being constantly transformed by the self-outpouring stream of divine life, and enlightened by the self-manifesting beam of divine light. They were led from the objectifying activity of the mind to the contemplative pursuits of the buddhi. Their consciousness was deepened and enlightened by the divine light. They could perceive the entire reality with its diversity in its ultimate depth of divine unity. Prajnānam Brahma, consciousness is divinised (Ait. Up. 3.1.3) - they could exclaim. Here the subject-object polarity is transcended. Here one discovers and realizes one's true nature as one with the divine nature. "Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati" (the one who experiences the Divine becomes Divine) - this is the ultimate mystical experience in the spiritual heritage of the Upanishads. "Everyone united with the Lord becomes one Spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17). This is the deepest mystical experience in the spiritual heritage of the Church. There is a certain convergence in these two streams of mystical introspection: one deepens the other, one enlightens the other.

Without unnecessarily polarising them or unduly ignoring the specific differences, the question may be asked from each side: what does the other evoke in me? With this question, the Christian believer reads the Upanishads from within her own spiritual depth, and the Hindu seeker reads the New Testament from within the inner cave. The Christian feels the movements of the Spirit that awakens the mystic

in him/her and the Hindu experiences the movements of the same Spirit that alerts the prophet within him/her. The Christian is moved to the perception that no integral spirituality can be genuine without contemplative pursuits and the ascetical elements demanded by them. The Hindu is led to the realisation that no liberative spirituality is possible without a genuine concern for human welfare and the resulting commitment to justice. The Christian is then helped to see the power and presence of the Divine in nature and thus draw the ecological consequences of the life of faith. The Hindu is helped to discern the liberative presence of God in the events of history and thus become sensitive to the challenges of social life. The Christian thus learns to look at nature as the body of the divine Spirit and to deal with it with greater respect and concern. The Hindu is motivated to look at a human person as the temple of the Spirit and meet them with the concerns of equality and justice.

Spiritual Co-Pilgrims

Here it is not a question of one teaching the other on the path of spiritual progress, nor is it a matter one interpreting the Scripture of the other in the light of one's revelatory experience. Rather, the Hindu and the Christian understand him/herself as a co-pilgrim with the other. On the way of this common pilgrimage, they read the Scriptures of the other, open themselves to be challenged, criticised, enriched and guided by the other. It is, in fact, a process rediscovering one's spiritual identity in an encounter with the other. It is through the thou that I become I. The mystical and prophetic streams are the dialectical elements of spiritual integration. In every religion, both are at work manifestly or implicitly. There are, for instance, mystical streams in Christian Scriptures and traditions; but to a great

extent, these are not fertilising Christian theology or the day-to-day life of Christians. In the highly structured patterns of community organisation and the dogmatic framework of theological thinking in the Church, the mystical elements have often been marginalised, if not suppressed. In today's world, there is a global quest for mystical experiences. Many Christians unable to find mystical wellsprings within their community and heritage seek them at the feet of Eastern masters or in the New Age Movements. This is a phenomenon which Christianity has to take seriously and listen to what the Spirit is telling the Church today. Church has to discern the unseen work of grace in the hearts of all human persons. The Upanishads open to Christians infinite horizons of searching the mystery of the Divine. If one's mind is attuned to the relentless quest of the Upanishads, one cannot be fixated on the particular forms of God's revelation, nor can one be dogmatic about the concrete formulations in theology. Such openness of the mind does not mean relativising faith in Christ but seeing it in relation to the universal process of the divine self-manifestation. Church will then be understood not primarily in terms of the visible structures and closed traditions but as the Spirit-determined community, the pilgrim-community that is ever on the move "to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth of the love of God revealed in Christ" (Eph.3:19).

At a depth of the Upanishads and the New Testament, there is a mystical experience of oneness with the Divine. The Christian experience of union with the Divine has been later interpreted in terms of theosis; the Upanishadic experience of merging with the Divine has been taken up in *advaita*. They are ways of understanding at the mind-level the deep mystical oneness-experience that one has at the heart-

level. The Church Fathers who advocated theosis made a consistent distinction between the divine essence and divine nature; humans participate not in the divine essence but are raised to divine nature. "...that you should share the divine nature..." (II. Pet. 1:4). Gregory Palamas makes the distinction between the non-participable divine essence and the participable stream of divine energies. In some advaita schools of thought; however, there is a tendency to speak of humans merging into the divine essence (sat), for ultimately reality is non-dual (a-dvaita). Reflecting on theosis Thomas Aquinas said: "the one who knows God, becomes God-like" (*quisque Deum intelligit, deiformis fit*, ST. 1.12.5.ad 3); the Upanishadic sage would say: "the one who knows God becomes God" (*brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*, *Mund. Up.* 3.2.9). These are attempts to interpret the deep mystical experience that in fact eludes every mental perception and verbal articulation. "There the mind does not reach, nor the words" (*Kena Up.* 1.3) "If you know God, it is not God" (Augustine, PL.8.663). It is important that one goes beyond the mind and reach out to the intuitive faculty of the buddhi / nous to enter the cave of the heart, wherein the merging / union / oneness of the human with the Divine takes place. This is an unending spiritual pursuit. One could find here converging lines between Christian spirituality and Upanishadic experience, between theosis and advaita. At the heart level, East and West meet. This is what Abhishiktananda through his deep entry to the Upanishadic wisdom discovered.

In this spiritual pursuit, the Christian theologian meets the Hindu Vedantin as a spiritual co-pilgrim; the interpretation of the spiritual dynamics of the New Testament is deepened by the mystical insights of the Upanishads. The anthropocentric world-view of Christianity is balanced by

the cosmic world-view of the Upanishadic sages, and the social initiatives are integrated with ecological concerns. The prayer of Jesus was that all may be one: that all human persons irrespective of the differences in religious affiliations and cultural patterns may experience their deep oneness in the triune divine reality. On the way to grasp the mystical meaning of the divinisation that takes place deep within us, the Upanishads throw a lot of light. There is, therefore, tremendous scope for Christian theology to be spiritually fertilised by the Upanishads.

Article Received: November 18, 2019

Article Accepted: January 11, 2020

No of Words: 5660



“Formation of the Heart:” An Essential (But Ignored) Element in Priestly Formation

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Abstract: Formation of priests was a major theme in the writings of Kurien Kunnumpuram, and the book *Called to Serve* is particularly noteworthy. In it Fr Kurien discusses four aspects of the formation of priests, viz. human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. In this article, the author continues his reflection on aspects of priestly formation. It particularly focuses on a grossly neglected area, viz. formation of the heart. The first part takes a look at the emerging paradox in priestly formation in the present-day context, and the second part reflects more in detail on some key elements in the formation of the heart! “What do I still lack?” was a question coming from the heart of a young man, and it required an answer from the heart. Hearing Jesus’ answer, the young man went away sorrowful, for he expected an answer from the head, not the heart. Apathetic theology cautions us about the limits of answers from the head, whether in written word or spoken word. There is the ‘empty space’ beyond words, and that is the

space occupied by the heart. Formation of the heart enables a pastor to be ‘large-hearted’ and ‘broadminded’ reaching beyond the realms of words and reason. It means conscious effort to create space for others and their concerns, expanding one’s horizon of relationships to welcome even the excluded. We need pastors with transformed hearts and are capable of transforming the hearts of men and women today.

Keywords: Formation, Heart, Pastors, Justice and Discernment.

Introduction

Fr Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ spent most of his active life in the formation of priestly candidates and in teaching them systematic theology. Both demanded of him a creative mind and an emotive commitment. Any thought of him brings up to my mind images of priestly formation with its multiple dimensions and contemporary challenges. Formation of priests was a major theme in his writings, and the book *Called to Serve* is particularly noteworthy.¹ In it, Fr Kurien discusses four aspects of the formation of priests, viz. human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. In this short paper, I would like to continue his reflection on aspects of priestly formation. I would like to particularly focus on a grossly neglected area, viz. formation of the heart. In the first part, we shall take a look at the emerging paradox in priestly formation in the present-day context, and in the second part, we shall reflect more in detail on some key elements in the formation of the heart.

The Emerging Paradox

Seminary formation can never remain insulated from what happens in the wider society and the changing cultural scenario. Most of the young men entering the portals of

seminaries today are products of the new-gen culture. How do we mould such men as authentic pastors, equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for effective apostolic commitment is the critical question before us. The sudden explosion in the field of media and communication keep the new-gen people ‘engaged’ 24x7. Our society is becoming increasingly noisy (and colourful) with little space or time for silence and solitude. Religious worship and celebration do not lag behind! Young priests take pride in displaying their eloquence from pulpits and at conventions adding to the noisy world around. Such is the real context in which priestly formation takes place today. The discrepancy between what is taught in formation houses with the insistence on intellectual formation, on the one hand, and the complexity of challenges in actual pastoral settings leave many young priests confused or disheartened. It is in such a context of paradoxes that we need to speak about the formation of the heart.

Deus Caritas Est, the first encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI (2005), underscored the importance of professional formation in the practice of charity. At the same time, it states that professional competence is not of itself sufficient. “Practitioners of Love require not only professional training but also the *formation of the heart*”, he wrote.² Modern secular professions rarely speak of the dimension of the heart and its training. There is a growing awareness that this aspect can no more be ignored in professions that deal with human issues. Priestly training also has to face the apparent incongruity between the language of the heart and the language of secular professions, between cool heads and warm hearts. An untrained heart can talk volumes with little content! After all, “the heart has its reason which reason knows nothing of We know the

truth not only by the reason but by the heart” wrote Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French thinker.

Give Us Pastors with a Heart!

What else can the message of Christianity be except the message of the heart! We live in a world where ‘heart’ gets sidelined in the rush for heartless technology and soulless development. The world is witnessing more and more bleeding hearts – in broken families, old-age homes, communal riots, political rivalries, and urban anonymity. Troubled hearts and fractured world! The need of the hour is more and more merciful hearts. It is most unfortunate if pastors too ‘lose heart’, which is not uncommon. The world is in need of pastors who are able to hear the heartbeat of the ‘sheep’, and transcend the frame of mere rational logic. Recently while addressing the participants in the plenary assembly of the pontifical academy for life, Pope Francis said:

Science and technology are not enough: doing good requires wisdom of heart.... Virtue is the best that the human heart has to offer.... Therefore, I encourage universities to consider all this in their programmes of formation, so that the students can improve those dispositions of the heart and mind, which are indispensable to receive and take care of human life, according to the dignity that belongs to it in any circumstance.³

What the pope said applies equally or more to priestly formation today. A priest is called to live a life with an awakened heart when he can say “I know my sheep and they know me” (John 15).

Apophatic theology or ‘*via negativa*’ was always part of the Christian tradition, and it underscored the limits of a purely rationalistic approach in matters divine. Pseudo-

Dionysius the Areopagite, the anonymous Syrian monk of the 6th century is mostly associated with the development of apophatic theology. It reminds us of the provisional nature of all knowledge about God and matters of faith. He looks at *via negativa* as a plunge into that darkness beyond intellect where we not only run short of words but also remain speechless. Conceptual thought is built on binary logic (either this or that) while *via negativa* frees us from the burden of binaries (neither this nor that). This is true freedom of the heart. Wendy Farley argues that the practice of apophatic theology transcends the limitations of conceptual thought and operates at the heart level, thus contributing to a deeper knowledge of matters divine.⁴ A theology of negation is necessary for a proper theology of affirmation.

Probably this is the wisdom that we get from the Buddhist tradition which speaks of ‘empty heart’; it is empty of evil but filled with wisdom! Whatever is done is done with this divine wisdom. That is why Buddhist masters emphasize training of the heart and suggest various ways of training it. Ajahn Mun, the renowned meditation master from Thailand, speaks of ‘reading one’s own heart’ and ‘listening to one’s own heart’. He writes: “Listening to your own heart is really very interesting. This untrained heart races around following its own untrained habits. It jumps about excitedly, randomly, because it has never been trained. Therefore, train your heart! Buddhist meditation is about the heart; to develop the heart or mind, to develop your own heart.... You must discipline it with meditation, with *samādhi*. This is called “Training the Heart”. Buddhism is the religion of the heart.”⁵ Meditation and awareness are at the centre of this training; it is nothing but training in compassion. The message to priestly formation is self-evident: in a fractured

world, with many people with troubled hearts, a pastor has to be a messenger of a healing heart. No wonder, the Jesuit tradition labels the third and final stage of formation before final vows (*tertianship*) as ‘school of the heart’!

Some Dimensions of Formation of the Heart

a. Human Heart as an Organ and as a Symbol

Proper formation of the heart has been a focal point in the biblical tradition from the very beginning. The term heart occurs over one thousand times in the Bible. It is the anthropological term the bible uses to denote a person’s centre (core) not only physiologically, but also emotionally and morally. In the OT view, the heart is meant to understand, to discern and to give insight, just as the eye is meant to see, and the ear to hear. Heart is the inner forum where discernment takes place, decisions are arrived at, and commitments are made. ‘Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’, asserts Prophet Samuel (1Sam 16:7). Jeremiah and Ezekiel were proposing a new heart that the Lord would give human persons (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26). David prays for a pure heart to replace his defiled conscience (Ps 51:10). The metaphor of writing on the tablet of the heart is also inspiring (Prov 3:3; Jer 17:1). Heart needs to be educated by filling it with God’s heart (Prov 22:17-18). Jesus is unambiguous: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be” (Mt 6:21). He sums up the law with the call “love the Lord your God with all your heart...” (Mt 22:37).

The Lord promises through Jeremiah, “I shall give you shepherds *after my own heart*, who will pasture you wisely and discreetly” (Jer 3:15). It is the right of the people of God to have shepherds after his own heart. It affirms that

the ability to pasture the flock ‘wisely and discreetly’ as essential to this pasturing. Every formation programme must be geared to preparing pastors who are wise and discreet. That is why Pope John Paul II chose this text as the title of his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.⁶

b. Restlessness/Discontent as Valuable Resource

All pastoral engagement assumes human situations that demand urgent human/divine intervention. Only a person who is disturbed by a situation can creatively intervene in it. We have an excellent example in Jesus himself. After going around towns and villages in Palestine at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus felt deeply disturbed, “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt.9:35-38). This discontent becomes the beginning of an expanded form of ministry involving selection of a group of disciples, as narrated by Matthew in the following chapter. Jesus’ initial focus was on the proper formation of his disciples, thus indicating what it means to be ‘pastors after His own heart’.

Restlessness or discontent is not necessarily a negative quality; the heart looks at it in positive terms as a valuable virtue and as goal-oriented. The human heart is inherently restless, as St. Augustine spoke of. “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you”, he wrote.⁷ It can become a spiritual power behind committed action. Late Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania and a devout Catholic, understood its value when he named it *Divine Discontent*. The conviction that we are transforming human discontent into divine discontent is at the core of genuine pastoral engagement. Unless guided by this vision, discontent can quickly degenerate into selfish

aggression or irrational reaction. Resistance and conflict are inevitable in any action, but the heart prompts us to see them not as disasters, but as opportunities for renewal and enrichment. A formed heart prompts a pastoral worker never to be disheartened, however alarming the situation be.

c. The Heart Promotes Human Solidarity

“We must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools”, said Martin Luther King Jr. years ago, indicating the importance of human solidarity. Solidarity is the contemporary term for the classical Christian virtue of ‘mercy’, later called ‘charity’, and then ‘commitment’. Pope John Paul II defines solidarity as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, the good of all and each individual, because we are all responsible for all.”⁸ Solidarity consists of two essential components: *inter-dependence* (awareness that I am deeply dependent on others), and *mutual responsibility* (that I am responsible for my brothers and sisters). Solidarity is an attitude, a commitment to participate in the life of the community/society to promote the common good. Theologically it rests on our identity as living images of the Trinitarian God, and in professing the mystery of the incarnation that our God is present in human history in the person of Jesus Christ to give us dignity as his children, as brothers and sisters.

Any pastoral engagement devoid of a sense of solidarity can easily degenerate into mere administrative strategies or political manoeuvring. The result would be the misuse of authority and neglect of the weaker members of the Christian fellowship. Today we witness many pastoral situations facing group conflict and power struggle, often becoming

a public scandal. The strength of a chain is determined by the strength of its weakest link; the health of a society is determined by the wellbeing of its weakest member. Only a properly trained heart can perceive the weakest link and attend to its concerns. Pastoral formation is to be oriented not only in cultivating this sensitivity in pastoral workers, but also in enabling them to be promoters of the spirit of solidarity in pastoral situations.

d. Restorative Justice that Goes Beyond Distributive Justice

The contemporary world is characterised by growing awareness about the cry for justice and is proactive in its response. At the same time, its preoccupation seems to be with *distributive justice*. No doubt, distributive justice is crucial in a world marked by uneven access to resources and a widening disparity between classes. But the heart says that we need to go beyond distributive justice. The heart impels us to shift our focus onto *restorative justice*. Archbishop Desmond Tutu gives us valuable insights based on his South African experience. As a strong advocate of restorative justice, he incorporates the love principle taking justice beyond punitive or retributive justice. He affirms the centrality of restorative justice drawing from the African religious tradition of *ubuntu*; the core concern here is “the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offence.”⁹ Here justice is not sacrificed, instead is affirmed in its fuller sense. It builds up the community, and avoids creating victors and losers. All are destined to become victors.

Pastoral workers cannot but be messengers of restorative justice in human situations marked by an urge for vengeance and retaliation. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that Christ has given us the ‘ministry of reconciliation’... ‘entrusting to us the message of reconciliation’ (2 Cor 5:18-19). So a pastor is an ‘ambassador’ of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation can easily get reduced to the ritual of confession, as history tells us, unless pastors are formed in the school of the heart. Pastors are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation and restoration, and so are to be trained accordingly.

e. Faith in the Power of Resurrection

Resurrection is the affirmation of life in the midst of misery and death. That is the meaning of Easter. Moments of discouragement and frustration, helplessness and hopelessness, of allegations and betrayals, are inevitable companions of pastoral workers at all times. Pastors may recall the cry from the cross, “My God, why did you abandon me” (Mk.15:34), as reflecting the agony of the heart in moments of utter frustration. We are reminded of the scene in the Old Testament where Moses hits the hard rock to produce water for the belligerent people of Israel in the desert (Exod 17:6; Num 20:10-11). Pastoral engagement often would lead us to the hard rock of the wilderness, asking us to work miracles. Archbishop Tutu would tell us how to make possible what appears impossible; after the collapse of the regime of apartheid, reconciliation of the white minority and the black majority appeared impossible. But the conviction that there is *no future without forgiveness* made the impossible possible through the work of the *Commission for Truth and Reconciliation*, of which Tutu was the chairperson.¹⁰

It also throws light on the meaning of success and failure in pastoral engagement. The heart would tell us that it is only when a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies... it bears much fruit, and that “he who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life...will keep it” (Jn.12:24-25). Obviously, it goes contrary to the logic of the head and of a world that upholds rationality as of supreme value.

f. The Heart Can Teach Us the Art of Discernment

The secular world currently presents before us two dominant systems of decision making: *autocratic* (decision by the one who has absolute power), and *democratic* (decision by the majority). The majoritarian principle has been sanctified by the ideology of parliamentary democracy and contemporary political systems. But the heart shows us a third alternative: the *discernment approach* (decision guided by the Divine Spirit).¹¹ The assumption is that the discerning faculty rests with the heart. This approach has deep roots in the Christian spiritual tradition. We have the prayer of King Solomon asking Yahweh for a discerning heart (1Kgs.3:9). We see the early church practising it in their everyday life and ministry, in the election of Mathias (Acts 1), in the appointment of the deacons (Acts 6), and in the council of Jerusalem while settling disputes (Acts 15). Unfortunately, we have lost this rich heritage of the discernment approach. The attraction of centralised authority and power is too tempting in today's world. The majoritarian principle is often prone to manipulation to serve vested interests. We need to recover the spirit of the discernment approach in pastoral engagement, and it has to begin with priestly formation. A pastor has to guide people to walk with the Spirit while dealing with complex problems or while taking difficult decisions. “Be wise as

serpents and innocent as doves”, we are told (Mt.10:16); both are essential requirements for a pastor.

We can look up to the Ignatian spiritual tradition to learn more about the effective use of discernment approach in pastoral ministry. The dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* manifest consistent emphases on formation of the heart in the one making a retreat. The first introductory explanation states the goal as “preparing and disposing our soul (heart) to rid itself of all its disordered affections, and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life.”¹² It further explains the reason in clear terms: “For what fills and satisfies the soul consists, not in knowing much, but in understanding the realities profoundly and in savouring them interiorly.”¹³ This emphasis is kept alive all through the Exercises, particularly the contemplation on *Call of the King*, the application of the senses and the colloquy. The Ignatian insistence on the heart is most evident in the exercises on ‘discernment of the Spirits’ paying attention to the inner movements of the heart.¹⁴ Ignatius was convinced that true transformation of persons consisted of transformation of their heart.

g. Pay Attention to the Language of the Heart

“Where words fail, music speaks,” wrote Hans Christian Andersen, the well-known Danish author of the 19th century (1805-1875). He is reminding us that music is one mode of the language of the heart. The same is true of silence and dreams. To experience the power of silence in a noisy world is becoming more and more difficult. But it is inevitable for an effective pastor. “When we dream alone, it is just a dream; but when all dream together, it is the beginning of Reality”, said Archbishop Dom Helder Camara. To pay attention to the dreams of oneself, and of others, demands

of our facility with the language of the heart. Do we, in our pastoral engagement, enable people to dream together? Do we share our dreams with them? Do we let ourselves share in their dreams? Lord Buddha soon after his enlightenment rushed to Sarnath, near the holy city of Varanasi, to share his dream (his first sermon) with a group of disciples. Jesus' work among the dispirited people of Israel lasted only a short time, yet he succeeded to share his dream of the Reign of God with the small band of companions, and it flourished and reached the ends of the earth. Pastors are sharers and promoters of that vision, and formation programmes must enable trainees to be committed to that vision in pastoral settings entrusted with them.

Conclusion

“What do I still lack?” was a question coming from the heart of a young man (Matt 19:20), and it required an answer from the heart. Hearing Jesus' answer, the young man went away sorrowful, for he expected an answer from the head, not the heart. Apophati theology cautions us about the limits of answers from the head, whether in written word or spoken word. There is the ‘empty space’ beyond words, and that is the space occupied by the heart. Formation of the heart enables a pastor to be ‘large-hearted’ and ‘broadminded’ reaching beyond the realms of words and reason. It means conscious effort to create space for others and their concerns, expanding one's horizon of relationships to welcome even the excluded. We need pastors with transformed hearts and are capable of transforming the hearts of men and women today. Let us hope that those responsible for priestly formation will take these to heart.

Notes

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2. Deus Caritas Est, No. 31
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8. Confessions, I.i.1.
9. Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, No. 38
10. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, New York: Image Book, 1999, 54.
11. *No Future without Forgiveness* was the title of the book he wrote after completing the work of the Commission (New York: Image Book, 1999).
12. Pastores Dabo Vobis speaks of 'Gospel Discernment'. See no. 10.
13. George E. Ganss (Tr), *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1992, Introductory Explanation, no. 1, p.22.
14. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, Introductory Explanation, no. 2, p.22.
15. For more details on this, see *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, nos. 313-336 [Rules for the Discernment of Spirits].

Article Received: November 11, 2019

Article Accepted: January 1, 2020

No of Words: 3890



Encountering God: A Liberative and Societal Experience

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Abstract: Everything in our life, today just as in Jesus' time, begins with an encounter. An encounter with this Man, the carpenter of Nazareth, a man like all men and yet different. There is an encounter between people, an encounter between people who were in the street". And this, he commented, is "something unusual". In fact, "when we go into the street, every man thinks of himself: he sees, but does not look; he hears, but does not listen"; in short, everyone goes their own way. And consequently "people pass each other, but they do not encounter each other". Because, Pope Francis clarified, "an encounter is something else" entirely, and this is "what the Gospel proclaims to us in our context: an encounter between a man and a woman, between an only son who is alive and an only son who is dead; between a happy group of people — happy because they have encountered Jesus and followed him — and a group of people who weep as they accompany the woman", who is a widow and is on her way to bury her only son. The Church should create spaces for critical reflection, spaces where poor people can meet and reflect about God's presence in their concrete situations. Also these spaces should be places of communion among equals, where real participation is lived out. These spaces should

be witness of God's presence among the people, a presence of communion, equality and "new creation".

Keywords: Liberative, Passover lamb, Incarnation, Liberation Theology, Clericalization, Trinitarian model, Culture of encounter.

"Everything in our life, today just as in Jesus' time, begins with an encounter. An encounter with this Man, the carpenter of Nazareth, a man like all men and yet different. The first ones, John, Andrew, and Simon, felt themselves to be looked at into their very depths, read in their innermost being, and in them sprang forth a surprise, a wonder that instantly made them feel bound to Him, made them feel different." -Pope Francis

Introduction

What is encountering God, what is liberative and societal experience? Without some clarity on these terms we cannot have a meaningful understanding of the subject. Encounter in this context is meeting God face to face. In my younger days, it was confined to having daily family prayer, going for mass and receiving communion once in a while. Sometimes we helped the poor, basically giving alms to the poor. If we did all these, I thought we had fulfilled the obligation and encountered God. In other words, it was encountering the Living God. Liberative and societal experience leads us to a wider realm, which is related to the wider society. Pope Francis explains this term very explicitly. It is an invitation to work for "the culture of encounter", in a simple way, "as Jesus did": not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying "what a shame, poor people!", but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion; "and then

to draw near, to touch and to say: ‘Do not weep’ and to give at least a drop of life”. Pope Francis used these words in one of his homilies. Pope Francis on a regular basis has spoken of a Culture of Encounter as a goal for human society. A society that espouses a Culture of Encounter facilitates the right relationship among humans and involves a spirituality that emphasizes a personal friendship with God who first encounters us in love. I believe that the term, *culture of encounter*, Pope Francis uses, is a loaded term. To make an encounter, part of our culture means that every one of us is expected to practice it in our day to day life. The Culture of Encounter may be explained as, the structuring of a society in which persons encounter each other, and thus they are able to encounter the Living God.

Encountering God

In the First Book of Samuel, the young boy ministered to the Lord under the direction of Eli. We read that in those days, the Word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. We know that Samuel’s sleep is interrupted because he hears someone calling his name. He gets up and goes naturally into Eli’s bedroom to see what he wants, only to find out that the preacher has not called him. Only after three disruptions of sleep that Eli-the-priest, realized what was going on. “Samuel,” he said, “Go and lie down, and if you hear that voice calling you again you say, “Speak, Lord; for your servant hears you”” (1 Samuel 3:9). So Samuel went and did just as the prophet asked, and God spoke to Samuel that night in a special way.

The above-mentioned experience of Samuel is a classic example of encountering God personally. If this experience remains within the personal self, it has no substantial effect. On the other hand, if we understand the meaning of, *speaking*

Lord, your servant hears, we will understand that the Lord will tell us to reach out to others. Lord tells his ministers to carry on with their services to society. Psalm 24: 3-4 clarifies the perspective. Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

Obstacles to Encountering God

“If a man cannot get through to God, it is because there is a secret thing he does not intend to give up.” We are so preoccupied with the secret thing that we refuse to give up such things, and we enjoy ourselves being in such situations. But unless we give up such a stubborn nature, there is no way of coming close to God through prayer. To experience Him and His power personally, we have to be real with God and search for Him in our selves daily. When we sin against others, our relationship with them is affected, so naturally, our relationship with God is breached. We have the example of Adam and Eve hiding from God behind the fig leaves; we too are ashamed and likewise hide. We have many ways of hiding from God; we hide behind our daily routines, work, family responsibilities, recreation, or even spiritual ministry. We have to understand, therefore, how sin affects our relationship with God and so constant prayer is very important.

Another obstacle that prevents us encountering God is brooding over painful past events: “Stop dwelling on past events and brooding over times gone by; I am doing something new; it’s springing up - can’t you see it? I am making a road in the desert, rivers in the wasteland” (Is 43: 18-19). Many of us go through traumatic experiences in our life, and quite naturally, we find it difficult to experience

God. We want to experience happiness and fulfilment in life. Unfortunately, we feel we are caught up in our past. How can we find a way out of this situation? At least on some occasions, we can find some helpful method by meeting a close friend, a loving Christian or a right counsellor. We have to open our heart to receive the grace of God through their kind words of encouragement and hope. God does intervene in our life through many people and events. Through such ways, we can deal with the painful past and overcome it. In other words, God's love and healing are available to us always provided we rely on His love to heal our wounded heart.

Holding grudges against others: "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness, no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12: 14). An easy way of keeping God away is to keep grudges against others and keep the bitter feelings against them. Since it is our own choice to keep grudges, the power of the spirit will not enter into us, and we will not encounter God. We will not be prompted to think of God or to pray. There will be no personal desire in us to be reconciled or to forgive others whom we have wronged or others who have wronged us. We should realize that our faith is mainly about forgiveness, as Jesus has mentioned. Jesus has given us as a free gift, and we, in turn, are expected to share this gift with others. As believers in Christ, we are obliged to follow the way of Christ. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph 4: 31-32).

Stubbornness in unbelief: "Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers" (Jer 7: 26). One of the main barriers

which block us from coming close to God is unbelief. Unless and until we keep unbelief apart and believe in Jesus, we cannot find God. If we persist in unbelief, we cannot understand what it means to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. We need to understand what is said in the NT. He cried out to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

With a little effort, we can become believers. Though it is a simple thing, many people don’t care about it and thus do not believe. They harden their heart and choose unbelief over belief. They choose to reject God and ignore Him. Unless we break this barrier of unbelief, we cannot have contact with God. By accepting Jesus as saviour, we are forgiven, and we can encounter God.

Community Encounter of God

We read in the Old Testament when the Hebrews were held in slavery by the Egyptians; God chose Moses to be His instrument to rescue them, because He had seen their trouble, had heard their cry for help and had decided to come down and set them free. The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land” (Exo 3). Such a God is someone who is very close to the people, and people can easily encounter Him as their redeemer, father and saviour.

Further, we understand that God acted to save His chosen people as a community special to him. After many difficult and troubling situations, God designed to persuade Pharaoh to let the people go free. Finally, God sent the angel of death to take the first-born of every family so that the chosen

people are set free. God wanted to assure His people that He cared for them as a community. Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssops, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the door frame. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the door frame and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down” (Exo. 12).

What we can conclude here is, death was not going to affect God’s people if they obeyed His word and trusted in the blood of the lamb. They had to paint their doorposts. As a community, they obeyed the instructions and found themselves safe although death had visited every Egyptian house. Thus the Hebrews encountered the saving power of God in their life because they listened to their God.

As committed Christians, we know that the same power of God can work in our life. All that we need to do is to trust in the power of God and be washed in the blood of the lamb. We have to remind ourselves often of the awesome power of God that redeems us and leads us through great trials and tribulations. Since we are part of the church we don’t have to face these struggles by ourselves; the encouraging support of the church is always available. Thus we can also help one another to encounter God!

Ways to Encounter God

There are many and different ways to encounter God, for instance, through the beauty of nature, through prayer and

meditation; there are also sudden and tremendous encounter such as St. Paul's experience on the way to Damascus. Each encounter depends on the situation in which we live and when God who wants to reveal himself to us. The Peruvian liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez had another way of encountering God. His option for the poor enabled him to see the Lord in the faces of the poor in Latin America. He acknowledges that "Christ hides himself behind the faces of those whom we tend to avoid because they have little importance in the eyes of the society." According to him, to be followers of Jesus requires us to walk with and commit ourselves to the poor. In doing so, we encounter the Lord who is simultaneously revealed and hidden in the face of the Poor.

Encountering God: Old Testament

Based on the understanding that the Biblical God is close to human beings, first of all, Gutierrez reflects on the first covenant that speaks about God dwelling in the midst of his people. God said, "I shall dwell in the midst of the Israelites, I shall become their God, and by my dwelling among them, they will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of Egypt. I am Lord their God" (Exod.29: 45; 26: 11-12). The presence and the dwelling of God among his people emphasized the relationship between God and human beings. To despise one's neighbour (Prov.14: 21), to exploit the humble and poor worker, and to delay the payment of wages, is to offend God: "You shall not keep back the wages of a man who is poor and needy" (Deut.24: 14-15; Exod.22: 21-23). Therefore, to love God and to love our neighbour means to do justice to the poor and the oppressed.

Encountering God: New Testament

In the New Testament God becomes present in the Incarnation of the Word. Through the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh, every person is the presence of God. Gutierrez notes: “Since the incarnation, humanity, every human being in history, is the living temple of God.”

This is the key element for speaking about an encounter with God. Gutierrez puts it this way: “If humanity, each person, is the living temple of God, we meet God in our encounter with others; we encounter God in the commitment to the historical process of humankind.” The Trinitarian understanding of God has been taken very seriously by Liberation Theology. Such seriousness was also recognised by the Pope’s (John Paul II) visit to Puebla on the occasion of the Latin American Bishops assembled there, when he stated that, “Our God, in his most intimate mystery, is not a solitude, but a family. For he intrinsically contains paternity, filiation, and the essence of the family that is love: this love in the divine family is the Holy Spirit”. However, the belief in the Triune God for the faithful throughout the world is a real struggle.

According to Liberation Theology, it is possible to emphasise a political and a religious reason for such a struggle. In the political arena we are used to political authoritarianism which is expressed in a heavy concentration of power. It is sad that the family is fashioned around an old patriarchal figure that does not allow equality for male and female. Unfortunately, the political and social situation has suggested that, just as there is one God, so there must be one ruler and one rule. In the religious sphere, according to liberation theologians, we find a similar phenomenon, that is, the centralization of power in the hands of a single

person, though in theory, it is said to be different. Similarly, the clericalization of the Church has led to the accumulation of power in the hands of priests who often exploit this power.

Trinitarian Dimension: Praxis Oriented Approach

The model of Trinity as communion can be seen as the ground where the struggle of impoverished people is rooted. Moreover, the communion model can uphold and sustain the utopia of a new form of society. Today there is an emphasis on the communion model as it can challenge the Church and her praxis in the world. We need to ask why the Church should be involved in the struggle of marginalised people. The preferential option for the poor helps people in the church and the world. Pope Francis says very explicitly, “I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

We know that Jesus revealed God. He is the central person, in order to understand the Trinity. Jesus revealed a God full of compassion for poor, marginalized and oppressed. Jesus revealed a God who made a clear option for the outcasts and marginalized of society. If we understand liberation theology, we know that the Trinity is not impartial and universal. Through the incarnation, the Trinity opted for the poor. Therefore, the Church, in order to remain faithful to the God revealed by the Son, is called to renew her option for the poor. A society inspired by Trinity is a society that cannot tolerate class differentiation, domination and marginalisation. On the contrary, a society rooted in the Trinitarian model is an inclusive society where equal opportunities are granted to all people.

Conclusion

Without contemplation, prayer, thanksgiving to God, there is no Christian life, and the fulfilment of the Christian life is in commitment, solidarity and love of neighbour. These two ways are not separated, and they need each other. The integration of these two approaches is the best way to link justice and spirituality. Since we cannot approach God without carrying the longing of our brothers and sisters with us.

Pope Francis expressed, “the Word of God speaks of an encounter. There is an encounter between people, an encounter between people who were in the street”. And this, he commented, is “something unusual”. In fact, “when we go into the street, every man thinks of himself: he sees, but does not look; he hears, but does not listen”; in short, everyone goes their own way. And consequently “people pass each other, but they do not encounter each other”. Because, Pope Francis clarified, “an encounter is something else” entirely, and this is “what the Gospel proclaims to us in our context: an encounter between a man and a woman, between an only son who is alive and an only son who is dead; between a happy group of people — happy because they have encountered Jesus and followed him — and a group of people who weep as they accompany the woman”, who is a widow and is on her way to bury her only son. The Church should create spaces for critical reflection, spaces where poor people can meet and reflect on God’s presence in their concrete situations. Also, these spaces should be places of communion among equals, where real participation is lived out. These spaces should be witnesses of God’s presence among the people, a presence of communion, equality and “new creation”.

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Article Received: October 23, 2019

Article Accepted: January 14, 2020

No of Words: 3468



Love of Neighbour: The Axis of Pauline Ethics: A Brief Study of Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10

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Abstract: Fr. Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ kept drawing my attention to two texts in the Epistles of Paul, namely Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10 which speak about *agapē* as the fulfilment of the law. As one who always insisted on authentic human existence following the axiom of St. Irenaeus “*Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei*,” proper understanding of these two texts was vital for Kurien.

Terminologically Paul’s idea of love is expressed not only through *agapē* and its cognates (c. 136 occurrences) but also through *phileō*, *eleeō* and *epipotheo* and their cognates and includes both God’s love for human beings, human beings love for God and human beings love for one another. Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10 focus on the love of the neighbour.

These two texts occur at crucial places in two of Paul’s most systematic, dogmatic epistles in which he, following

the *indicative-imperative* pattern, invites every follower of Christ to live the through Christ gained freedom by loving one another which amounts to a singular way of fulfilling all the commandments and the law.

Keywords: Love commandment, Love in St Paul, Love of neighbour, Love of God.

Introduction

The greatest of all the biblical commandments is the one to love one another (the Greek *agapē*) and the whole of Christian message can be summarized in this one word ‘love.’ This is what each one longs for and wishes to share with our fellow human beings though at times we end up doing just the opposite of love. ‘Love is the beauty of the soul’ said St. Augustine. It is appropriate that such a topic is studied as part of the seminar conducted in honour of Fr. Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ who always insisted on authentic human existence following the axiom of St. Irenaeus “*Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei.*”¹ During the last few years when I got a chance to live with him in the Papal Seminary, Pune, he kept drawing my attention to studying these two texts, namely Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10 which speak about *agapē* as the fulfilment of the law. A proper understanding of these two texts was vital for him.

‘Love of Neighbour’ in the New Testament

The New Testament is replete with ‘love’ and the ‘love commandment.’ However, the moment we hear of ‘love-commandment’ in the New Testament, the texts that immediately occur to our minds are either Jn 15:12-13 which speaks of the love of neighbour or Mt 22:37-40 (Mk 12:28-31; cf. Lk 10:25-27) which speaks about the two greatest commandments of which the second concerns the love of

neighbour) or 1 Jn 4:7-12 which sees the love of neighbour as a direct consequence of the love of God for us revealed through Jesus' death² or 1 Cor 13:1-13 which is a hymn of praise on love. However prominent and important 1 Cor 13 may be, yet there are two other texts in Paul, namely Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10 which speak of the love of neighbour and which play a foundational role for Pauline ethical exhortations.

In fact, when we turn the pages of Paul's Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans, we find him speaking against the 'law' and the 'works of the law.'³ In its place, Paul brings in another commandment, namely, the commandment of love which is even more demanding than the laws and prescriptions which Paul has rendered superfluous. Particularly the two texts which we intend to study in this short essay and which occur at key positions of the respective Epistles, also treat the love of the neighbour as the singularly important commandment. Let us begin our brief study by first taking a look at the terminology, foundation and specifications of this love as we find in the epistles of Paul.

'Love' in Paul: Terminological Clarifications⁴

Terminologically Paul's idea of love is expressed not only through *agapē*, a word well-known among the Christian circles and which occurs around 136 times in Paul in its different forms but also through *phileō* (c. 25x),⁵ *eleeō* (c. 22x) and *epipotheo* (c. 21x) and their cognates. Now the meaning of the term *agapē* is not easy to define, though it usually refers to relationships based on love and charity, but the meaning of other terms can easily be specified. The term *phileō* refers to attachment or affection, *eleeō* to compassion or mercy and *epipotheo* to longing or yearning. Among

them, the usage of *eleeō* applies exclusively to God's mercy and compassion, while the other three are used to include God's love for human beings, human beings love for God, and human beings love for one another. Among the three first, namely God's love for human beings, is the foundation on which the other two are built. Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10 which use the cognates of *agapaō* focus on the love of human beings for one another.

Pauline Foundation of Neighbourly Love

For Paul, love is the basis of the divine plan of salvation. As the creation and the call of Israel through covenant express the love of God in the Old Testament, Christ's death on the cross does it in the New Testament. Paul himself experiences the mercy and grace of God in and through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross in his personal life (cf. Gal 2:19-20; 1 Tim 1:13-16). He then also understands that the same has been done to the whole of humanity (Rom 5:6-8; Eph 2:4-5; 2 Thess 2:16). This becomes evident from how he speaks of the revelation of the 'wrath of God' in his Epistle to the Romans. Having established the fact that the whole of humanity is under sin and the wrath of God in Rom 1:8-3:20, Paul should have gone ahead with explaining the punishment which would have been a logical consequence of sin and wrath of God. Instead he goes on to describe how in the place of the wrath, God reveals his righteousness. This suggests that in the logic of God as explained in the Epistle to the Romans sin is not followed by punishment but by God's righteousness.

This righteousness of God is understood in the biblical context not as an attitude or a virtue, but as the way God relates to human beings. In the Letter to the Romans Paul claims that God relates to the human in that he justifies ev-

everyone under sin by revealing his grace as a gift through the redemption in Jesus Christ whom he put forward as an expiatory sacrifice (Rom 3:23-25). The important point to be noted here is that Christ who knew no sin (2 Cor 5:21) was obliged by God the Father to die for human beings while they were still weak, ungodly, sinners and enemies of God (Rom 5:6-8). Paul thus describes how salvation has been offered both to the Gentiles and to the Jews as a gratuitous gift which is appropriated by humans by faith in Christ (Gal 2:16; Rom 1:16). Such a free offering of salvation and justification is due to the love of God (Rom 5:8). When Paul speaks about the love of God, the focus is on God's love for human beings from which the love for the neighbour flows.

This love of God is further expressed in the calling given to *all* people (Eph 1:4-5) and not only to Israel (Rom 9:13.15.18.21-24). For Paul, this love of God⁶ is also the basis for Christian theology and ethics, for a believer's sense of security (Rom 8:31-39) and it is also the chief driving force (2 Cor 5:14-15) in the life of the Christians. Though Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 2:9, 8:3; 16:22; Eph 6:24; and 2 Tim 3:4 mention human obligation to love God, Paul does not emphasize the first great commandment (cf. Mt 22:34-40) in his ethical sections as much as he does with regard to the love of neighbour.

The two texts we study in this essay, namely Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10 which stake the claim that love of neighbour is the epitome and kernel of the entire Old Testament moral law, also demonstrate through their structural placement in the respective epistles, how this love of neighbour flows from the love of God revealed through the sacrifice of Christ. It must be noted here that these two texts occur in two of Paul's most systematic, dogmatic epistles.

Indicative-Imperative Pattern

In the epistles of Paul, we find two types of material, the first consists of the descriptive or the dogmatic section on the basis of which he then makes certain demands which form an ethical section. Since all the epistles of Paul are addressed to Christian communities the descriptive section delineates how Christians have been included in God's plan of salvation in and through Jesus Christ and the ethical section contains admonitions or exhortations which guide the Christians to live a life worthy of the call that has been given to them (Eph 4:1). This way of dividing the writings of Paul has been named the *indicative-imperative* pattern by J D G Dunn.⁷ Such a pattern can be easily traced in 1 Thessalonians, Galatians and Romans which the first part is in the indicative and the second in the imperative. In all the other epistles this pattern is followed in each of the individual issues dealt with.

Gal 5:13-14

As said above this unit occurs in the ethical section of the Epistle to the Galatians. Following the above suggested pattern, the Epistle to the Galatians can be structured in the following way:

The Indicative Section: 1:1-5:12: (contains the descriptive section on how the Galatian Christians had been saved from sin through grace without having to be circumcised); **1:1-5:** Foreword; **1:6-10:** Shock of Paul; **1:11-2:24:** Autobiographical Narratives to prove the authenticity of the gospel proclaimed by him; **2:15-21:** Justification through Faith; **3:1-4:7:** Law, Spirit and Son-ship; **4:8-31:** Warning against Falling into Slavery; **5:1-12:** Appeal to the Galatians concerning Christian Freedom.

The Imperative Section:⁸ 5:13-6:20 (contains the

ethical admonitions): **5:13-26**: Exhortations not to allow the Christian Liberty become an occasion for Self-Indulgence; **6:1-10**: Further Exhortations to give concrete expression to Christian Freedom and Love; **6:11-18**: Postscript.

Having explained the independency and the reliability of the Gospel proclaimed by Paul in Gal 1:11-2:21, Paul continued to demonstrate in Gal 3-4 that the Gentile Christians are saved without having to follow the prescriptions of the law, particularly the prescription of circumcision as a precondition for entering into a relationship with God. Thus, he concludes that the Christians have been made free from sin through the Christ Event alone.

Paul begins the next section 5:1-12 with the noun 'freedom' in the dative case⁹ in **5:1**, thereby showing that Christ set us free for the purpose of freedom.¹⁰ The first implication of Christian freedom, according to him, is that the Christians do not submit themselves once again to the yoke of slavery. That is, the obtained Christian freedom should not be understood as a license for doing the things according to one's own desires. Then in the succeeding verses of this section, namely in 5:2-12 he describes the Christian freedom which is the consequence of the justification brought by Jesus and which must find its expression in authentic love (v 6). This section also reveals that the principle of Christian liberty (freedom) is very close to Paul's heart¹¹ (cf. Gal 5:1; Rom 8:2).

Both 5:1 and 5:13 imply that to live by grace is to live in freedom, in the freedom of Christ. It is both **freedom from inner conflicts** and **external enslavements**, that is, the inhibitions one carries along within oneself and the external structures and systems which enslave the human beings and destroy human dignity. Paul seems to suggest elsewhere that the inner conflict is due to the tyranny

of sin (Rom 6:7-8.18; **6:23; 7:13**). Though Christ has made the Christians free from all enslaving elements, yet Paul is aware that slavery to flesh on the part of the human beings is not yet overcome. That is why he begins his exhortation section by first reminding them of Christian freedom and by inviting them not to yield to self-indulgence. He writes in **5:13-14**:

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself "

Here Paul is making three main statements. First is a warning against self-indulgent behaviour which is actually a misuse of freedom; the second is an invitation to give expression to this freedom by serving one another, and the third contains an assurance that by practising love of neighbour one fulfils all the requirements of the law. From what follows in 5:19-22, we understand that this love of neighbour amounts to fulfilling the fruits of the Spirit.

The first statement gives a warning against turning Christian freedom into a license, which would then lead to self-indulgent behaviour. The original word used in the text for self-indulgence is 'flesh', and it should not be understood merely as bodily flesh distinguished from spirit but as a supra-human power which can destroy the Galatian Christian community.¹² A more detailed presentation of this flesh as a dangerous actor is made in vv 16-20. In the same verses, he also speaks of the Spirit as another supra-human power which is always in conflict with the flesh. Such a conflict is further intensified by the lists containing the works of the flesh and those of the Spirit in vv 19-22. The freedom is given by the Spirit (**2 Cor 3:17**) whose fruits are "love, joy,

peace, patience, Kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (cf. **Gal 5:22**) and who is opposed to the works of the flesh: “fornication, impurity, licentiousness,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” (cf. **Gal 5:19-21**). The test of Christian freedom lies in the capacity of the Christians to overcome the fruits of the flesh and live the fruits of the Spirit.

The second statement calls for mutual service in love. Here freedom is understood as the right of the individual not to pursue one’s own interests but to be conditioned by the rights of the others in a community. By implication, the individual should be prepared to give up one’s rights for the sake of one’s neighbour. It is for the same reason Paul also forbids the Corinthian Christians from participating in the meals offered to the idols (cf. 1 Cor 8-10). Such an understanding of freedom appears paradoxical and comes as a puzzle to those who believe that freedom is for oneself.

Contrary to that this text affirms that this freedom is not for oneself but freedom from oneself, that is, a freedom “to be unselfish, freedom, that is, to live in love.”¹³ Living this life of freedom in love implies giving up the desires of the flesh and living the fruits of the Spirit referred to in the previous paragraph. Inability to love is an expression of one’s incapability to free oneself from one’s selfishness which again proves that one is not yet free. Freedom that does not include responsibility is not freedom at all.

The third statement confirms that the love of neighbor fulfils the whole law. It is surprising to note here that after arguing against the law in the previous sections of the Epistle, now Paul is making a claim to get the whole of the law fulfilled. What is actually meant here is not getting the prescriptions of the law executed, but Paul claims here that by loving the neighbor one behaves according to the

will of God which is actually the purpose of the whole law. Here the meaning of the word ‘fulfil’ has to be understood in the sense of ‘bringing to completion’ or ‘making perfect,’ thereby implying that the one who loves the neighbor, fulfils the essence of the law. Such an understanding is clarified later in 6:2 of the same Epistle where it is claimed that by bearing one another’s burden, the Galatian Christians will fulfil the law of Christ. Therefore, Christian freedom is not to be enjoyed in selfish solitude but it is for making oneself a ‘slave’ to all (1 Cor 9:19-22). Here love is defined as **the concern to serve one another** and Christian freedom is joined to active and passionate concern for one another.

Rom 13:8-10

As in the case of Galatians, the Epistle to the Romans can also be divided into two major sections with their subdivisions:

Indicative Section: 1:1-11:36 (Explains the human situation of sin and the righteousness of God expressed through justification by faith in Christ which results in a free life in the Spirit) **1:1-7:** Foreword; **1:8-15:** Introduction: thanksgiving prayers and Paul’s wish to visit Rome; **1:16-17:** Thesis Statement; **1:18-3:20:** The general guilt of humankind; **3:21-8:39:** Revelation of God’s righteousness as an expression of his love and life in the Spirit which flows from it) and **9:1-11:36:** Righteousness of God and the People of Israel: Here Paul makes the claim that the whole of Israel will be saved.

Imperative Section: 12:1-15:13: (contains exhortations which contain demands of upright Life in Christ) **12:1-13:14:** Spirit-guided Christian life must be the proper worship to God - **13:8-10: Love Commandment;** **14:1-15:13:** The strong owe the duty of love to the weak there; **16:1-27:** Postscript.

After addressing the duty to civil authorities in 13:1-7, Paul moves to the duty of love of neighbour that sums up the Mosaic Law in 13:8-10. Till now Paul has spoken of God's love for human beings (5:5.8; 8:35.37.39; 9:13.25) and the love of human beings for God (8:28), but now he takes up the question of human love for other human beings (12:9; 13:8-10; 14:15). This little passage consisting only of three verses summarizes basically Gal 5 and reverts to the theme of 12:3-13. The only difference between 12:3-13 and this text is that in ch 12 it is about love towards members within the Christian community, and here it is love for the neighbour in a universal sense. Now let us read the text:

Rom 13:8-10: ⁸

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are **summed up** in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, **love is the fulfilling of the law.**

This text begins with an opening statement on loving one another and on the relationship between the love for one another and the rest of the commandments in v 8 and continues to provide an explanation as to the relationship between love and the rest of the commandments in v 9 before finally somehow summarising the points of the previous two verses in v 10. By doing so Paul brings all social relationship demanded by the law particularly by the Decalogue under the one umbrella of love of neighbour (12:9).

As said above v 8 contains all the main points of this unit. After speaking about the 'dues' (*tas opheilias*) to be paid to the civil authorities in terms of taxes, revenues, respect and honour in 13:1-7, now he explains what a Christian 'owes' (*opheilete* – v 8) to all human beings, namely

love. Actually love cannot be a debt in the sense of a *quid pro quo* (something for something), yet Paul calls it a debt “to stress its role in all Christian conduct”¹⁴ and to provide an effective link to the just concluded section in v 7 where he speaks about paying to all what is due to them. Further he clarifies that this love is not limited only to the Christians but also to the outsiders as is implied by the Greek **ton heteron** meaning ‘the other’ in v 8 and **ton plesion sou** meaning ‘your neighbour’¹⁵ in v 9. It means that the danger of reducing this love to the ‘like-minded’ person¹⁶ who is congenial to me should be avoided and must be extended to the one who differs from me. And then Paul makes the third point of this verse by asserting that this exhortation on love fulfils all the obligations of the Christian life.

Now Paul takes up the same idea of Gal 5:14 where he has already affirmed that the love of neighbour fulfils all the law. However, while in Gal 5 this idea is expressed only once through the Greek **peplērōtai**, here the same is expressed through three terms **peplērōken** in v 8, **anakephalaïoutai** (summed up) in v 9 and **plērōma** in v 10. Now, this idea of fulfilling or summing up the law should be understood in the context of Romans. In 3:31 he has said “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means!

On the contrary, we uphold the law.” Thus the law that is not in a position to re-establish the lost relationship between human beings and God is not overthrown. Again in 10:4, Jesus is Christ is seen as the end of the law. Jesus is also the goal of the law because he is the one who mediates the right relationship with God for the believers and through him the law obtains its original function of promoting life (cf. 7:10). Now Jesus enables the believers to fulfil the demands of the law. This happens through the love of neighbour, which is actually a response to the love of God that has been revealed in Christ himself (cf. 5:8). Both the

Greek verbs *plēroō* (v 8) and the noun *plērōma* (v 10) used here to refer to the praxis / doing of the law.

In v 9 Paul lists four / five of the Decalogue (6, 5, 7, and 9 or 10) of Deut 5:17-21. Contrary to the 9th and 10th commandments, Paul does not specify the objects of covetousness. It may be due to the fact that he has already mentioned it in 7:8. And the expression “any other commandment” may refer immediately to the rest of the commandments in the Decalogue, but remotely it would refer to the whole of Tora and even to the Greco-Roman legal system. **V 10a** reminds us of 1 Cor 13:4-6, which illustrates that authentic human love should be void of every selfish motive. One cannot both love and do wrong. In fact, evil is overcome through love (12:21: “... overcome evil with good”). Thus according to Paul the law remains. However, the highest of all the laws is love. Love of neighbour is also a law coming from the Lord and it acknowledges the unique dignity of the individual and demands to love the neighbour as oneself. The basis of such a demand lies in God’s love for us. Authentic love of neighbour consists of transforming oneself and of concretizing the good things that we want to do.

The explicit reference to the law in this section re-emerges the discussion on the law in 1:18-11:36. Throughout the Epistle Paul has identified the law with the ethnic Israel and has established that the Christians are discharged from the law (7:6) though it is good and holy (7:12). However, now that Paul has defined the Christians in non-ethnic categories, he has to provide a new centre similar to that of the law for the people of Israel, around which the rest of the norms for personal and social ethics could be built. Thus the triple emphasis on love of neighbour (vv 8, 9, 10) and bracketing emphasis on fulfilling the law (vv 8, 10) effectively gathers together and sums up the earlier scattered references on these themes (love – 5:5; 8:28; 12:9; fulfilment – 8:4).¹⁷

As in the case of Galatians, Romans too makes it clear that this love is the result of freedom which has been acquired through Jesus Christ. Cf. **Rom 8:2** *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*

Rom 8:14-17 ¹⁴

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

¹⁵ *For you did **not** receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*

Synthesis of Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10

In these two texts, Paul invites every follower of Christ to live the through Christ gained freedom by loving one another which amounts to a singular way of fulfilling all the commandments and the law. The affirmation '**love fulfils the law**' is made once in Gal 5:14 and three times in Rom 13:8-10. The formulation of this love of neighbour as "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Rom 13:9; cf. Gal 5:14) is a quotation from Lev 19:18. In doing so Paul appears to echo the saying of Jesus in Mk 12:28-34 (cf. Mt 22:34-40; cf. Lk 10:25-27) where he makes the love of God (Deut 6:4-5) and the love of neighbour (Lev 19:18) as the two most important of all the commandments. Matthew (22:37-40) also makes the same claim and adds that both the law and the prophets hang on these two (Mt 22:37-40).

Paul also makes the love of neighbour commandment as the foundation of the life of every disciple of Christ. However, Paul goes one step further than Mark and Matthew in speaking of this 'love of neighbour' as the single commandment that fulfils the whole of the Mosaic law.

From the contexts of the two Epistles, it is clear that here **the ‘law’ refers to the Mosaic law**. In Galatians Paul has been contrasting faith with the law of circumcision and in Rom 13:9 he makes a direct reference to the Mosaic law (Decalogue). By implication what the people of Israel living under the law of Moses required to do as their covenantal obligation is now being fulfilled by those practise the love of neighbour. Thus by fulfilling the law, love only upholds it.

Specifications of this Love of Neighbour

Now in the writings of Paul, love for one another is intimately related to faith in Christ and these two concepts form two sides of the same coin. They occur in the initial thanksgiving of his epistles (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:3; Philm 4-5). Most prominently these two terms occur in **Gal 5:6** where Paul’s summary of the Christian life is expressed as: ‘faith working through love.’ In the context of Pauline theology, “love represents the ethical outworking of the imputed righteousness bestowed by grace through faith, the outward expression of new life in Christ.”¹⁸

For Paul love is never a ‘self-attained’ virtue but is the result of the transformed life filled with the Spirit of God who pours God’s love into human hearts (Rom 5:5; Gal 4:6-7; Phil 1:8; Eph 5:18) and therefore lack of love calls into question one’s relationship to God (Rom 8:1-14). This love of neighbour is a joyful and grateful response to the grace received (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 8:1-9). Thus there is a necessary correlation between faith in Christ and loving others. Love is the fruit of righteousness (Phil 1:11) and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). God pours his love into human heart (Rom 5:5; Gal 4:6-7; Phil 1:8; 2 Cor 8:16) and it is not a self-merited achievement.

Everything a Christian does is to be an expression of love (1 Cor 16:14) and it is the first virtue above all the others (Col 3:12-14) and the one charism believers are to seek above all others (1 Cor 12:31-14:1). In the context of 1 Cor 12-14, which insists on using the Spirit-given charisms for the 'common good' (cf. 1 Cor 12:7) and on every one's readiness to restrain one's own conviction of charism for the benefit of the whole (1 Cor 14:28.30), love of neighbour understood as love without any self-interest (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-13) is made the guiding principle. That is why 1 Cor 13 is inserted between chs. 12 and 14. 1 Cor 13:1-13 qualifies this love as self-less. Real love demands self-sacrifice (Eph 5:25-33; Col 3:19; Tit 2:4) and self-denial. The contrast is the love of self and money (2 Tim 3:2-4). The invitation made by Paul to refuse to eat meat also involves this self-denial when he requests the Corinthian Christians to give up their right to eat meat for the sake of those Christians who are of a weaker conscience (Rom 14:15.20-21; 1 Cor 8:9-13; 10:23-33).

This love is not expressed only through gentleness. Sometimes it calls for harsh language (Gal 1:8-9; 5:12; Phil 3:2) which arises out of genuine concern (1 Cor 4:14; 2 Cor 2:4; 7:8-11; 12:19; 13:2-4.10; Gal 2:11-14). It is the intention of the heart or the motivation of the action which qualifies love as authentic.

This love is first related to the Christian community¹⁹ (Gal 6:10) whose members must remain united (Rom 12:10.16.18; 14:1.19; 15:5-6; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 3:27-28; 5:22-23; 6:2; Eph 4:1-6; Phil 1:27; 2:1-4; 4:2; Col 2:2.19; 3:12-14; 1 Thess 5:13-14), should care for one another (1 Cor 12:25-26) and should help in mutual up-building (Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor 8:1; 14:3-5.12.17.26; Eph 4:15-16; 1 Thess 5:11), though it includes all humans into

the fellowship (Rom 12:14.17-21; Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 3:12; 5:15). Though Paul invites the Christians to love the *ton heteron* and the *ton plesion* as we have seen in Rom 13, yet it has not gone the full way of calling the Christians to love even their enemies.

In the Hebrew context ‘neighbour’ referred to a fellow Israel. In Jesus’ language the neighbour includes an enemy (cf. Mt 5:43-44; Lk 6:28) and the alien, for according to Luke, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to the question “And who is my neighbour?” (cf. Lk 10:30-37).

Further we find in Mt 25:31-44 that the neighbours are the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the ill-clad, and the prisoners. Paul’s use of neighbourly love in his extant epistles confirms the view that Paul did not regard it as a Christian duty to go out of his way to love a non-Christian. The love of outsiders and even of enemies comes actually from Jesus himself which then gets narrowed down to the members of the Christian community at the time of the Early Church as reflected in Paul. This is understandable from a person who is concerned first to set the things right in his own communities before extending it to the larger society.

The other aspect of the love of neighbour commandment in Paul is that it does not go to the extent of questioning the dehumanising structures of the times. The possible reasons could be that Paul’s main focus was to strengthen the insiders (the Christians) in the context of an insider-outsider (non-Christians) tension. This was to attract the outsiders through an exemplary life by the insiders. Since the Church was in its fledgeling stage, Paul and the others could not afford to question the oppressive structures of the society. In some places, Paul even instructs the Christians to follow

the ‘customs’ (cf. 1 Cor 11:13) in order not to scandalize the outsiders. In fact, Paul in his epistles and Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, try to present the Church as friendly as possible to the Romans. Maybe they did it for the sake of first establishing the church in the midst of all opposition and rejection so that the church can gain wings to take off in a much stronger way.

Critical Reflection

Paul rightly identifies the importance of ‘love’ as the central proclamation of Jesus and makes it the foundation of the ethical behaviour of all the Christians. Theologically ‘love of neighbour’ is rightly understood by Paul as the central proclamation of Jesus Christ. He does it by showing that Justification is a gratuitous gift which is appropriated by everyone who believes in Christ. By virtue of this justification, every Christian is made free and this freedom is only for loving one’s neighbour as oneself. Living this life of freedom in love means giving up selfishness by avoiding all the desires of the flesh and living out of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

However, pastorally when Paul is giving exhortations to the communities on this love of neighbour his main focus remains the love of the insiders, that is, the Christian brothers and sisters before the outsiders. For whatever reason Paul may have done it, in any case, it is clear that Paul has, to a certain extent, narrowed down the perspective of love of neighbour from that of the earthly Jesus. Such an approach to love may not provide wide wings so that she can take off with a full swing, but might turn the Church communities become more and more inward-looking.

Conclusion

Gal 5:13-14 and Rom 13:8-10 presuppose Paul's description of the human situation of sin and the failure of the Mosaic law to really free them. Both the texts present God's response of love, grace and mercy in and through the cross of Christ as a gratuitous gift (initiative is from God). All those who come to believe in Christ are justified through the same Christ event, and they are made free from the desires of the flesh whose root cause is sin. All those who are freed by the cross are then led by the Spirit, who functions as a guarantee and guide. The Christian Freedom and the consequent life in the Spirit needs to be expressed through love of neighbour which replaces law and fulfils it at the same time.

Notes

1. This Latin quote must be correctly translated as "For/truly the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God" and not simply as "the glory of God man fully alive" thereby promoting the cult of self-fulfilment. The quote actually speaks about the fulfilment of human beings in beatific vision of God, namely in Christ (cf. Eph 3:18-19).
2. For a detailed study particularly of Mt 22:34-40 and 1 Jn 4:7-12 read: George M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Love Commandment," in *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action*, ed. Scaria Kuthirakattal (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2003), 65-71.
3. By these terms 'law' and 'works of the law' Paul appears to refer to the legalistic and retributive / salvific understanding of and attitude to fulfilling the works of the law (the so called 613 prescriptions) which he clearly rejects as a possible means of salvation. While admitting that the law is good and holy (cf. Rom 7:12) and explaining that it was given as a 'disciplinary' (Gal 3:24) to those who were disobedient, Paul goes on to affirm that after grace has been revealed in and through Jesus Christ, the Old Testament law has been rendered superfluous (cf. Rom 7:1-6).

4. The terminological clarifications made here are based on Kurt Aland, *Vollständige Konkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament unter Zugrundelegung aller modernen textkritischen Textausgaben und des Textus Receptus*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1983); R. Mohrlang, "Love," *Dictionary of Paul and His Epistles*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 575.
5. The numbers here refer to the number of occurrences of the terms and their cognates in the Epistles of Paul.
6. When Paul uses the expressions 'love of God' and 'love of Christ,' he might refer either to our love for God or for Christ (*objective genitive*) or God's or Christ's love for us (*subjective genitive*). In some places it is very ambiguous (cf. Rom 5:5; 2 Cor 5:14; 2 Thess 3:5).
7. Cf. James D G Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1998), 626-631. Such pattern is found in texts like Rom 6:4ab; 1 Cor 5:7ab; Gal 5:1ab; Gal 5:13ab, Phil 2:12-13. However, one must also be aware that the indicative-imperative pattern is strictly followed by Paul in all his epistles. Often, he mixes them up.
8. The exhortative or the hortatory character of this section is made evident by the three imperatives used in 5:13-14: "Do not use your freedom as an ..." and "... but through love become slaves ..." in v 13 and "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" in v 14. One also finds eleven other imperatives in the section 5:13-6:10. Cf. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 481.
9. Cf. Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC, Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1962), 270-71.
10. This is the so called 'dative of place whither.' Cf. Smyth H. W., *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956), 1531. The dative of place shows the direction or the purpose of some activity. Here when Paul places 'freedom' in the dative case and relates it to Christ, it means that Christ, through his act of justification, has taken those who participate in this justification 'into the realm of freedom.'
11. Cf. James D G Dunn, *The Theology*, 658-661.
12. Cf. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, 483.

13. C K Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation. A Study of the Epistle to the Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1985), 62.
14. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 678.
15. In the Hebrew context 'neighbour' referred to a fellow Israel. Cf. Cf. C. G. Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1930), 60-68. However, in the context of Paul it cannot be limited only to the fellow Christians. Already in Jesus' language the neighbour includes an enemy (cf. Mt 5:43-44; Lk 6:28) and the alien, for according to Luke, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to the question "And who is my neighbour?" (cf. Lk 10:30-37). Further we find in Mt 25:31 -44 the neighbours are the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the ill-clad, and the prisoners.
16. C K Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Harper & Bros, 1957), 250.
17. Cf. James D G Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 775.
18. R. Mohrlang, "Love," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 576.
19. Cf. Hugh Montefiore, "Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbour as Thyself," in *Novum Testamentum VII* (July, 1962), 157-170. In this article the author notes that a close examination of Paul's use of neighbourly love in his extant epistles confirms the view that Paul did not regard it as a Christian duty to go out of his way to love a non-Christian. The author's contention in this article is that the love of outsiders and even of enemies comes actually from Jesus himself which then gets narrowed down to the members of the Christian community at the time of the Early Church.

Article Received: October 21, 2019

Article Accepted: January 24, 2020

No of Words: 6572



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

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

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

Introduction

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

Mission of the Church in the Post-Conciliar Documents

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

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

a. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

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

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

1. Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

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

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

2. Commitment to Evangelization

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

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

3. Witnessing Life and Explicit Proclamation

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

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

b. *Redemptoris Missio*

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

1. Kingdom of God in the Person of Jesus

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

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

2. The Church as the Servant of the Kingdom

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

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

3. Commitment to Evangelization and Dialogue

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

c. *Ecclesia in Asia*

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

1. Centrality of the Holy Spirit

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

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

2. Centrality of the Word of God

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

3. Centrality of the Gospel Witness

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

Salvation in the Post-Conciliar Documents

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

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

a. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on Salvation

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

b. *Redemptoris Missio* on Salvation

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

c. *Ecclesia in Asia* on Salvation

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Notes

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

- Ecclesiology for India*, 107. Kurien Kunnumpuram, “Towards a Theology of Ministries,” in *Creative and Affirmative Action in Today’s India*, ed. Alwyn D’Silva (Pune: National Vocation Service Center, 1984), 28-29.
8. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §13. Vadakkumpadan, Paul. *Evangelization Today: Understanding the Integral Concept of Evangelization in the Light of Contemporary Trends in the Theology of Mission* (Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1989), 135. Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church’s Mission in India Today*, 16.
 9. Joseph Puthenpurakal, *Evangelizing Mission* (Shillong: DBCIC, 2008), 95.
 10. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §9.
 11. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §14.
 12. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §20. H. Staffner opines that the Church being aware of her mission that the instrument of God’s self-communication to people regards the other faiths are not so much as rivals but rather as cultures which have to be purified and perfected by the Spirit. H. Staffner, “Mission Method According to Vatican II,” *Indian Missiological Review* 8 (October-1986): 230.
 13. M. M James H. Kroeger, “Recent Popes and Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Interreligious Dialogue: Catholic Perspective*, ed. M. M James H. Kroeger (Davao City: Mission Studies Institute, 1990), 44-45. John Paul II, cautions Christians that the members of other religions are indeed not lacking the treasures of human spirituality but can make Christians ashamed being themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 4 March, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979), §6.
 14. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §41.
 15. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §22. Chethimattam states that it is the task of theologians to provide the common

people a sense of moral and religious values and of meaning in their life emphasized by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. John B. Chethimattam, "Problems of an Indian Christian Theology: A Critique of Indian Theologizing" in *Theologizing in India*, ed. T. K. John, Gispert-Sauch and M. Amaladoss (Bangalore: TPI, 1978), 205.

16. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §§22&23. Staffner, "Mission Method According to Vatican II," 236.
17. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §29. Michael Amaladoss, "Interreligious Dialogue 50 Years After Vatican II: Challenges and Opportunities," *VidyaJyoti* 79 (February-2015): 88. Pope Francis affirms that the same Spirit everywhere brings forth various forms of practical wisdom which help people to bear suffering and to live in greater peace and harmony." Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013), §254. Amaladoss, "Interreligious Dialogue," 97.
18. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §13. Kurien Kunnumpuram, "Priests as Prophets of the Lord," in *The Dharma of Jesus: Interdisciplinary Essays in Memory of George Soares-Prahbhu*, ed. Francis X. D'Sa (Gujarath: Gujarath Sahitya Prakash, 1997), 248.
19. Kunnumpuram, *Towards a New Humanity: Reflections on the Church's Mission in India Today*, 29.
20. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §52.
21. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §3. Sebastian Painadath, "Dialectics between Spirituality and Religion," *Jeevadhara* 42 (2012): 351. Kurien Kunnumpuram, "The Church and Peace," in *World and Peace*, ed. Kurien Kunnumpuram (Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2007), 226.
22. Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission," in *Interreligious Dialogue: Catholic Perspectives*, ed. M. M James H. Kroeger (Davao: Mission Studies Institute, 1990):5.

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

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

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

Article Received: October 12, 2019

Article Accepted: January 14, 2020

No of Words: 5502



A Philosophical Reading of the Theology of Praxis

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

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

“The Spirit aids me: now I see the light! ‘In the Beginning was the Act,’ I write.”
-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

In my opinion, all theology must have a practical nature. When we talk about the practical nature of theology, we usually refer to the importance of the narrative of salvation for human experience. However, in recent years, some theologians prefer to focus on human action than on human experience. For example, a French theologian Claude Geffré holds that theology should not only begin from praxis or human action but must also allow itself to be challenged by it.¹ Another French theologian Camil Ménard, inspired by the writings of a Brazilian theologian Clodovis Boff, states that the theological methodology moves an initial praxis to a praxis transformed by the indispensable mediation of one or more theories.²

Focusing on praxis or action has some benefits. First, the modes of action are more precise than those of experience. Secondly, action is more susceptible to analysis and based on the analysis, action can be improved. Thirdly, focusing on practices involves both personal and collective dimensions, whereas experience usually involves a personal dimension. Fourthly, action can be thought of only in relation to a context; it is woven into a specific historical milieu with its history, tradition, symbols and agents of action. Fifthly, action is dynamic and it is a locus of relationships, conflicts, judgments, and personal and collective transformations. Finally, action is often critical of acquired knowledge, including knowledge acquired through experience; the study of a particular action makes it possible to understand the gap between professed and enacted theories,³ an analysis that calls for and offers new knowledge and capabilities.

The theology of praxis makes at least two vital demands on us. First it invites us to improve both our awareness of the situation and our commitment to engage in action. Secondly, it invites us to develop a more rigorous theological method to better understand the significance of our actions for our faith. Although the theology of praxis is primarily about action, there is hardly any reflection on the very concept of action. There is more literature on the relationship between theory and practice. But a clear understanding of the concept of action seems to be essential for research in the theology of praxis. This seems all the more important for the Church as ecclesial practices are said to be the result of divine inspiration or of a mission granted from above. A Christian cannot deny that the Spirit plays an important role in ecclesial practices, but these are nonetheless related to the complexity of human actions.

We need to recognize that the theology of praxis cannot be limited to human actions alone; it must be interested in the divine action as well. The divine action, however, is already the subject matter of systematic theology which thematises it, for example, in terms of revelation, creation and salvation. Theology of Praxis focuses specifically on the divine action manifested through human actions as is the case in the New Testament, the Gospels present to us the actions of the historical Jesus and the Acts of the Apostles (*praxeis apostolon*), speaks to us about the actions of the members of the early Christian community. Thus, theology of praxis is a theological discipline determined by an empirical-hermeneutical relation to actions, particularly but not exclusively to the actions of believers. Its challenge is to bring to light the connection between the divine action and human actions for salvation. Theology of praxis focuses on the interaction between divine and human actions for the

transformation of the world; it is theology rooted in reality and therefore relevant and sometimes normative.

Elements of the Philosophical Tradition

A quick glance at the development of the term praxis in the philosophical tradition can help us to understand its meaning. In Greek, the verb *prasso* means I act, I do an activity, I do it, and “our doing, our conduct, our praxis result from our own deliberation and choice under the guidance of the practical wisdom that Aristotle named *phronesis* and Aquinas named *prudencia*.”⁴ Activities involving physical labour reserved for slaves were excluded from praxis and were designated by the term *poiesis*. Aristotle, for example contrasts praxis which refers specifically to ethical-political action with *poiesis* which involves productive action; “For production [*poiesis*] has its end beyond it, but action [*praxis*] does not, since its end is doing well itself.” (NE 1140b) It is within this framework that Aristotle made praxis one of the three fundamental human activities that he considered three modes of knowledge: *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis*.

The Marxist tradition distinguished the term practice from praxis, giving the latter a reflexive character which it denied to the former. In this context, practice seems closer to the ancient *poiesis*.⁵ Althusser defines *poiesis* as “any process of transformation of a determinate given raw material into a determined product, a transformation effected by a determined human labour, using a determinate means (of production).”⁶ Practice, thus understood, is rooted in particular contexts far from ideal. Praxis incorporates the characteristics of practice, but it is distinguished by its reflexive dimension. David Tracy, who intends to distinguish praxis from practice identified with the application of a theory, defines it as “the critical relationship between theory

and practice whereby each is dialectically influenced and transformed by the other.”⁷ The theory-practice relationship is important in theology of praxis marked by its desire to uncover, criticize and improve the dialectical influence between theory and practice in contemporary situation. The Marxist distinction between practice and praxis has become less important today, so we can focus on the concept of action rather than practice (though these terms are used interchangeably) and recall with Paulo Freire that praxis is “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.”⁸

Heidegger took up the Aristotelian triptych⁹ by making each of its activities fundamental dispositions for the unveiling of the Being. Praxis proves to be the most basic mode of Dasein, mode in which *theoria* and *poiesis* are determined respectively in contemplative and productive disposition. As in Marx, praxis in Heidegger determines and reveals the subject as well as his or her world. MacIntyre identifies praxis with “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.”¹⁰ By interpreting Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*¹¹ in his book *The Logic of Practice*, Graham specifies that “practices are not merely ‘rule-governed behaviour,’ but symbolic, purposeful strategies with many layers of meaning.”¹²

a. Praxis in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur

Ricoeur makes a distinction between praxis and practice. He refers to practices as “complex actions ruled by precepts of all kinds whether technical, aesthetical, ethical or political.”¹³ For him, practices consist of chains of actions endowed with structures that are primarily logical, then teleological or historical, prescriptive, and ethical. They are logical because they present relations of coordination and subordination, teleological because they are enshrined in plans of life and in the unity of a life that unfolds from birth to death, prescriptive because they are governed by rules or precepts, ethical because they are marked by an asymmetrical dynamic inviting or respect for others (ethics). It is in practices that subjects express themselves, their goals, the choice of means to achieve their goals, the results of their choices, and their relations to other subjects and the given circumstance in which they act.

Praxis is the plan of life in which practices are expressed, the narrative unity of life, which captures and integrates praxis into a story, the wish for a good or accomplished life in the Aristotelean sense. From the conceptual point of view, it is only a limited idea: the good life is a goal, towards which are directed all our individual actions. The content of good life is, “for each of us, the nebula of ideals and dreams of achievements with regard to which a life is for more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled”¹⁴ The good life is the horizon towards which all our actions tend.

However, such finality goes beyond individual action, of which it nevertheless constitutes the internal dynamic. This proves that the individual life is not a set of closed practices. “This opening, which fractures practices otherwise held to be closed in upon themselves when doubts rise about

the direction of our life maintains a tension, most often a discrete and tacit one, between the closed and the open within the global structure of praxis”.¹⁵ It concerns above all the text of the action, but also the moral agent who interprets himself or herself in his or her action. Thus, if we accept that understanding the action is for the agent to understand himself or herself, we can say that self-esteem at the ethical level is what the self-interpretation is at the reflexive level. This is the meaning of the good life, the first moment of the ethical goal. But ethics is also concerned with the other whom it institutes as my fellow being who also requires me reciprocally.

b. Dimensions of Action in Habermas

In the wake of Weber, Jürgen Habermas developed a typology of action, which is useful for analysing actions. Habermas distinguishes four types of action: teleological, normative, dramaturgical and communicative.¹⁶ The concept of teleological action (directed to one end) is fundamental to the other types of actions because the teleological structure is present in all four types of action. In fact, what differentiate these four types of action from one another are the conditions according to which we pursue our goals and the manner in which we relate our actions to those of others.

Teleological action is characterized by its focus on the relationship between the means and the end. The success of the action implies the choice and the coordination of the means to arrive at the desired end. The criteria for this action are the knowledge of the external world (means) and the effectiveness of the intervention in this world (end); it is the right coordination between the means and the end of the action. Depending on how the knowledge and interests of the agent of the action meet, this type of action can be

a source of cooperation or conflict. But when we are over preoccupied with the right coordination between the means and the end, we risk turning our action into instrumental or technical.

Normative action refers to the common values of a group by which members of the group orient their actions. The criteria for this action are legitimacy of norms and conformity of actions to the norms of a social group. Admittedly, norms are found in every action, as Ricoeur points out while referring to the rules of action, but there are actions that are entirely defined by its relation to norms and therefore characterized as normative.

Dramaturgical action is that in which participants mutually constitute an audience for one another. Habermas holds that this action is often parasitic of the preceding ones and that it rarely exists in the pure state. The criteria for this action are truthfulness and the authenticity of communication to the internal subjective world, involving the risk of communication becoming manipulation and transforming the dramaturgical action into instrumental.

Communicative action opposes a purely performative or utilitarian objectifying attitude of partners in action and therefore implies a moral dimension. It aims at the interaction of acting subjects in search of agreement or consensus that allows them to coordinate their action plans. Interpretation is its principal task: "the task of mutual interpretation is to achieve a new definition of the situation which all participants can share. If their attempt fails, communicative action cannot be continued"¹⁷ In communicative action, before arriving at a mutual understanding on coordinating mechanism of the action, subjects agree to relativize their expressions when their validity is disputed by the other

participants of the action. Hence the triple criteria of this action: the first related to truth (the statement is true in relation to the objective world), the second to justice (the linguistic action is just in relation to the normative context in force) and the third to truthfulness or authenticity (the intention expressed by the speaker is his or her thought as he or she expresses it). Peukert expresses very eloquently the meaning and the mechanism of this action:

To speak implies the creative projection of an interpretation of the subjective, social and objective reality on to my conversation partner in a way that both opens up to an understanding to that person and invites my partner to share her or his own creative interpretation with me.”¹⁸

The Richness and Complexity of Praxis

Literature often uses the terms action or social action to refer to praxis. We shall therefore do the same, while stating however that praxis involves repetition of action for a certain duration and commitment to it over a period of time. We must also acknowledge that praxis has a social dimension though society consists of cooperating and conflicting individuals with their knowledge and interests. Recent literature on praxis revolves around two poles. One emphasizes the systemic aspect, objectifies praxis and considers individual agents of action as one of elements in praxis. The other is pragmatic and places the agent of the action at the heart of praxis. Although there is tension between the two camps, it seems to us that they are not irreconcilable. We cannot understand the agent of action outside the system of action and the reverse is also true. This tension nevertheless remains fruitful, making it possible to escape reductionism on both sides, and it invites

us to understand these apparently conflicting poles as complementarity.

By borrowing largely from Paul Ricoeur, we shall define praxis as a complex system of actions and interaction of agents of action, oriented towards one or many ends, including relations of coordination and subordination, regulated by rules of different types, marked by a dissymmetry among the agents of action living in a context—whether institutional, sociocultural or religious that influences the action and gives it meaning, but also allows to be influenced by the action. To understand praxis, we need to study the system of action through its semantics and structural poles by investigating “who does what, where, when, how and why”. For Ricoeur, “it is in terms of the entire network crisscrossing the semantics of action that we understand the expression ‘agent’.”¹⁹ He further adds:

Actions have goals, goals which are anticipated and which have results. But actions towards goals imply motives, the reasons for engaging in the actions that allow one event to be connected to another. These motives are held together by agents who are capable for the consequences of their actions, and consequently a network of interactions is constructed, each item complementing the other. These elements, and more besides, allow narrators and listeners to answer questions like ‘what,’ ‘why,’ ‘who,’ ‘how,’ ‘with whom’ or ‘against whom’ with regard to any action.²⁰

If praxis is a complex system of voluntary and goal oriented actions, it involves the goal of individual subjects. These individual subjects interact with others in action, thus praxis is inevitably related to the meaning of human existence.²¹ Through the system of action, the human subject makes meaning of human existence.²² Action therefore involves physical, emotional and spiritual subjects

with needs and desires, capable of judgment and choice, capable of coordinating actions and goals according to ideologies of self-representation and representations of the world in diverse and overlapping contexts (personal, social, ecclesial), which influence them and largely determine their representations, goals and actions.

There is no action without a subject and there is no subject without an action. Action is thus the locus both of understanding and of transformation of self and the world. Action influences the subject's being and understanding. In this sense, action is the un-concealment and transformation of the self and the world. Heidegger considers praxis as a mode of Dasein's existence and relates it to the notion of care. Action is the unfolding of the human subject and his or her relation to the world.

a. Praxis as a Hermeneutical Act

We orient our actions according to their perceived or constructed meaning. Thus, hermeneutics is an important aspect of action related to the public dimension of an action, to a meaning that is publically available, as Jervolino points out: "It is a structured symbolic system, a public one, which furnishes single actions with a context and makes them, in a certain sense, readable."²³ The subject as part of the world makes his or her interpretation of the self, others and the world, an interpretation that is susceptible to change and transformation by his or her action. The complex interaction between theory and practice is thus woven, which has relevance for a theology of praxis. Led by the meaning making project in which reality is confronted with interpretation, practice is intrinsically related to theory, as is ethics to hermeneutics.

Interpretations are in process and in conflict. As there are many agents of action, Actions allow for multiplicity of interpretations leading to conflict as there are many agents of action. Both conflict and cooperation are part of an action. This makes complex not only an action but also its analysis, interpretation and evaluation. Which interpretation should be privileged and on what basis? Hence the need for Ricoeur's hermeneutical process or Habermas' communicative action to determine which vision, narrative and metaphor are best suited to the givenness of the world, the interests of the "narrators," and the significance of the action that is likely to transform both the "narrators" and the "listeners." Interpretation, however, has a dramatic dimension for those who are refused the right of a narrative.

The human subject is an indispensable element in the system of action. The subject wishes to inscribe something of his or her self in the system in which he or she evolves. When the subject makes a manifestation of his or her self in the world through the system of action, he or she may have a kenotic experience: in action the subject is divested at least a part of his or her self. Thus, a tragic dimension of praxis is added to its dramatic dimension. The hermeneutical act must be attentive to the dramatic and tragic dimensions of praxis.

The entanglement between the laws of the system and the desire of the subject is problematic.²⁴ It is because of this entanglement, every action represents the power of the subject, his or her ability to perform certain actions. Von Wright calls this interference, which according to Ricoeur, "consists in joining together the ability to act, of which an agent has an immediate understanding with the internal relations that condition a system."²⁵ According to Ludwig von Mises, an economist and one of the pioneers in

praxeology, human beings determine their course of action based on three conditions: uneasiness over an existing situation, possibility of a greater satisfaction when the existing situation changes, and representation of the power to act: “to make a man act, uneasiness and the image of a more satisfactory state alone are not sufficient. A third condition is required: the expectation that purposeful behaviour has the power to remove or at least to alleviate the felt uneasiness.”²⁶

Consciousness of the power to act is a necessary prerequisite for action. We may have good reasons to engage in transformative action but not doing it only because we know that we do not have the power. This is the reason why we feel helpless in the face of a unjust economic system, polarizing national political climate, the inhuman form of globalization, oppressive social structures and mass genocides. According to Ricoeur, When we say “I can” we affirm implicitly of our consciousness of the power to act: “It is only in this phenomenology of the ‘I can’ and in the related ontology of the body as one’s own that the status of primitive datum accorded to the power to act would be established definitely.”²⁷ No ethics is possible without this consciousness. This dynamics of the power to act has not been given enough attention in various theologies of liberation including Feminist, Dalit and Tribal theologies.

Praxis is founded in the will to transform reality; it works through the dynamics of power and makes the human subject commit to action. It is therefore the locus of competition, struggle, domination, submission, exchange and cooperation. Recent studies on construction of power structures inform us that power is not equally shared. Every action is therefore marked by a structural inequality. Whatever be our convictions about kindness and cooperation, to act is

to make an intervention often though persistent persuasion. Ricoeur remarks that the other “is potentially the victim of my action as much as its adversary.”²⁸ Following the Weberian and the Marxist traditions, Habermas has pointed out the effects of instrumental action on the subject who may be reduced merely to a means in the Kantian sense. In our enthusiasm to idealize action, we tend to forget that power is at work in every action and it can create conflict. Praxis is constantly accompanied both by cooperation and conflict resulting from the dynamics of power. To deny this is to turn a blind eye to the ethical call at the heart of the theology of praxis. The asymmetric relation of power is often a problem in ecclesial practices as elsewhere and I wonder if we give pay enough attention to this. We pretend to have an idealized concept of praxis, especially because of our ideology of respect, benevolence and love of others, whilst the actual practice in the Church is to hold an asymmetrical relation which we cannot afford to ignore.

b. Praxis as Communication

The fact that a subject enters in relation with other subjects in action whether through cooperation or conflict suggests that praxis is a locus of communication. The effectiveness of an action depends on the communication among its agents and with the context. To act is to make oneself heard of one’s vision of the world and to listen to the vision of others. Thus human action becomes communication. “Human action concerns intended activity. As such it includes communication acts as well as bodily movements.”²⁹

Austin and Searle highlighted the practical dimension of communication: “to say is to do.” However, it also seems to me that “to do is to say,” or again “to act is to say.” We

can confuse “to do” with “to act” as Hannah Arendt has pointed out in her *The Condition of Modern Man*. However, the level of a pragmatics of communication, “to do” can be taken as synonymous to “to act.” This equation may have other implication but it does have a meaning even if it is the complicity of political silence. To the idea speech is action, the school of Palo Alto adds the idea ‘action is speech,’ thus suggesting that human behaviour is a form of communication,³⁰ a position which Habermas refutes.³¹ We shall be prudent and be content in affirming that action says something.

The pragmatics of language considers discourse as an act and a performance. However, this act and its meaning depend on the context of interlocution that is, on its location, the dynamics of relations between the interlocutors, their positions, culture, beliefs and intention. We know from Heidegger and Wittgenstein that language serves not only to represent the world but also to complete an action by directing oneself to build the world. To speak is to act, or to commit to act on self, others and the world. It is to establish meaning rendering speech into action. When a speaker says something to someone, he does it with an intention to make an impact on the person whom he or she is addressing. The speaker may intend to frighten, to impress, to coax, to seduce or to comfort his or her addressee. The illocutionary force of speech, what one does in speaking, is action.

What we have discussed here is not strange to the hermeneutical theology of action. Paul Ricoeur has invited us to read action as a text.³² On the one hand, action offers the structure of a locutionary act because it has a certain propositional content and internal features that bring it closer to the act of speech. On the other hand, it also has an illocutionary force insofar as it aims to influence not

only the external world but also the human environment within it. We can thus think of a typology of action and ecclesial action, modelled after the illocutionary acts of Austin and Searle. This is not surprising if we remember that pragmatics (of *pragmata*, actions) is precisely based on actions intended and carried out by the speech act. Since the illocutionary force of discourse is primarily about action, we find these features in praxis. Praxis therefore communicates something.

The first feature of Searle's typology, the assertive trait (by which something is said to be true), seems less obvious. Yet, praxis communicates to us a perception of reality as a truth claim. To lock up mad people in an asylum, for example, is to say that they have no place in our neighbourhood. Praxis, as we have stated earlier, is also an act of interpretation.

The guiding trait of praxis is more evident than the previous one as it is directly oriented to action. It aims not only to change the external world but also to influence human persons, who inhabit it, to engage in action. In fact, it is from an understanding of discourse as performative, and therefore as action, that pragmatics has thematised this trait.

The commitment trait is also obvious: if someone shows commitment in word, he can also do it in action. To give one's presence, time and energy is to commit oneself to the other. Admittedly, there may be tenderness, trickery and other hazards of action, but these also mark the acts of speech.

The expressive feature of praxis is related to the dramaturgical action of Habermas and to the pragmatics of Watzlawick mentioned above. Practice is where the

human person expresses what he or she is with his or her possibilities and limits, and through which he or she says what really matters to him or her, what he or she wants to be, and what he or she wants the world to become.

The act of declarative language accomplishes what it says, a realization that is directly related to action. Declarations of different sorts—declaring a session open, declaring someone as married, elected or dismissed—are already encoded in action in specific contexts, without which these declarations would be false.

Let us add one last element to these communicative features of praxis. It is also the locus of mutual recognition, which in my opinion, constitutes its radical aspect of communication attested by the pragmatics of Palo Alto. The human person's ability to be with (*Mitsein*) others is unique. In the words of Martin Buber, "the basis of man's life with man is twofold, and yet one: the wish of every man to be confirmed as what he is, even as what he can become, by men; and the innate capacity in man to confirm his fellow men in this way."³³

Communication has "the function of constantly rebuilding the self concept, of offering this self concept to others for ratification, and of accepting or rejecting the self-conceptual offering of others."³⁴ It is through praxis that the ongoing construction of the concept of the self and identity exchanges are done. In this sense, praxis as communication has a broader meaning than that of Habermas' "communicative action."

Conclusion

The meaning of action emerges partly from its agents and partly from the system of action, which is situated in a larger context. It is detached from the event itself and

from the agents of action. Just like the meaning of the text is distanced from the event of writing and its author, the meaning of an action surpasses the intention of its agents not only because of its public nature, but also because of its entanglement with the system of action and of multiple agencies. We can agree with Ricoeur that an action is detached from its agent in the same way that a text stands out from its author and develops its own meaning. Similarly, the meaning of the action no longer coincides with the intentions of its agents, but resides in the action itself. Like a text, it is open to anyone who knows how to read it. It can therefore receive different interpretations from those made by its agents.

The importance and significance of an action goes beyond its original relevance and meaning. In this, an action opens a world of possibilities. Paraphrasing what Ricoeur says about the comprehension of a text, we can say that what is to be understood in an action is neither the agents' presumed intention, nor the inherent structures of the action, but the outcome of the action.³⁵ We are at the heart of the hermeneutical work of the theology of praxis articulated in its empirical work. Praxis opens many possible meanings that can be realized in new contexts. Thus, a Christian theology of praxis is always open to new possibilities of actualizing the praxis of Jesus in new ways, thus enabling us to live the Christ event in our own context.

It is on the open-ended aspect of praxis that we conclude our reflections, a choice that is obviously not fortuitous. If Faust replaced the aphorism "In the beginning was the Word" with "In the beginning was the Act," it is because action Praxis and logos, or action and proclamation, are woven together and the theology of praxis must take this into account.

Notes

1. Claude Geffré, *Le christianisme au risque de l'interprétation* (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 343.
2. Camil Ménard, "L'urgence d'une théologie pratique nord-américaine comme théorie critique de l'agir chrétien au service de la société," in Petit and Breton (eds.), *Seuls ou avec les autres? Le salut chrétien à l'épreuve de la solidarité* (Montréal: Fides, 1992), 300.
3. See Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).
4. Bernard Lonergan, "Theology and Praxis," CTSA Proceedings, 32 (1977): 1.
5. In philosophy, *poiesis* (from Ancient Greek: ποίησις) is the activity in which a person brings something into being that did not exist before. *Poiesis* is etymologically derived from the ancient Greek term ποιεῖν, which means to make.
6. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 166.
7. David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 243. See also his book *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 69.
8. Paul Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 60.
9. Aristotelean triptych is the artful repetition employed in rhetoric. It comprises of three activities: 1. Tell them what you are going to tell them, 2. tell them, 3. then tell them what you told them.
10. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187.
11. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed the notion of 'habitus' to capture the permanent internalisation of the social order in the human body whilst recognising the agent's practice, his or her capacity for invention and improvisation. In Bourdieu's theory of practice, the world's structural constraints form permanent dispositions. These are schemes of perception and thought,

extremely general in their application, such as those which divide up the world in accordance with the oppositions between the male and the female, east and west, future and past, top and bottom, right and left, etc., and also, at a deeper level, if the form of bodily postures and stances, ways of standing, sitting, looking, speaking, or walking.

12. Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, 101
13. Paul Ricoeur, "The Teleological and Deontological Structures of Action: Aristotle and/or Kant?" in A. Phillips Griffiths (ed.) *Contemporary French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 99.
14. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 179.
15. *Ibid.*, 179.
16. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 1: Reason and Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 75ff.
17. Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 3.
18. Peukert, "Enlightenment and Theology as Unfinished Products," in Don S. Browning and Francis Schussler Fiorenza (eds.), *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology* (Crossword Publishing Co., 1959), 59.
19. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 95.
20. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 55.
21. Thomas W. Ogletree, "Dimensions of Practical Theology : Meaning, Action, Self," in Don S. Browning (ed.), *Practical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 85
22. Ricoeur criticizes the semantics of action as the occultation of the subject. See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 56 ff.
23. Domenico Jervolino, *The Cogito and Hermeneutics: The Question of the Subject in Ricoeur* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 128.
24. See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 88-112.
25. Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, II, trans., Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London: Con-

- tinuum, 2008), 212. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 135; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 231.
26. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (San Francisco: Fox and Wilkes, 1996), 14
27. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 111. See also page 112 and 181.
28. Ricoeur, "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 294.
29. Donald Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Sciences: Systems of Inquiry* (Albany, New York State University Press, 1983), 172.
30. See Paul Watzlawick, J. Helmut Beavin and D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communications* (New York: Norton, 1967).
31. See Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 44-50.
32. Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, II, trans., Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London: Continuum, 2008), 140-163. See also Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Science of Man," in *Review of Metaphysics*, 25 (1971): 3-51. Clifford Geertz had already proposed to do ethnography as one reads a manuscript: "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture", in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
33. Martin Buber, "Distance and Religion," in Asher D. Biemann (ed.), *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 210.
34. John Cumming as cited by Watzlawick and others, *Pragmatics of Human Communications*, 84.
35. Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," *Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 1-2 (April 1977): 1-37.

Article Received: October 22, 2019

Article Accepted: January 23, 2020

No of Words: 5990

36.



Relational Christology: An Effective Response to the Brokenness of the Church in India

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Abstract: The author attempts to provide a Christological response to existential brokenness of Indian Christian community. Referring to the term ‘Relational Christology’ used for Christology of Adolf Schlatter (1852-1938), He delves into the Gospels to see Jesus through the eyes of relationality. We ask: How does Jesus help the Christians in India in healing their own brokenness and guide the Church to respond to the existential brokenness in India? The paper is organized into four parts. The first part deals the brokenness in the Indian Christian community in terms of her identity, her social existence and in the life of the Church leaders. The second part provides theological foundations for interrelatedness in the world. In the third part, we deal with Relational Jesus of the Gospels. Finally, I derive some social and ecclesial implications of the relational paradigm of Jesus for Christians in India. The method adopted is mainly contextual and analytical. The author has also made use of Adolf Schlatter’s theological method which contains three stages: seeing-act, thinking-act and living-act.

Keywords: Adolf Schlatter, *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis, Relational Christology, Healing, Relationality.

Introduction

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home*, addressed the world in the following words, “The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures” (*Laudato Si*, 61,66,241). He invited the Church as well as the whole world to give witness to the conviction that everything in the world is interrelated and interconnected.¹ The invitation of Pope Francis to give witness to the sense of interrelatedness in the world by gazing at Jesus led me to ask the following questions: How does Jesus guide me to respond to the issues of brokenness?² How do I perceive Jesus when I see him through lens of relationships? How does Jesus help the Christians in India in healing their own brokenness? How does the Church respond to the individual, societal and environmental brokenness in India? Consequently, in this paper, I establish that *a relational Christology inspires the Church in India heal her own brokenness and respond effectively to the larger Indian context of individual, familial, societal and environmental brokenness by promoting positive relationships with God, humans and nature.*³

1. Indian Christian Community: Fragmented Reality

The Indian census (2011) shows that the Christians make 2.30% (2.78 crores) of Indian population. It is a negligible minority in comparison to 79.8% of Hindus and 14.23% of Muslim population.⁴ Though minority in number, Christians in India boldly proclaim Christ and live the values envisaged by the Gospel of Christ. Through centuries of its presence Christianity influenced various aspects of Indian society. Addressing the 30th Plenary Assembly of the Conference

of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) of the Latin Church, in Bangalore on Feb 4, Cardinal Oswald Gracias said, “The Catholic Church needs our nation and India needs the Church.”⁵ This clarion call exposes the deep rootedness and relatedness of Christianity to Indian soil and to Indian hearts. However, being a minority, the journey of Christians on Indian roads has not always been smooth sailing. They are continuously exposed to varied and complex situations of brokenness or feelings of alienation.

1.1. Broken Identity

The question before the Indian Christians is to what extent they can merge their identity with general society and yet remain true to their faith. They fear that conformity to the general pattern will lead to criticism from the Christian community and refusal to conform will be misconstrued by their Hindu hosts. The dilemma is, “merging the Indian Christian personality with the danger of losing his identity versus the refusal to adapt to the Indian culture and remaining isolated from the culture of our nation.”⁶ Christianity even after long years of its existence in India is not yet firmly rooted in the Indian soil and still struggles for its sustenance (social, organizational, and spiritual).

1.2. Broken Social Existence

The Christian community is drawn primarily from the socially and economically weaker sections of society and has yet to be liberated from the psychological, social and economic alienations particularly in the rural area.⁷ India experiences today an escalation of attacks on its Christian minority. The Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) affirms that Dalit Christians suffered in India.⁸ In the first six months of 2017, Indian Christians were harassed, threatened or attacked for their faith as reported in 410 incidents (248 in

the first quarter) almost as many as the total for the whole of 2016 (441).⁹ Maharashtra passed a bill which criminalized social exclusion based on religion, caste or race, yet 80 incidents against Christians were recorded. In Chhattisgarh, one of five states to have an ‘anti-conversion’ law, 122 incidents were recorded in 2019 in comparison with 72 in the year 2018. There is also an increase in Christian persecution across the region driven by extreme religious nationalism by local and national governments.¹⁰ These atrocities and antireligious attitudes infused a sense of fear amidst the Christians endangering both their social status and religious status making them feel broken in their own country and their own lands and their own religious faith.

1.3. Broken Leaders of the Church

We blame not only the changing trends in the postmodern scenario or other social or religious communities but also the changing mentality of the Church leaders.¹¹ The priesthood is essentially a relational reality.¹² This is true in many senses, and was vigorously affirmed by Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (no.12). It is clear that like every human being the priest must relate himself to the source of his existence, God, the Father and he communicates depth of his loving relationship in his ministry by relating to the people whom he serves. Pope Francis calls the Shepherds to ‘to live with the smell of the sheep’¹³ but the modern trends indicate that the stench of the shepherd is keeping the sheep away. The reality shows that the leaders of Indian Christian communities are alienated from ‘Indian people, Indian Intellectuals, Christians.’¹⁴ The very ones who are called to relate with people are broken themselves and break themselves away from the people whom they are commissioned to serve. Indicated realities of new scenarios of modern world keep challenging the

Indian Church for a renewed outlook. Indian Christian community has her dual task of responding to brokenness of her country on the one hand and responding to her own internal brokenness on the other.

2. Biblical Witness to Human Relationality

Human beings are relational beings. They optimally function when they are in community. John Donne wrote, “No man is an island.”¹⁵ No one can live as an individual. Even to call a place an island it has to be surrounded by water. Similarly, it is only in community even individuality of a person is realized. Dwayne Huebner uses the metaphor of weaving to describe how individuals create a fabric of life.¹⁶ The inter woven relationships (with people, creatures and community) define the comprehensive understanding of human life. As beings in the world, humans’ wellbeing is dependent a lot on their meaningful interpersonal relationships and social living.¹⁷ They are connected to every living and non-living in this universe.¹⁸ They find their meaning and fulfillment of life by relating with the world around them. Their world consists of realities that are progressive in relationship. It is through reverting to relatedness, they attain a sense of meaningfulness in their lives.

This vision of human relationality was also reflected in the themes of Creation and Covenant in the Bible. The creation stories (Gen 1-2:4a; 2:4b-3:24) highlight the fundamental relationality and interdependence of humans. They expose the reality, “To be human means to be-in-relation.”¹⁹

2.1. Relational Dimension of Creation

The creation stories in Genesis are concerned with explaining the establishment of relationship with God and

creation. In Genesis 1-12 the intimate communion and relationship between the first humans and their creator is inaugurated. In the second creation story (Gen 2:4b-3:24) the intimate relation between humans and the earth is highlighted by saying that *adam* was made from *adamah*. God makes them. He touches them. He blows his breath into their nostrils. This personal involvement makes God, a God of relationships. The Bible testifies that the fall of the first parents in sin brought about every human being born in sin (Rom 5:12). The primary consequence of the Fall is the separation from God, their Creator, in whose image they were made.

We also read about an alarming brokenness of human relationship with God and with one another manifested in their brokenness with other human beings and the nature. The story of Cain is representation of humans cry for Divine-human-cosmic Harmony.²⁰ The extension of this brokenness becomes manifest in the deathly chaos of the flood. Even after a new creation and the covenant with Noah, we see the deadly fruit of the pride which disintegrates humanity. When men and women are interested only in themselves, the inevitable result is Babel, the breakdown of relationship and the destruction of community.²¹

God extended relationality to all God made through the act of creation. The Bible says, “So, God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them...” (Gen 1:27). The metaphor ‘image of God’ evokes this Christian understanding of the human person. There are two dimensions of the *imago Dei*.²² They are the vertical relationship (between God and person) and the horizontal relationship (between persons and creation). The first dimension of this *imago Dei* is reflected in human beings’ ability to relate and respond to God, to God’s Words, and

to God's presence in creation. The second dimension is reflected in their ability to relate with one another and with the whole creation.

Among various types of interpretations of this metaphor, interpretation as relationality seems to be appreciated by some of the theologians.²³ Karl Rahner (1904-1984) stated most succinctly the central motive of all his theological effort: "Human persons in every age, always and everywhere, whether they realize it and reflect upon it or not, are in relationship with the unutterable mystery of human life that we call God."²⁴ Human persons are defined in their relationship with God. This is not only a gift but a responsibility. This is the reason why Karl Rahner stated, "The original relation to God is the love of neighbor."²⁵ Human persons' relationship with God extends to their relationship to fellow human beings and to the whole of creation. This is further revealed by God in the covenantal relationship.

2.2. Relational Dimension of Covenant

God enters into a relationship with humans by making a covenant with them. Covenant affirms and effects the relationship between God and humans and the whole of creation. His covenants are also revelatory events wherein God reveals himself as personal God and relational God. The Bible says that God makes covenants both with Israel and all creation.²⁶ The core of the Israelite understanding of its relationship with God was the notion of covenant (FABC paper no.146, 40). God's covenant making demonstrates God's relationality. These events of Yahweh's covenant are begun with Adam and are fulfilled in the new covenant with Jesus Christ.²⁷ God's initiative to not only relate with the people of Israel but through Christ with all the whole of

creation. These covenantal relationships are made out of love assuring humans their dignity and fulfilment of their destiny.

As we progress through the covenants in the Bible, we know that God discloses himself “a being-in-relation, a unity of three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”²⁸ Covenant presents God’s desire to enter into relationship with men and women created in his image.²⁹ This is very clearly reflected in the repeated covenantal proclamation, “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 30:22; Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:28). John R. Sachs, commenting on this proclamation, sees the covenant as a matter of the heart and a matter of personal relationship.³⁰ The source for this interpretation of human persons as relational is Trinity who is communion of Persons. The divine trinitarian love is the origin and source for achieving this goal of human community of loving relationships.

2.3. Trinity as Source for Beings-to-be-in Relation

In Trinitarian Theology, relationality became a prominent theme in late twentieth century.³¹ Inter-relationality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit emphasizes to perceive God as One in Three Persons. Theologians like John Zizioulas, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert W. Jenson, Leonard Boff, Mirosław Volf, Paul Fiddes, Colin Gunton and Stanley Grenz contend that the relationality of the Father, Son and Spirit are one God.³² We find that liberation theologians extensively speak about God’s interaction with the world. Therefore, I revisit the inner relationship of the Trinity in the light of liberation theology. These theologians who propose social Trinitarian approach take shelter under Cappadocian Fathers namely St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa

and Richard of St. Victor. It is worth quoting the words of Gerald O'Collins about Social Trinitarian approach of Cappadocians:

At the heart of God, the Cappadocians saw an interpersonal communion or *koinonia*, with communion as the function of all three divine persons and not simply of the Holy Spirit. For this interpersonal model of Trinity, **God's inner beings is relational...**³³

Some of the Liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez (b.1928), Leonardo Boff (b.1938) and Juan Luis Segundo (1925-1996) also insist on this social or communion aspect of social Trinity. Among them, Leonardo Boff elaborately deals with social Trinity in terms of communing in love expressed in terms such as *Perichoresis*, mutuality, egalitarianism, openness to the other and love.³⁴

The grandeur of oneness, communion, mutuality, openness, indwelling, fullness of life and love in Trinity demands that every reality is to be viewed from a trinitarian perspective. This perspective inhales the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity and the expression of the same Trinity in human beings who are created in the Trinitarian image.

We observed that our relationality is not in doubt but the appropriateness of our relationality is questionable. The question arises, 'Where do we find a concrete realization of these relational character of God and human beings?' Do we find the answer in the person of Jesus Christ? Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the perfect expression of this loving relationship with God and with Humanity and the creation. He is the One who is the image of the Trinitarian loving communion (Col 1:15, 2 Cor 4:4, Heb 1:3). He reveals God to humans and humans to themselves

(*Redemptor Hominis*, no.10 & *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). This gives us an impetus to proceed to the next section where we explore into relational dimension of the life and the mission of Jesus Christ.

3. The Relational Jesus: His Identity and Mission through Relationality

B.L. Callen says: “A relational [Triune] God has created relational people in a relational world.”³⁵ The Trinitarian God who is relational by communing in love, created the world which is relational. God renews this relationality with humanity through his Son Jesus Christ. According to Biblical witness, long ago God spoke to our ancestors in various ways but now most definitively through the Son, Jesus Christ who is the exact imprint of God’s very being (Heb 1:1) in and through the presence of Spirit. Thus, the intra-Trinitarian loving relationship is manifested in the world in and through the person of Jesus Christ and the unitive power of the Holy Spirit. Now, we look into Gospels to take a close look at Jesus’ life and mission through the spectrum of relationality.

3.1. Relational Jesus in the Gospels

One of the ways theologians try to understand Jesus is by analyzing Christological titles found in the New Testament. A few such titles are the following: ‘the Christ,’ ‘the Son of God’ or ‘the Son of Man.’ The evangelists, however, do far more. They tell the story of Jesus who makes a profound impression upon human beings and relates to them in unique ways. The evangelists accentuate his relational approach, his activity, and teachings in the context of his personal interaction with individuals and groups.³⁶ They provide a

deep and dynamic perspective of Jesus in his relatedness to the Father, the Spirit, the disciples and the people.

3.1.1. Jesus' Relationship with the Father

The major focus in Jesus' life and his ministry is solely based on his relationship with the Father. Mohan Doss says, "The life of Jesus is the flowering of his intimate relationship with the Father."³⁷ The Gospels portray Jesus' profound and foundational experience of God as the *Abba* Experience (Mk 1:11, 14:36). Joachim Jeremias argued quite convincingly that the baptism of Jesus by John was the occasion for his *Abba experience*.³⁸ Jesus becomes "Conscious of being authorized to communicate God's revelation, because God had made himself known to him as Father."³⁹ Through this intimacy with the Father, what is communicated to him is not simply the message or ministry but relationship. Thus, as the beloved Son of the Father, Jesus shares in the sociality of his Father. He teaches that God is our *Abba* (Father, an intimately relational description).⁴⁰ He resides in a privileged relationship with the Father (Jn 1:18). In and through this relationship with the Father, Jesus is empowered to share the story, nature, and relationality of the Father with others. Similarly, just as Jesus lives in an ever-so-close relationship with the Father, so, the Fourth Evangelist, who is in a privileged position of being 'at the bosom of Jesus' (Jn 13:25) narrates the Jesus-story in a relational perspective. The evangelist repeatedly and emphatically portrays that he is the one sent by the Father (Jn 4:34; 5:23, 30). He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30, 38; 14: 9, 11, 20).⁴¹ Thus, it is convincing to say that Jesus' obedience to God's will flows from his *Abba* experience.

3.1.2. Mediating the *Abba* Relationship

The Abba-experience of Jesus not only revolutionizes the relationship of God with humans but also radicalizes the relationship among humans themselves.⁴² The focus of his relationship is seen in the redemption of creation, specifically the redemption of humanity. Because Jesus basically spoke of God as his *Abba*, he respected and related to all peoples in that radical and dignified relationship of the children of God. He could command them to love one another as he loves (Jn 15:12).⁴³ Jesus says, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (Jn 20:17). His return to the Father is a moment of rejoicing. His ascension ensures the ultimate fulfilment of his promises to the those he loves. In returning to the Father Jesus makes it possible for his disciples to share fully in his relationship with God.⁴⁴ Jesus has graciously revealed to us his filial relation with his Father. Thus, we can see that his mission reflected his relational *Abba* experience of God. His relationship with humanity flows from his filial relationship with the Father.

3.1.3. Jesus’ Relationship with the Spirit

The Gospels portray the indispensable relationship between Jesus and the Spirit. The *Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference* (FABC) declares that “the presence and activity of the Spirit in Jesus Christ can be found throughout his life and ministry, from [Incarnation to Resurrection]” (FABC No. 81, 3.3). His incarnation, words and deeds are the hope filled signs of the Kingdom of God. Pope John Paul II emphasizes that “The incarnation of the Son of God is the supreme work accomplished by the Holy Spirit” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, no.16). In his redeeming journey Jesus is accompanied by the loving Father and the Spirit.

The relationship with the Spirit is glimpsed in the baptism of Jesus, where the Spirit is manifest in the form of

a dove alighting on Jesus even as the Father's voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with whom I am well pleased" (Mk 1:11, Mt 3:17, Lk 3:22). In the synagogue at Nazareth he began his prophetic ministry to preach the good news to the poor, freedom to captives and a time acceptable to the Lord (Lk 4:18-19). He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be strengthened for his public ministry (Mk 1:12; Lk 4:1; Mt 4:1). Jesus of Nazareth inaugurates the Reign of God with the power of the Spirit. The presence of the Spirit is manifested in his teaching with authority (Mk 1:22, 27), and in his miracles (Mt 12:28). Jesus' last gasp is the Spirit that animates creation.⁴⁵ Pope John Paul II rightly points out that "All of this shows how Jesus' saving mission bears the unmistakable mark of the Spirit's presence: life, new life" (*EA*, no. 16).

The relationship between the Spirit and Jesus manifests the communing dimension in the Trinity. The Spirit is meaningful to the community of believers along with the presence of Christ. Similarly, the acts of Jesus are redemptive together with the Spirit. *Redemptoris Missio* pronounces, "The Spirit is not an alternative to Christ. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions...can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit" (*RM*, no. 29).

3.1.4. Jesus' Relationship with Mother Mary

The Gospel of John offers us a portrait of Mary as the ideal disciple.⁴⁶ Mary appears twice in the Fourth Gospel: at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn 2:1-12) and at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25-27). At Cana, we see Mary's significance in her relationship with Jesus. The event provides an illustration of the close cooperation and union between

mother and Son. The relationship of Jesus and Mary at Cana was one of mutual cooperation. At Cana, one learns that by being in communion with the Word, Mary leads people to Jesus.⁴⁷ In the scheme of John's Gospel her activity at Cana is a preparation for the comprehension of her role on Calvary.⁴⁸ At the foot of the Cross, she becomes mother of the Beloved disciple.⁴⁹ Jesus brings them into a mother-son relationship and thus constitutes a community of disciples.⁵⁰ Jesus reveals and creates his mother as the mother of the new family of disciples, of those who hear the word and act on it (Lk 8:21). She epitomizes what fidelity and love mean by standing at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25). She stands as one who nurtures and fosters a sense of family interrelatedness.⁵¹ Christians' relationship with Mary is an expression of their relationship with Christ.⁵²

3.1.5. Jesus' Relationship with the Disciples

Jesus manifested the relational essence of the Kingdom of God to the disciples by being with them, by teaching them through parables and by showing them signs of the Kingdom through miracles. His relationship with the Father and the Spirit is extended to the disciples.⁵³ Jesus' formal appointment of the twelve begins with the purpose statement, "to be with him" (Mk 3:14-15). Relationship with Jesus precedes their commission (Mt 10:5, Mk 6:7, Lk 9:1) or the seventy's charge on their short-term mission (Lk 10:1ff). Due to their relationship to him, they obey and venture out and engage in the challenging task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Jesus' command, 'follow me,' invites relationship and obedience that are coupled with his faithful promise.⁵⁴ In him, they experienced "a complete transformation from alienation to communion,

from fragmentation to wholeness, from meaninglessness to meaningfulness, from death to life.”⁵⁵

3.1.6. Jesus’ Relationship with the People

Jesus reveals the essence of the Kingdom of God by relating with all kinds of people. He sought relationship with others before they gain benefits or gifts. Even though people come to him with their pressing physical needs, they learn that he deals with them individually, in a completely personal manner. Thereby, they develop a relationship with his person who accepts and invigorates their relationship with God, with other members of the community.

Not only does Jesus become poor with the poor, he makes himself an outcast by associating with outcasts. He touches the leper to welcome him back into human fellowship (Mk 1:41). He eats with tax collectors and sinners earning the reprobation of the religious elite (Mk 2:15; Lk 15:1-2). He puts aside the laws of ritual cleanliness to which the Pharisees attached so much importance (Mk 7:1-23). These are not casual gestures on the part of Jesus. They are expressions of his relationship with them. He consistently and radically identifies himself with the poor and the marginalized of society, not only by announcing their liberation (Mt 11:2-6; Lk 4:16-21; 6:20-27) and protesting on their behalf (Mk 3:1-6; 10:13-16; Lk 7:36-50; 13:10-17) but by relating to them, by sharing their life and their shame.⁵⁶

These reflections on the Gospels depict Jesus in his relationality with the Father, the Spirit and the whole of creation. In essence, the Gospels portray a relational Jesus. The implications of embracing this relational Jesus who reveals a relational God through his relational approach will be explored in the final section.

4. Implications of Encountering the Relational Jesus

The Indian Christian community has the dual task of responding to the brokenness of her country and to her own internal brokenness. The Church in India looks up to Jesus for a response. It is quite fitting to recall the statement of Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia*, “Contemplating Jesus in his human nature, the apostles of Asia find their deepest questions answered, their hopes fulfilled, their dignity uplifted and their despair conquered” (*EA*, no. 14). The Relational Jesus whom the evangelists portray in the Gospels provides direction for Indian Christians to courageously respond to the pressing challenges. These implications are not immediate solutions but invitations for the Christian community “to know Him [Christ], to introduce Him and to trust India with the Christ and trust Christ with India.”⁵⁷ These implications are not presented as solutions but as directives for the Christians in India to revitalize the relational paradigm of Jesus in their context.

4.1. Healing Loneliness

The loneliness and isolation of the people in India reveal very strongly the ambivalence of our personal situation. They want to communicate, and yet they experience over and over again that nobody listens to them. The stance of Jesus in John’s Gospel is that of one who really listens (Jn 4: 4-26). He says no word to the woman until the end. He listens to the silence of the woman. He listens to the Pharisees, to their worldview, and to their anger with him. Jesus listens to people who are in need of forgiveness. Jesus’ ministry of healing sprang from his ability to be moved with pity when he saw the needs of those among whom he lived. He went out to the others in their need, and responded to them through a gesture, a touch, a life-giving word. It was

a liberating movement because the persons in the encounter were revealed their own power of being, of becoming what they were created to be. The Indian Church, as body of Christ, should emphasize on the ministry of listening, the ministry of affirming and the ministry of healing. Our image of the relational Jesus propels every Christian to listen to the silent cries of lonely widows, shattered youth, broken farmers, rape victims and trafficked women.

4.2. Healing Parishes

Parishes or Christian communities are to be built on interpersonal relationships. As children of God, as brothers and sisters who claim God as '*Abba*' our parent, Christians related to one another in the Parishioners are called to a relationship of love rather than a task or function in the life of the Church. The Church is to be a place where they can be persons in relation with God and each other. It is where love and authentic self-revelation can be shared. No activities and programs will fill the void if a relational context is missing in a parish. In this light we can say that congregational growth means drawing others into authentic personal relationship in parishes. This involves much more than simply adding numbers or names to a parish list. The measuring rod for real growth in a parish is positive interaction among the members of the community.

4.3. Healing Religious Communities

I always wonder at the amount of suffering and pain encountered in religious of all ages. Very often, they are maimed by fears and are unable to open themselves.⁵⁸ This kind of internal brokenness in religious communities needs healing. One of the greatest difficulties experienced in the area of relationships comes from the fact that they are creating relationships which are in fact a constant denial

of the other's freedom in the name of charity. Our wanting to protect the other from one's own hurt, from one's own mistakes, from one's freedom, is the most damaging element in the relationships. It would seem that many of our relationship in ministry are characterized by this being 'responsible for'.⁵⁹ Being 'responsible to' another person is a very different thing. One is able to accept the other where he/she is independent of his/her choice. It involves a relationship of listening, caring, of respecting the freedom of the other. One of the impressions, the relational Jesus imprinted on the people was a sense of acceptance, a sense of freedom. Thus, by truly knowing the heart of the relational Jesus religious communities shall heal their internal brokenness.

4.1.4. Healing Families

The prosperity of a person and of both human and Christian society is closely attached to the healthy state of conjugal and family life (GS 47). The healing of the institution of the family heals the society. Healing of the institution of the family requires that it is transformed by Christ and restored to its natural purpose and essential structure (CCC 1643). A mutual surrender of will and trust are some of the values that a modern Christian family could learn from Jesus who in his volitional union with the Father saved humanity. A mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable unity between them (GS 48). Jesus on the cross becomes a guiding light for families to surrender to one another in love (*Amoris Laetitia*, 11,13,22). Jesus is the model of obedience to God's will in the families and of perseverance to enjoy the fruitfulness of their marriage (*AL* 18,22). In the footsteps of Christ, mutual love, mutual freedom and mutual obedience become guiding principles

for them (GS 52 & CCC 1660). Thus, Christian families heal themselves by truly loving one another as Christ loves them (Eph 5:25, 32).

4.1.5. Ecological Stewardship

The facts discussed in the beginning show that people are turning this living planet earth, our home into a wasteland. By emphasizing the relational dimension of the Kingdom proclaimed by Christ, Christians will realize the fact that God not only creates, protects and perfects all the creatures but also indwells, accompanies, participates and delights in them and, calls for a relationship of mutuality between creatures and us humans.⁶⁰ Pope Francis says that Jesus invites every one of his disciples to “recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures” (*Laudato Si* 96-100). On the basis of the covenant with the Creator each one is invited to a deep personal conversion in one’s relationship with others and nature.

Thus, the Christians in India have a special responsibility to develop appropriate eco-theologies. Only through attitudinal change, can one eradicate one’s greediness and selfishness which are the root causes of ecological crises (LS 201). The Church in India has to recognize and honour the untiring services of environmentalists like Medha Patkar, Saalumarada Thimmakka, Robert Athickal and others. Today to safeguard this beautiful planet earth the Church India needs to work along with people of other faiths.

Conclusion

The emphasis on relationality in Jesus’ life navigated us to find implications for brokenness in the Indian Christian community. I began highlighting the responsibility of the theologians to present a relational image of Jesus

to the faithful like Jesus the listener, the healer, the compassionate, the merciful and others. By emphasizing the relational dimensions of faith, redemption the Indian Christian community and the faithful are guided to become mediators of reconciliation and healing in the individual, familial and cosmic spheres of the Indian society. The same holds true also for religious communities. This mission of reconciliation is possible only when the Indian Church relates with the lived experiences of broken people through the ministry of presence, listening, caring. Finally, one realizes that the purpose, communication and the calling of Christology is relationality. Though, the Christians are minorities in India, the implications indicate that they could be guiding lights having their source in the relational Jesus who revealed a relational God. Thus, a relational Christology inspires the Indian Church and the Indian society heal their brokenness and become joyful witnesses to the conviction that everything and everyone in the world are interrelated.

Notes

1. Michael Braütigam, *Union with Christ: Adolf Schlatter's Relational Christology* (Oregan: PICKWICK Publications, 2015), 13.
2. Whenever I refer to 'brokenness,' it mainly refers to the existential brokenness of people in society. I treat relationship from the theological, social and cosmic perspectives.
3. This is my dissertation thesis which I defended in March, 2019. It is to be noted that I reworked on the paper to convey the argument succinctly.
4. *The Census Organization of India*, "Religious Census 2011," <https://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php> (accessed February 12, 2018). The Census presents that 2% (1.67 Crore) of them are in rural India and 2.96% (1.12 Crore) in urban area.
5. Vatican News, "Cardinal Gracias: Indian Christians should become fully Indian and fully Christian," (February, 2018) <http://www.vati->

cannews.va/en/church/news/2018-02/cbei-meets-in-bangalore-india.html (accessed February 21, 2018).

6. S. K. Hulbe, "The Dilemmas before the Indian Christian," in *The Indian Christian's Dilemma Disaster or Opportunity*, eds. Yeager Hudson, Joseph Barnabas et al. (Poona: Israelite Press, 1968), 43-44.
7. Hulbe, "The Dilemmas before the Indian Christian," 39.
8. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), *Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church in India: An Ethical Imperative to Build Inclusive Communities*, 8 December 2016, <https://www.cbei.in/Policies/Policy922172823534.pdf>, (accessed 20 September 2017), nos. 9-36.
9. World Watch Monitor, "Hinduisation of India Leads to more Anti-Christian Violence," August 8, 2017, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/08/hinduisation-of-india-leads-to-more-anti-christian-violence/> (accessed February 15, 2018).
10. Harriet Sherwood, "Christians in India Increasingly Under attack," *The Guardian*, (January 11, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/11/christians-in-india-increasingly-under-attack-study-shows> (accessed February 1, 2018).
11. P. Arockiadoss, "Crises facing Priesthood in Catholic Church," *Vai-hari* 9, no.1 (2004): 21-35.
12. Gispert Sauch, "Priest is a Relational Being," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 73, no.8 (August 2009): 598.
13. Pope Francis in his homily during Chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica (March 28, 2013) invited the priests to go out of themselves. He said that priests are called not to merely 'live with the smell of the sheep' but to be truly involve with the flock.
14. Soares-Prabhu speaks about Indian Theologian and his/her alienation in three areas: Alienation from people, Alienation from Intellectuals and Alienation from Christian People. I have attributed the same aspects to the life of every pastor. They seem to be quite resonating with experiential reality about Christian Church leaders in general. Refer to Soares-Prabhu, "From Alienation to Inculturation: Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today," 87-91.
15. John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (United States of America: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), 108.
16. Dwayne Huebner, "Practicing the Presence of God," *Religious Education* 82, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 570.
17. Joseph Kaipayil, *Human as Relational: A Study in Critical Ontology* (Bangalore: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy, 2003), 51.

18. Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "Reality as Relationality: Some Scientific and Anthropological Reflections," *Jnanadeepa* 10, no.2 (2007):101-121.
19. Jose Kuttianimattathil, *Theological Anthropology: A Christian Vision of Human Beings* (Bangalore: The Theological Publications in India, 2009), 75-76.
20. Rekha Chennattu, "The Story of Cain (Genesis 4:1-16): A Cry for Divine-human-cosmic Harmony," *Bible Bhashyam* 27 (2001): 256-257.
21. John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press,1991), 39.
22. Yeo Khiok-Khng, "A Relational Theology of Worship: Its Meaning and Implications for the Eucharist," *Asia Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (1995):171-172.
23. Mathew Jayanth, "Theology and Science on Human Person: Constructing a Theological Anthropology in Dialogue with Science," *Malabar Theological Review* 2 (2007): 5-7. Some of theologians like Adolf Schlatter, Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and John McMurray are referred to when we speak of relational understanding of *imago Dei*.
24. Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965-1982*, eds., P. Imhof and H. Biallowons, trans. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 147.
25. Karl Rahner, *Grace in Freedom* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 217.
26. For a historical explanation for the covenants and their prevalence in Judaic community, refer to Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical – Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Illinois: Crossway, 2012).
27. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002), 11-61.
28. Gentry, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 656.
29. Alistair I. Wilson and Jamie A. Grant, eds., *The God of Covenant: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 12. Also refer to Gentry, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 21.
30. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 45.
31. Stanley J.Grenz, *Rediscovering the Trinity: The Trinity in the Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 117.
32. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 40-49,83-89. John Zizioulas, "Communion and Otherness," in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994): 347-361; Jürgen Motlmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: For-

- trass, 1993), 162-170, 172; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 322-325; Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 75-161.
33. Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God* (New York: Paulist, 1999), 131-132.
 34. Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1988), 138-146. Also see Leonardo Boff, "Trinitarian Community and Social Liberation," *Cross Currents*, 38, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 281-308.
 35. Barry L. Callen, "John Wesley and Relational Theology," in *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction*, eds. Brint Montgomery, Thomas J. Oord and Karen Strand Winslow (San Diego: Point Loma Press, 2012), 7-10.
 36. J. Lyle Story, "Christology and the Relational Jesus," *American Theological Inquiry* 1, no.2 (15 July 2008): 91.
 37. Mohan Doss, "Jesus: The Listener," *Asian Journal for Priests* 57, no.3 (2012): 13.
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Article Received: October 24, 2019

Article Accepted: January 11, 2020

No of Words: 6840



JNANADEEPA

PJRS ISSN 0972-33315

24/1 Jan-June 2020: 160-166

Committed to the Church and the Country

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A new edited work has come out to explore the theological vision and contribution of Prof Dr Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ, Professor (Emeritus), Systematic Theology, Jnanadeepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. He has been a pioneer of Vatican II in India and has contributed significantly to the emergence of Indian Christian theology.

After having specialised in Vatican II, he has been teaching various subjects like Theological Anthropology, Ecclesiology and Priesthood for more than thirty years. After his retirement, he has been editing two journals, *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* and *Asian Journal of Religious Studies*.

Dr Kunnumpuram is a versatile personality: a committed professor of theology, creative thinker, prolific writer, gentle mentor and compassionate guide to many of us! 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!

Considering his invaluable contribution to Indian Christian Theology, some friends and admirers of Kurien have brought about a compilation of articles in book form in his honour. The articles are related to the themes that have been dear to Kurien: Church, human beings and spirituality. Some articles are based on his chosen writings and are meant to continue the path of theological reflection on the Indian soil.

After elaborate planning and exchange of views, the seminar was organised at Kozhikode (Calicut), Kerala, on October 17-18, 2018, with the whole-hearted support of the Jesuit Province of Kerala. Eighteen theological papers were presented during these two days. Kurien had a stroke on 17

Nov 2017 and he was bedridden, and so he could not take part in this Seminar which he was eagerly preparing for. Unfortunately, just five days after the seminar, on Sunday, October 23, 2018, Kurien passed away peacefully and joyfully!

After the seminar some more papers were added in order to explore Kurien's contribution to Indian Christian theology from various angles. Thus, this volume has thirty-four articles – all being expressions of love and gratitude to Kurien for what he has been personally and professionally. The introductory article by MK George SJ, Provincial, Kerala Province of the Society of Jesus, is adapted from his inaugural address at the seminar. It gives an overview of Kurien as a person and a theologian who has contributed significantly to the Indian Church. The other articles are organized into five broad sections. The first section is on Commitment to the Indian Church. Francis X D'Sa SJ, a colleague and friend of Kurien, explores the need to return to the original charism of the Church based on the cosmotheandric vision of Raimon Panikkar. The next article by Isaac Padinjarekuttu dwells on the spirit of Vatican II as impetus for Church renewal, a theme close to the heart of Kurien. This is followed by a critical study of Onesimus in Philemon by Arul Samy ALCP/OSS, a renowned scripture scholar. Sr Shalini Mulackal PBVM, challenges the Church to reclaim its prophetic mission for the poor. Paul Thelakat, reflects on the repeatable tragedy that Church at all times is confronted with. Thomas Karimundackal SJ studies a new way of being a prophetic priest in India based on the Prophet Amos. This is followed by article by Evelyn Monteiro, SCC who pleads for an integration of the side-lined 'New' People of God and their active and prophetic engagement in the life and mission of the Church. The next article is a

fervent plea for radical change in the Church, by Kochurani Abraham, a feminist theologian. Denis Rodrigues, a lay thinker and close associate of Kurien, concludes this section by pleading for a mystical Church, inspired by Karl Rahner.

The second section deals with the Church's basic openness to the world. Two American biologists discuss the future of evolution and evolutionary biology, leading us to encounter the possible collective destiny of the human family. Christian Bauer from the University of Innsbruck and a close admirer of Kurien, focuses on Church's interaction with the social media through "Inter mirifica heute: Eine Relecture im digitalen Zeitalter." The issue of dialoguing with other religions is further reflected on by Andreas Vonach, Old Testament scholar, University of Innsbruck, when reflects on the relevance of *Nostra Aetate* with special reference to Hinduism and Buddhism. The next two articles pay attention to the theme of ecology. The first one by Isaac Parackal relates ecology to the Eucharist, and the other by A.L. Christopher Roach, a systematic theologian, dwells on the anthropology and ecology in *Laudato Si'*, topics close to the heart of Kurien. The final article in this section is by Job Kozhamthadam; he deals with the Church's openness to the world in general and science in particular.

Dialoguing with other religions is the theme of the next section. The article by Joseph Mattam explores the general principles in dialoguing with other religions. Anoop Anto MSMI, inspired by Kurien, studies the salvific significance of other faiths in the teachings of post-conciliar documents. Mathew Chandrankunnel CMI tries to draw the wisdom from Christian, Buddhist and Hindu religious practices. James Ponniah dwells on shared religious spaces in different religions that can promote mutually beneficial encounter among religions. Sebastian Painadath SJ, a close

colleague of Kurien, compares the spiritual experiences of the Upanishads (advaita) and the early Christian fathers (theosis). The final article by VM Jose investigates the liberative and societal dimension of authentic religious experiences.

The fundamental human search for truth and quest for dignity is the theme of the next section. As a basic condition for this search, Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, OFM Cap raises some fundamental questions on theological truths. The article by Nishant A. Irudayadason explores the relationship between theory and praxis with special reference to theology. M.D. Joseph reflects on our collective search for truth, based on the philosopher-saint, Edith Stein. The last two articles of this section deal with human dignity, a major theme in Kurien's thought. Bishop (Emeritus) Thomas Menampampil, reflects on the meaning of human rights in a globalised world, while J. Charles Davis, discusses the two faces of dignity in terms of "Secured Worth" and "Required Recognition."

The last section of the book deals with spirituality that humanises, a theme to which Kurien devoted his entire life. Stephen Chundanthadam SJ tries to understand Kurien's own spirituality in terms of "fullness of life." Dr Victor Ferrao dwells on carnal hermeneutics and the dynamics of divine-human love. This is followed by an article by P.T. Mathew, SJ, co-organiser of the Seminar and co-editor of the book, on "formation of the heart" that is badly missing in the training of priestly candidates today. The article of Surekha Lobo focuses specifically on spirituality that humanises, drawing inspiration from Kurien himself. Paulraj Mariapushpam dwells on the love commandments in St. Paul's letters, a theme personally encouraged by Kurien.

The concluding article is by Kuruvilla Pandikattu, co-editor of the book. It draws on hope, joy and freedom, which remain the core values Kurien nourished, both as a Christian and as an author, as elaborated in his last book. It visualises a Christian living that is rooted in Christ joyfully and lovingly and at the same time affirms the freedom, dignity and worth of fellow human beings!

As for the title of this edited work: *Committed to the Church and the Country: Exploring the Theological Contributions of Prof. Dr. Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ on Caring and Sharing*. As we know Kunnumpuram has been a person passionately devoted to the Church and the Nation. He was rooted in the rich heritage of India and that of the Church. He embraced the values, vision and ethos of India and the Church. He felt fully at home in the Indian culture and Christian fellowship. His was truly a life of devotion to the country and commitment to the Church. We hope that the readers of this book will be good citizens and committed Christians!

The 14 appendices contain various personal and professional information on Kunnumpuram and wishes and reminiscences of various people closely connected with Kurien. Thus this book is a blend of professional theological insights with personal warmth and devotion! To many of the writers Kurien is both a professional visionary and personal friend!

The editors hope that this modest contribution, inspired by the life of Prof Kurien Kunnupuram, SJ, help us foster a common and collective life of love, joy, peace and freedom for every individual in our vast human family! May this book further the vision of Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ who accepts, affirms and respects every individual!

I hope that this hope will help the emergence of an authentic Christian theology that is responsible to the vision of Christ and the tradition of India. A theology that humanises and a vision that sustains our human life on the planet earth! Truly his life and theology has primarily been one of caring and sharing: caring for each individual and caring for all!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ and PT Mathew, SJ (eds)
***Committed to the Church and the Country:
Exploring the theological contribution of Prof Dr
Kurien Kunnupuram SJ on Caring and Sharing.***
New Delhi and Pune: Christian World Imprints and
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2019. pp.448+xx. ISBN:
9789351483977

Article Received: November 25, 2019

Article Accepted: January 12, 2020

No of Words: 1730



Book Review: Universe, Life, Mind and Reality

The conflict between the various visions of Reality runs through the history of philosophy. What is the relationship between origin of universe, evolution of life and mind? Can we really discover the reality with our limited minds? Can we synthesize these divergent streams? These are the crucial questions of the series of three books written by George Luke:

- *Origin of Universe*
- *Life and Mind*
- *Discovery of Reality*

As a combination it forms a comprehensive treatise on REALITY by George Luke who took voluntary retirement at the age of forty eight to prepare his magnum opus. He is writing these books under sub-title “The Light of System Philosophy”.

System Philosophy is to be distinguished from the systems philosophy or systems view, popularized in the writings of a group of thinkers including mainly David Bohm, Fritjof Capra and Ervin Laszlo. They have followed the empirical approach adopting the process view for articulating that the universe consists of self-organizing systems, which are wholes of interrelated components; these systems have been organized physically at various levels primarily due

to the particle-wave (matter-energy) duality of subatomic phenomena. Obviously the systems philosophy is a physical description of the activity or process of reality, from scientific point of view, without implying existence.

In contrast, System Philosophy is defined here as an integrative thought about the universe as a system of matter and consciousness, where these constituents are in dialectical and productive relation. It effectively shows that things exist by the union of those opposites. This philosophical perspective about real existence involves the synthesis of rational and empirical aspects of knowledge.

The first book -- *Origin of Universe* -- is primarily aimed to address the profound questions of cosmology.

The book starts with the question why the basic questions pertaining to the origin of our universe have not been answered so far. There are controversies in scientific cosmology on account of the mathematical models representing standard model particles, quantum gravity, strings, multiverse etc.

Through System Philosophy, this book innovatively reconciles the conflicts in the doctrines of philosophy of science. Further, it develops a convincing answer to the supreme question: How did universe originate? Moreover, the dilemmas of great physicists like Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking and also the important cosmological puzzle are resolved.

ISBN 13 (SOFT): 9781543704167

ISBN 13 (eBook): 9781543704174

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The second book - *Life and Mind* - considers the key question about the origin of life and mind. It suggests an innovative thesis of philosophy of biological science, which is an uncharted area so far. System Philosophy logically shows that things exist by the union of opposites. Treating genetic code (information) as non-physical is the vital step to reach the new philosophy about biology. Importantly, life is a system formed by the opposite entities called macro-molecule (mainly DNA) and information. This leads to the new System Model of Life and Evolution, which synthesizes the opposite views of science and religion.

The materialist theory of evolution advanced by Charles Darwin is modified in this book radically. Also it would equip us to tackle the problem of missing links in an ingenious way. The age-old problems of mind-body dualism and self-consciousness are solved here through the system model of mind. Also the analysis is extended to develop The System Philosophy of Religion, which effectively provides a new thesis about God.

ISBN 13 (SOFT): 9781543704211

ISBN 13 (eBook): 9781543704204

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The theoretical framework of philosophy is analyzed in the third book *Discovery of Reality* in order to make it efficient for solving the problems of our life. In this comprehensive treatise, author George Luke offers a philosophical perspective of the ultimate reality.

What is the reality or fundamental stuff of the universe? With regard to this age-old question, in western philosophy, there are six worldviews under the main groups of organic worldview, spiritual process worldview, mechanistic world-

view and physical process worldview. These worldviews would logically lead to seven partial theories of reality.

Then, for solving the above controversies, this author discovers a new integrative theory of reality named as System Philosophy. Its key principle: Ultimate Reality is the system of opposite forces called Body and Consciousness, which are represented by X-axis and Y-axis respectively of coordinate geometry. Therefore, reality is like a factory producing worldly things as systems of those opposite components. Further, this book deliberates upon the existence of seven social systems at the global level – like economics, politics, family, religion, etc. – into which human life is divided. Then it reconciles the issues of truth in all branches of knowledge.

ISBN 13 (SOFT): 9781543704525

ISBN 13 (eBook): 9781543704518

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A rank holder in B.Sc. (Mathematics Main) and in M.Sc (Statistics), George Luke was selected in February, 1993 for part-time research in Dept. of Economics at Kariavattam Campus of the University of Kerala. He has an M Phil and has served Reserve Bank of India and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) totally for 25 years. George Luke voluntarily retired from NABARD service in 2001 at the age of 48 for academic research. His core area of research is system philosophy and its ramifications for the whole of life and reality.

This trilogy is academically thorough and philosophically thought-provoking. I would recommend this book to every serious thinker. This book should have a place in every academic library.

Gini T.G.



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