ISSN 972-33315

jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

Life Varia 1

Volume 14 No.1 January 2011

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011.

Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies

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

Jnanadeepa is published in January and July. Views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the editors. Material submitted for publication should be original and cannot be returned. It is preferable that material be sent by e-mail.

Publisher: Thomas Kuriacose for Jnana Deepa Publications. Typeset done at JDV.

ISSN: 0972-33315

Correspondence regarding material for publication, book review (please send two copies please), use of published matter, and editorial matters should be addressed to: The Editor, ***Jnanadeepa***, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune 411014, India. Telephones: Office +91-020-41036111. Residence +91-020-41036364. Fax +91-020-41036199. E-mail address **journalpune@gmail.com**

Correspondence regarding subscriptions, present or previous issues, etc., should be addressed to the Subscription-In-Charge. E-mail address: **subscriptioninch@gmail.com**

Payments, within India, can be paid by Money Order or Demand Draft. Kindly state clearly sender's name and purpose, when money is sent. Money Orders are to be addressed to Jnanadeepa Journal. **Demand Drafts** are to be made in the name of **Jnanadeepa Vidyapeeth, Pune.** For payments from outside India, kindly contact the Subscription-In-Charge. E-mail address: subscriptioninch@gmail.com Kindly renew subscriptions on time. The subscription expiry date is mentioned in the address of the subscribers.

Subscription Rates. Postage outside India is only by Air Mail.

Within India: Rs.100 for one year. Rs.250 for three years. And Individual life subscription Rs.3,000.

SAARC Countries: Indian Rs.140 for one year. Rs.400 for three years.

Other countries: For Individuals: US $25 or Euro 20 for one year and US $65 or Euro 55 for three years. Life subscription US $400 or Euro 350.

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011, 3-4.

Editorial

Human life has many dimensions, some appear to be prominent, some seem to be not so important, while others seem to fall in different places on a scale of prominence or importance. Appearances, they say, are often deceptive, and the dimensions of life would corroborate such a dictum. The value judgment that one passes on the various dimensions of life is often conditioned by one's immediate context, one's knowledge of matters, and one's estimation of the relative worth of things. The articles in this volume reflect some of these dimensions of human life. They vary in emphasis from the theoretical to the practical.

The right to education is a basic right of every human being. Some are privileged to have the possibility of receiving an excellent education, while others do not have such a privilege. This fact alone lends itself to the considerations of some of the dimensions of life that our context throws up. This apart, whatever be the actual situation of education in India, the teaching-learning process definitely deserves our close attention.

The sacred is a very important dimension of the lives of many human beings. Therefore the phenomena of the sacred, and the language in which the experience of the sacred is conveyed, need attentive study.

The contemporary Indian context throws many challenges to those willing to respond to the needs of the people living in India today. Indian society, marked so much by caste, and the situation of the Dalits in particular, does require great attention. In addition, the marvelous riches of India, manifested by manifold variety, already

beckons us to be more optimistic than pessimistic, in our search for solutions to our problems.

The final two articles in this volume, take us from possibilities proposed in dealing with a sad problem, to a holistic view that integrates the dimensions of the divine, the human and the cosmic.

Thomas Kuriacose, S.J.
Editor.

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011, 5-39

Methods And Models Of Education: Reflections On Re-Visioning The Teaching-Learning Process

Mathew Jayanth, S.J.
Papal Seminary, Nagar Road, Pune 411014

Abstract: The primary goal envisaged in this paper is to introduce some models of teaching and learning, and their accompanying theories of education, with a view to initiating creative thinking in the field of pedagogy, especially regarding philosophy and theology in seminaries. A holistic model of teaching and learning is proposed which includes the six dimensions of thinking and learning, and the five levels of awareness and experience.

Keywords: Models of education, theories of education, philosophical-theological teaching-learning, holistic model of pedagogy, spiritual level of awareness.

Introduction

Methods of teaching and learning constitute a complex field of research that involves theories of learning, models of education, pedagogy or methods of teaching, methods of evaluation, understanding the student profile, awareness of the prerequisites for learning as well as other areas such as syllabus, curriculum design, and resources. However, very little time and energy is spent in our theological and philosophical institutions on the question of methods of teaching and learning. In practice, professors in the faculties of philosophy and theology engage in the teaching and learning activity without any conscious knowledge of the theories of education that are implicitly present in their very activity. Bringing some of these

theories into our conscious awareness could help us re-vision and improve the quality of our teaching and learning process.

Understanding 'Method'

The term 'method' is ambiguous. When applied to the process of teaching and learning, it can be understood in two ways. First, it could mean the concrete ways adopted or steps taken in the teaching and learning activity. For instance, a teacher may employ the lecture method, the methods of lecture cum discussion, small group discussions with presentations, seminars, power point presentations, field studies, debates, panel discussions, participant observations and exposure program in his/her teaching and learning process. These are teaching methods in the sense that they are concrete steps taken or tools employed in order to achieve and realize the goal of education.

Second, 'method' could also be understood more abstractly as the assumptions, presuppositions, visions and goals of the total process of teaching and learning. In this sense, it stands for the theoretical structure or the conceptual framework of the teaching and learning activity. This structure or framework provides the rationale for the pedagogy used for the educational purpose. In reality, pedagogy evolves from the conceptual framework with which an educator operates and, hence, an analysis of one's pedagogy will unveil the theories of education on the basis of which the teacher is functioning. That is to say, method as understood as the structure or theoretical framework is seldom present in the conscious awareness of the teacher unless he/she is formally introduced to the theories of teaching and learning.

The primary focus of this paper is on method understood in its second meaning. The reasons for giving priority to the second understanding of method are the following: First, there is much chaos created in our discussion on improving the teaching methods on account of confusion caused by the mix-up of the two different understandings of method. Second, we often talk about pedagogy focusing exclusively on the first meaning of method and give little attention to the models of education or the theories of teaching and learning. As a consequence, we fail to make any headway in improving our pedagogy. Third, we are unaware that a specific pedagogy is built on a particular theory of education. It implies that one's conception of pedagogy differs from others depending on the underlying theories of education one has. It is important, then, that a certain level of consensus on the theories of teaching and learning is ensured before we can meaningfully talk about pedagogy. Finally, there is an immediate and urgent need to introduce new pedagogies into our teaching and learning process. For this, it is necessary to begin with some of the theories of education, because new pedagogies presuppose new theories of education. In other words, any significant change in the pedagogy is predicated upon our conceptual framework for teaching and learning.

From this perspective, the primary goal envisaged in this paper is to introduce ourselves to some of the models and accompanying theories of education with a view to initiating creative thinking in the field of pedagogy or methods of teaching. The assumption behind this is that familiarity with the models and theories of education as well as some of the theories of learning may prove to be of immense help for us to revision our pedagogy, our

syllabus and curricula, and the process of assessment and evaluation. Accordingly, I shall discuss the four basic models of education and the various models that derive from them. While discussing these models, I offer a brief critical assessment of the teaching and learning processes that go on in our philosophical and theological institutions and suggest some of the crucial elements that need to be incorporated into our educational process. In conclusion, I shall highlight some of the insights that can be utilized for improving the methods of teaching and learning.

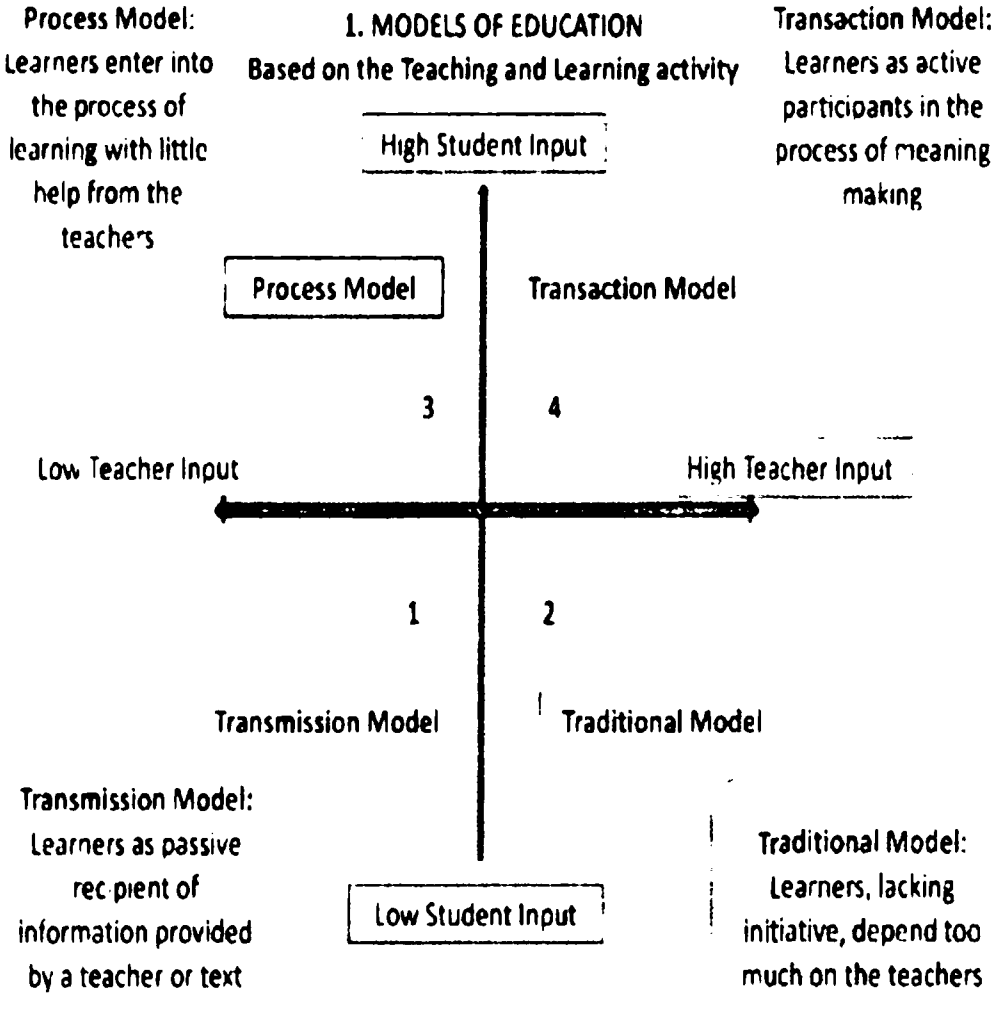
I. Models Of Education Based On The Teaching And Learning Activity[1]

The educational model based on the teaching and learning activity in the classroom classifies the process of teaching and learning on the basis of the levels of the teacher input and the student input. Accordingly, this model generates four different sub-models. A grid could help understand the sub-models that emerge[2]. Here the teacher input is placed on a horizontal axis which marks a continuum from low teacher input to high teacher input. Similarly the student input is placed on a vertical axis representing a continuum from low student input to high student input. This generates four quadrants representing four sub-models of education.

---

[1] For this section I am indebted to Doug Noon, "Models of Education: Overview". Accessed 5 November 2010. Available from http://borderland.northernattitude.org/2005/12/13/models-of-education-overview/

[2] The graphic is adapted from Lucy Calkins as presented in Doug Noon "Models of Education". I have elaborated it to serve the purpose of this article.



Quadrant I: Low Teacher Input and Low Student Input. The quadrant one (1) is characterized by minimum classroom activity from the side of both the teacher and the student. This is called the Transmission Model. In this model, students remain as passive recipients of information that the teacher imparts. The educational process depends heavily on lectures and class notes, prepared notes and reading material, and very limited and restricted student responses. As a consequence, a minimum is taught, a minimum is learned. The teacher is happy because there is hardly any demand on the teacher; the student is happy because not much effort is needed to learn the minimum that is taught. The student evaluation

places emphasis on the student's ability to memorize what is taught. Since there is not much to memorize, it is possible for all students to perform well and score high marks in the examination. In the teacher evaluation, it is very likely that the teacher would be rated high since students easily understand the minimum that is taught, and especially so if he/she has a good sense of humor and has good communication skills. In an atmosphere that encourages high criticism of teachers that could endanger their teaching career, teachers may be tempted to adopt this model as a survival mechanism.

Quadrant II: High Teacher Input and Low Student Input. The second quadrant is marked by high teacher input and low student input. It is called the Traditional Model. Like the previous model, this model is also marked by passive learning and the educational process follows a similar pattern. However, there is one major difference, namely, that the teacher in this model is more active than in the previous case. This model can also be called the "banking model" because the teacher's primary function is seen as 'depositing' his/her knowledge into the students and the student's role is to take in what is deposited. The teaching method may include prepared notes, dictated notes, extensive use of blackboards, and/or power point presentations. Here the demand on the teacher is high. However, the student's capacity to think is stifled. Since the teacher does the thinking, the student is discouraged from thinking. This will contribute to the frustration of the intelligent students who place a premium on thinking. Students could perform excellently well solely by memorizing the content of the elaborate notes painstakingly prepared by the teacher. In the teacher evaluation students who have a penchant for gathering

information (a majority of our students prefer this to independent thinking!) may rate the teacher high.

An Observation: In most of our philosophical and theological institutions we still operate according to models represented by Quadrants I &II. The teacher is concerned with giving more and more information to students. The role of the student is to "know' the information given and to reproduce it from memory. The focus of evaluation is to determine the amount of information the student has gathered in the process of attending a course. If the teacher and the student are operating with these models, it would be nearly impossible to bring about any substantial change in the teaching and learning process. No further explanation is needed to ascertain what our institutions stagnate!

Quadrant III: Low Teacher Input and High Student Input. The third quadrant, which is called the Process Model, is characterized by low teacher input and high student input. Within this model students enter into the process of learning on their own without much assistance from the teacher. This model may be appropriate for highly motivated self-starters as it gives them ample opportunity to study and do research independently. However, the average student will be in the lurch as they are deprived of their primary source of learning. Even the intelligent students would experience the deprivation since they lack the much needed feedback from the teacher as well as the opportunity to benefit from the teacher's knowledge, experience and guidance. As a consequence, they may not make as much progress as they could have made with the help of the teacher.

We find, in our institutions of philosophy and theology,

students who fall into the category of self-starters who are normally highly intelligent and capable. They might find the normal classroom activity inadequate and frustrating. If our teaching and learning activity is not going to rise to the level represented by the Fourth quadrant, then, it is important to identify the self-starters in the group and to offer them the needed assistance by way of feedback and guidance to do independent study and research. This is particularly important in large classroom situations.

Quadrant IV: High Teacher Input and High Student Input. The specific marker of the fourth quadrant, called the Transaction Model, is the high input both from the teacher and the student. In this model both the teacher and students are actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Both are fully engaged in and committed to the principle of participatory learning in which students as well as the teacher are beneficiaries since both teach and both learn. Accordingly, the responsibility for learning and making decisions is shared by the teacher and students in their differing capacities.

The Fourth quadrant represents the ideal scenario of teaching and learning from the perspective of the model we are discussing. Here the process of teaching and learning operates on the basis of a contract between the teacher and students. The function of the teacher is to facilitate the learning of students and students take responsibility for their learning. This responsibility is vested solely in the students and it is not to be transferred to the teacher. If such transference occurs, it will pave the way for high teacher criticism which must be perceived as a camouflage for the students to debunk their own responsibility for learning. Encouraging such a tendency and making it a pattern of students' academic life in our

institutions may be counterproductive in the long run as it encourages among teachers a corresponding tendency to seek cheap popularity by awarding high marks in examinations and to avoid criticism by means of adopting the model of teaching as represented by the first quadrant. This is becoming more and more a curse on our philosophical and theological education.

In addition, the model represented by the fourth quadrant is difficult to achieve precisely because the teachers in the institutions of philosophy and theology are disadvantaged on three accounts: first, they inherit the methods of teaching and learning as represented by quadrants I and II that are prevalent especially in the Indian educational system and they find it difficult to transcend the inherited models. Second, they have no formal learning in the theories and principles of education as required of ordinary primary and secondary school teachers. And third, the students they are dealing with are trained according to the models of the first and second quadrants. Therefore, teachers face a constituency that refuses to change over to any other model because they are unwilling to face the demands of the change. In addition, inadequate emphasis on accountability, lack of motivation and incentives make the situation worse. In my opinion, if we could adequately respond to the first two disadvantages, the handling of the third disadvantage would be easier.

II. Models Of Education Based On The Outcome Of The Teaching And Learning Process[3]

[3] The reflections in this section are based on Robert Freeman, "Competing Models for Public Education: Which Model is Best?" Accessed 7 November 2010. Available from

The first model based on the teaching and learning activity in the classroom is foundational and is applicable to the remaining three models of education because the teacher and the student inputs are basic to every type of educational process. It would suffice, however, to keep it in mind while discussing the other models. The models of education based on the outcome of the teaching and learning process consists of two subsidiary models, namely, the factory or industrial model and the womb model. The focus in both models is on the intended outcome or the end product of the educational process.

1. The Factory or Industrial Model

This model is particularly promoted by the corporate world that needs professionals to run the various departments of the corporation. In our institutions this model gets valorized when the church itself is seen as a big corporation in need of professionals. When this happens the philosophical and theological formation moves in the direction of a factory model. Accordingly, the institutions of philosophical and theological learning become factories or industries and the process of education assumes the nature of a mechanical, industrial process. Just as a car is fabricated in a factory, a church professional is fabricated in our institutions. Just as the process of producing a car begins at the beginning of a conveyor belt and comes out as a finished product at the end of the conveyor belt so also a church professional begins to be formed in the minor seminary or pre-novitiate and comes out as a finished product at the end of the conveyor belt of years long formation. From this perspective, the student is looked at as a factor of

---

http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0226-25.htm

production to be assembled and put to work. A student who does not think and who does not ask critical questions would be considered as material of the best quality. The purpose or goal of the educational process becomes no more than the mass production of 'factors of production' to be used for the manufacture of wealth/goods (services). The teachers are like industrial robots that produce well-trained products with competence, especially with the excellent qualities of submissiveness and total inability for critical thinking. Their competency is judged on the basis of their ability to produce professionals as required by the managers to run the corporation. For this purpose, the content (what is to be taught) and method (how it should be taught) are dictated to them and seldom are they given the necessary freedom for curriculum design.

According to this model, the purpose of reform and renewal of the educational process would be to make the institution more machine-like; production more mechanical; and products more 'efficient'. In order to achieve this goal, emphasis is often given to greater standardization and stricter regimentation. The ultimate consequence of such standardization and regimentation would be the total dehumanization of education itself.

This model in its starkest form may not be present in our philosophical and theological institutions. However, the restriction of the freedom of research and expression imposed on the teachers and, to a limited degree, on the students, and the constant supervision of the content and process of education with the help of 'invisible hands' point to the direction of a factory model of education. Moreover, the quality of the end products judged with the measure of personal conviction, initiative, creativity and commitment, and seeing the conspicuous lack of these

qualities, one may be justified in thinking that the product is coming out of a conveyor belt. Further, the evaluation system focusing more on awarding marks for information reproduced than on personal transformation in terms of developing strong convictions, perspectives and commitments also may testify to a machine-like production process in our institutions.

2. The Womb Model[4]

The womb model of education has great relevance for the life of the church. Here the church is understood as a community that needs nurturers rather than a corporation requiring professionals. Accordingly, school and education are viewed as a place the process of birth takes place – birthing a new generation of priests and religious who will carry forward the culture of the community. Here students are seen as human beings to be nurtured rather than machines to be fabricated. They are nurtured and set to thinking so that they may become agents of ecclesial and social regeneration. In conformity with this view of the student, the purpose of education is envisaged as individual cultivation of human maturity in order to give birth to thoughtful human beings who will embody and model the church's values for succeeding generations. Here the role of the teacher becomes delicate and challenging. They are seen as nurturers of human persons and midwives of a new generation of thoughtful priests and religious. This model of education also envisages the need for reform and renewal. However, the purpose will not be to make the educational process more mechanical and products more efficient. It will rather be to create

[4] Robert Freeman uses the phrase 'Cultural Womb Model".

space for personal growth; to promote individual initiative and freedom and to facilitate the generation of agents of ecclesial and social transformation.

The womb model of education, as mentioned earlier, has great significance for the church in India, especially because the church itself is considered as the Mother of the faithful. If the church is mother, then her primary function is to nurture and promote life. Priests and religious are people who are specially called to participate in the nurturing function of the church and, therefore, the institutions of philosophy and theology have the responsibility to create nurturers who are capable of giving witness by embodying the true nature of the church. This can be achieved only if teachers themselves become nurturers with the required competency to assist the birth process of a new generation of priests and religious. This does not rule out the need for professionals since the church is also an institution. The real problem emerges when the professional aspect overrides the nurturing dimension of the educational process. In fact, this is happening in our institutions under the impact of globalization where efficiency and professionalism is valued at the expense of everything else. The church values professionalism and efficiency, but it ought to value the nurturing dimension more and create in her professionals the ability to become nurturers. Accordingly, the process of reform and renewal of our institutions of philosophy and theology need to aim at transforming them into places of rebirth and regeneration, the teachers into nurturers and midwives of a new generation of priests and religious and students into embodiments and carriers of the values of the church for future generations.

III. Models Based On Orientations To Learning[5]

While the focus of the first models was on the teaching and learning activity in the classroom and that of the second on the outcome of the educational process, the emphasis of the third models fall on the learning theories and particularly on orientations to learning. Here learning is viewed not as a product in terms of acquiring knowledge, skills, methods and the ability to apply them to various circumstances of life. If we look at learning as a product – the outcome of a process – then learning becomes external to the learner. Rather, in the third models learning is seen as a process of change and transformation and, hence, learning as internal to the learner. It is different from the models represented by quadrants One and Two in the first models and from the factory model where learning is perceived as something the teacher does to the student. When looked at learning as a process, it is something that happens to the student as a consequence of the participatory teaching and learning process as represented by the fourth quadrant in the first model, and the nurturing of the persons as seen in the womb model of education. That is to say, there is something personal about the educational models based on orientations to learning.

There are four orientations to learning, namely, the behaviorist orientation, the cognitive orientation, the humanist orientation, and the social/situational orientation. Each of these orientations enshrines specific views of

---

[5] The inspiration for this section comes from Smith, M. K. (1999) 'Learning theory. Accessed 13 November 2010. Available from *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/b-learn.htm, Last update: September 03, 2009

learning, the purpose of learning, the role of the teacher as well as the manifestation of this orientation in adult learning. These orientations to learning show various aspects of learning involved in the process of education which need to be taken into account.

1. Behaviorist Orientation to Learning[6]

View of the learning process:

The behaviorist orientation to learning views education as a process leading toward a change in behavior. The change is perceived predominantly as a function of the environment. More than the learner himself or herself, it is the elements in the environment that are considered to be decisive for what one learns. Therefore, the behaviorist orientation to learning gives great importance to the environment of learning in the process of learning that leads to the formation of habits indicating changes in behavior. However, the behaviorist orientation in its emphasis on the environment tends to overlook other factors in the learning process which the other orientations highlight.

Purpose in education:

Consonant with the view of learning as a process, the purpose of learning is conceived as producing behavioral changes in the desired direction. Knowledge and theory have no relevance in themselves. They are significant insofar as they help bring about changes in behavior.

---

[6] Discussions in this section are based on Smith, M. K. (1999) 'The behaviourist orientation to learning'. Accessed 2 January 2011. Available from *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/learning-behavourist.htm. Last update: September 03, 2009.

Educator's role:

Accordingly, the role of the teacher is to arrange the environment to elicit the desired response. The learning environment needs to be such that it makes learners active rather than passive. For the behaviorist orientation to learning presupposes that activity is important for learning to take place. Moreover, constant practice is also a necessary element for effective learning. Together with repeated practice, there is also the aspect of positive reinforcement by way of rewards that plays a significant role in the learning process. Finally, to better facilitate learning, the objectives of learning need to be made clear to the learners. In these ways the teacher creates and arranges the environment for learning and facilitates behavioral changes.

Manifestations in adult learning:

Since in the behaviorist orientation to learning the emphasis is on the outcome of the learning process in terms of behavioral changes, the learner manifests one's learning in effecting behavioral objectives, especially the desired changes in behavior. Second, competency-based education focusing on developing capabilities to do things rather than merely having theoretical knowledge and skill development are other manifestations of behaviorist orientation in adult learning.

We shall now briefly look at the significance of the behaviorist orientation to learning for philosophical and theological education. Effecting change and transformation of behavioral patterns in the direction of an authentic Christian life is a central concern of our philosophical and theological formation. However, living in a society that is steadily becoming more and more

consumerist, it is undeniable that people tend to adopt consumerist values and patterns of life. Consumerism exercises a strong influence both on teachers and students in our institutions. This is the environment of our education and it leads our students to adopt behavioral patterns contrary to what is desired and intended by our educational process. The primary question for us educators at this juncture is: what should be the nature and characteristics of the environment in our institutions and how can we transform it so that our teaching and learning will effect change in our students in the desired direction of Christian values and patterns of life? This question highlights the vital need to pay greater attention to the behaviorist orientation to learning in our educational process.

2. Cognitivist Orientation to Learning[7]

View of the learning process:

The focus of the cognitivist orientation to learning is on the individual's internal mental processes including insight, information processing, memory, and perception. That is to say, it is concerned with cognition itself, namely, the act or process of learning. Learning takes place through inferences, expectations and making connections. From a cognitivist perspective, rather than acquiring behavioral habits as in the case of behaviorist orientation to learning, learners acquire the ability to make plans and strategies through the learning process.

---

[7] The ideas developed in this section are based on Smith, M. K. (1999) 'The cognitive orientation to learning'. Accessed 2 January, 2011. Available from *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/learning-cognitive, Last update: September 03, 2009.

Purpose in education:

From the perspective of cognitivist orientation, the purpose of education is to develop capacities and skills to learn better. Behavior, tasks and skills need plans and strategies to put them into effect in actual practice. It is the primary function of education to provide the ability to plan and develop strategies to execute tasks which come from the knowledge acquired through the process of learning.

Educator's role:

The primary role of the teacher envisaged in the cognitive orientation is to structure the content of the learning activity. This role of the teacher takes into account some of the key principles of the cognitivist orientation to learning. They include the need for the teacher to organize the instructions well because well organized material can be easily learned and remembered. The cognitivist orientation requires the teacher to clearly structure the instruction taking into account that the subject matter itself has inherent logical relationships among key ideas and concepts that link the parts together and it is the responsibility of the teacher to explicate these relationships. The teacher also needs to be aware of the knowledge level of the learners so that new learning can be incorporated into things that are already known by students. This presupposes that there are differences in individual learners. Finally, the teacher needs to give cognitive feedbacks, that is, providing information about the results of learning. This will reinforce the learning process. In this way, the teacher plays a constitutive role in the cognitive orientation to learning.

Manifestations in adult learning:

In adult learning, the cognitive orientation to learning is

manifested in the cognitive development of the learner which includes development in the internal mental processes such as insight, information processing, memory, and perception. The growth in intelligence is manifested in the ability of the student to make inferences and to establish connections among key ideas. In the practical realm the student will show competence in making plans and strategies for achieving the desired goal.

The cognitive orientation to learning has great significance for our philosophical and theological education. What we witness at present in our institutions is an increasing disdain for intellectual excellence. It is evident in the overemphasis given to extracurricular activities in our institutions, often at the expense of the academic side. Sports and games, musical and cultural performances, various competitions, celebrations, program and shows, and pastoral and social activities easily substitute serious academic activities. The teaching and learning itself is approached as a burden helplessly borne and as a necessary evil to be patiently endured. The tragedy is that even the educators seem to encourage and promote this view by lowering the standards, relaxing the demands, and rewarding mediocrity, thereby enabling students to perform well in the examinations even without any serious application to study.

While this is happening in our institutions, the secular world throws up challenges and questions from varied fields starting from the religious, socio-cultural, economic and political, environmental spheres and reaching up to the most challenging fields of science and technology. Often the questions coming from secular fields have a direct bearing on our faith. And yet the priests and religious who come out of our institutions find themselves

inept in facing these questions and responding to these challenges. Helplessly settling for simplistic answers learned in earlier catechism classes becomes the only pastoral option for many as a result of the neglect of intellectual and academic excellence.

In the emerging situation, it is incumbent upon our philosophical and theological institutions to ensure that the cognitivist orientation to learning is given adequate importance. They should do this knowing that the pastoral ministry is not narrowly limited to what our students understand and that it involves much wider and complex areas than preaching, teaching catechism, conducting choirs and administering sacraments. Pastoral ministry in the modern world calls for adequate intellectual preparation as emphasized in the cognitivist orientation to learning.

3. Humanist Orientation to Learning[8]

View of the learning process

In the humanist orientation to learning, the stress is neither on the change of behavior nor on the mental processes that go on in the learner, but on the potential for human growth. Rather, the process of learning is seen as a form of self-actualization of the whole person which is considered as the highest good desired in the learning process. Learning is approached as a personal act to fulfill one's potential. In the humanist orientation the learning process engages the whole person with his or her

[8] This section is developed with the help of Smith, M. K. (1999) 'The humanistic to learning'. Accessed 2 January 2011. Available from *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/learning-humanistic.htm, Last update: September 03, 2009

experiences. As a consequence, the humanist approach to learning combines the logical and the intuitive, the intellect and feelings. The critique of the humanist orientation to learning is that it tends to be narrowly individualistic and self-centered.

Purpose in education:

In conformity with the humanistic vision of the learning process, the purpose of learning is perceived as becoming a self-actualized person. Self-actualization is understood as the capacity to make full use of and give full expression to one's talents, capabilities and potentialities. Self-actualization also entails becoming autonomous persons not in the sense of having no social responsibility but capable of fulfilling the social obligations without losing one's own integrity or personal independence. The social existence of the self-actualized person need not necessarily limit one's horizon as not to see other possibilities of self-actualization. If necessary, he/she may be also prepared to transcend the socially prescribed ways of acting in order to reach one's full potential as a human person.

Educator's role:

The teacher's role is limited solely to facilitating the development of the whole person. It implies that the teacher should ensure the personal involvement of the whole person. That is to say, the feeling and cognitive aspects of the person needs to enter into the learning process. The teacher may provide external impetus or stimulus; however, he/she should realize that learning is self initiated and that understanding and comprehension come from within the learner. Similarly, the teacher should be conscious of the fact that learning could exert

influence on the behavior, attitudes and personality of the learner and make a difference. However, it is the learner's responsibility for this to happen. Furthermore, it is important to know that in this approach the learner is also the evaluator. The teacher could assist the learner to see whether the learning process meets the needs of the learner and provide the necessary help to achieve what the learner wants. And, finally, the teacher should realize that the essence of learning is making meaning for one's life and, therefore, the teacher should make sure that meaning is built into the whole experience of learning.

Manifestations in adult learning:

The primary manifestation of the humanistic orientation to learning is in the sphere of self-directed learning. The adult learner knows what he/she wants and takes the initiative to get fully involved in the learning process and ensures that he/she achieves the goal one sets for oneself. It is in the self-directed learning that one manifests one's journey toward self actualization.

The humanist orientation to learning could shed light on certain ambiguous areas of our philosophical and theological education. Often questions are raised about the appropriateness of philosophy and theology professors being considered as formators. It is argued that the job of professors is to teach and the formation should be delegated to a different agency called 'the formators'. The humanist orientation to learning shows that personal growth and actualization of the self are strong components of education. Teaching and formation constitute two inseparable sides of the whole teaching and learning process. The responsibility to facilitate the personal development of students through their teaching is vested

on the teachers. This makes it clear that teaching cannot be confined to transmission of information but also includes the inculcation of the formative value of the subjects taught. For this, the teachers themselves would have to personally experience and live those values inherent in the subjects. In other words, witnessing by life is integral to the teaching and learning process. Teachers, by giving witness to a Christian way of self-actualized life by their pattern of life, facilitate the self-actualization of students. The humanist orientation to learning needs to take this direction in our institutions of philosophy and theology.

4. Social and situational orientation to learning[9]

View of the learning process:

From the perspective of the social/situational orientation to learning, the process of learning is situated in the context of social relationships, in situations of co-participation. Learning takes place through interactions/observations in social contexts. Here the focus is not on cognitive processes and conceptual structures but on social engagements that provide the context for learning. Learning is seen as a process of social participation and, hence, participation in communities of practice is essential for learning to take place. People often begin learning at the periphery of a community and gradually move to the centre of a community of practice. The increasing participation in the communities of practice is seen as authentic learning and it involves the

[9] The basic ideas for this section are borrowed from Smith, M. K. (1999) 'The social/situational orientation to learning'. Accessed 2 January 2011. Available from *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/learning-social.htm, Last update: September 03, 2009.

whole person acting in the community and the world. The social/situational orientation emphasizes the situated nature of learning. Learning is always contextualized.

Purpose in education:

In the context of a relational view of persons and learning, the purpose of education is understood as full participation in communities of practice and utilization of resources. Since the social orientation to learning does not envisage learning as acquisition of knowledge and information by individuals, but as a process of participation in the socio-cultural practice of the community, the purpose of education is to enable persons to become full participants in the community and through the community to engage in the world.

Educator's role:

As both the vision and purpose of education underscore the centrality of participation in a community of practice, the teacher's role in the learning process is to work to establish communities of practice in which conversation and participation can occur. The teacher needs to explore all possible avenues with people in communities to ensure that all are accorded full participation. The teacher should be especially sensitive to the power relations existing in communities that might prevent some from becoming full participants in the socio-cultural practices of the community.

Manifestations in adult learning:

The social/situational orientation to learning is manifested in the degree of social participation of the people. High levels of participation and engagement would indicate the depth of one's learning. Moreover,

since learning is not the private possession of individuals but an integral part of various conversations in a community, adults give expression to their learning by becoming partners in conversation at various levels.

While discussing the significance of the cognitive orientation to learning the tendency to overly engage in extracurricular activities was exposed and critiqued as an excuse to evade the demands of academic excellence. The social orientation to learning, on the other hand, reveals the significance of social and pastoral involvement for the teaching and learning of philosophy and theology. Students often complain about the irrelevance of what is taught in our institutions. The major reason for this complaint is the lack of orientation of our teaching and learning to the ecclesial and social life. Our philosophical and theological education has become decontextualized in the sense that it is unrelated to and irresponsive to the questions arising from our life situations. The teachers are excellent thinkers, no doubt, but their isolation from and lack of lived experience of the life-context of the people make their teaching insular and irrelevant. Students who often have much greater exposure and experience of the living conditions of the people bemoan the inability of teachers to link their teaching with the pressing issues arising from society.

Contrary to the current isolation of both teachers and students from the context of a living community, the social orientation to learning emphasizes the need for our teaching and learning activity to be concretely situated in the life of a community and learning to emerge from involvement and engagement in the life of the people. This specific orientation reminds us that authentic learning has to evolve from the interaction between the learning

activity proper and participation in a community of practice. Learning is not something done but it is something that happens in the interface of participation in social/ecclesial life and formal learning.

To conclude, teaching and learning are not to be guided by a single orientation. It involves multiple orientations and all are important. These orientations constitute the different components of the total educational process. The weakness of our institutions is that most of our teaching focuses on the cognitivist orientation and, as a result, it becomes, as we shall discuss in the following model, reductionist. This explains the fragmentation of our education. The challenge before us is to incorporate all orientations into our teaching and learning process.

IV. Models Based On The Dimensions Of Education[10]

The educational process is a very complex reality as it entails different dimensions of thinking and varied levels of awareness. If in the earlier times the approach to education was characterized by a simplistic concept, the complex nature of education is being acknowledged and accepted in the contemporary times. Based on the emphasis given to the dimensions of education, it is possible to classify education as conventional or unidimensional and holistic or multidimensional education.

a. Conventional Education (Unidimensional)

---

[10] The discussion on holistic education is based on Ramon Gallegos Nava (2000) PowerPoint Presentation at the 8th International Conference on Holistic Education. Guadalajara, Mexico, November 2000. Accessed 16 December, 2010. Available from http://www.ramongallegos.com/englishversions.htm#ancla2

All of us are familiar with the conventional, unidimensional education since it was probably the only type of education that we have been introduced to and the only model we employ in our current educational activity. Hencc, without going into details, we shall briefly delineate the main characteristics of this type of education.

In conventional education, the focus is exclusively on the cognitive dimension of the learning process. As a result, all learning is seen as a cognitive process involving the mind and all the mental processes such as reasoning, logical ordering of ideas, making inferences, memorizing, remembering and everything associated with mental activity. Accordingly, the academic task is considered exclusively as the development of the intellectual capabilities of students. Nothing else is given importance. The student is like a robot that must assimilate information unilaterally provided by the teacher. The unidimensional education is, thus, similar to the models represented by the first and second quadrants in the models based on the teaching and learning activity that we discussed in the beginning. It is also similar to the Factory model of education.

The cognitive vision of learning is one-dimensional and, hence, reductionist. Education is reduced to a single dimension, namely, the cognitive, and, accordingly, places emphasis on memorizing, and intellectual, rational, linguistic, linear and materialistic training. As we shall see, the unidimensional cognitive vision leaves out other important and fundamental dimensions of education that are taken seriously in the holistic approach to teaching and learning.

b. Holistic Education (Multidimensional)

Unlike the conventional model, the holistic model of education attempts to take into account the entire field of thinking, learning and expression of the whole person. This model views teaching and learning as a pluri-dimensional and multilevel task related to the total awareness, experience and expression of the student. It considers education as an integral process involving various dimensions of thinking and different spheres of awareness. In other words, the holistic vision of education focuses on the total body-person with his/her personal, intellectual, psychological, moral, aesthetic, social, ecological and transcendental dimensions and awareness.

The holistic model identifies, in particular, six dimensions of the teaching and learning process. They are: Cognitive Dimension, Social Dimension, Emotional Dimension, Corporal or Physical Dimension, Aesthetic Dimension and Spiritual Dimension.

1. The Cognitive dimension focuses on the thought process and the capacity to reason logically. This dimension takes seriously the intellectual nature of human persons. As intelligent and rational beings, human persons thirst for truth. Seeking and finding the truth about the natural world, about humans and their societies, as well as about God are integral to human existence. Every educational process, therefore, requires to give importance to the cognitive dimension of education.

2. The Social Dimension emphasizes the social nature of human existence. Human beings are social beings who can become humans only in the context of a society. Precisely because humans are social, all learning happens in a social context of shared meaning. Accordingly, social interaction and social participation, as the social orientation to

learning has pointed out, have a significant role in the learning process. The social dimension of education, thus, emphasizes the interrelated nature of human existence and its importance for the teaching and learning process.

3. The Emotional Dimension gives due importance to the fact that human persons are psychological beings. Feelings and emotions play a significant role in making us who we are. The Stoic concept of human persons as rational who would be best if untouched by emotions is seen as a distortion of what it means to be real humans. The multidimensional education understands that all learning is accompanied by an emotional state which can greatly affect the learning outcome and, hence, it recognizes the role of emotions in the educational process.

4. The Corporal or Physical Dimension is an important factor in teaching and learning that has been sidelined for too long. Human persons are essentially body persons and the embodiment is the substratum for all other dimensions of human existence including the teaching learning process. The holistic education acknowledges this truth about human persons and recognizes that all learning occurs in a physical body. Therefore, the mind-body harmony is an important element in the quality of learning. What we learn, we learn in our bodies and there can never be any learning outside the body. In a way, the physical dimension is central to the learning process.

5. The Aesthetic Dimension is another aspect of human existence that has also been ignored in the educational process. Along with truth and love, beauty is a key aspect of human existence. Holistic education realizes this truth and considers the aesthetic dimension as an important element is the educational process. By emphasizing the

dimension of beauty, it directs our attention to the interiority of the learner and underscores the need for giving expression to the interior life of a person as a significant dimension of the educational process. It sees artistic expression of inner life as a key to a happy life. This makes it mandatory that the teaching and learning process gives due importance to the aesthetic dimension in education.

6. The Spiritual Dimension is the third and crucial aspect that has also been overlooked in the teaching and learning process. The reason for ignoring the place of spirituality in education is that, first, it wrongly gets associated with sentimentalism and superstition. Then it is judged to be unscientific and unfit for consideration in the educational process. And finally it is delegated to the sphere of emotionalism emerging from a pre-scientific mindset. However, the spiritual dimension of a person is a much deeper concept that views human persons as transcendent beings who seek to go beyond the limitations imposed by embodiment as well as the space and time categories. Spirituality is, thus, seen as a person's capacity to open oneself to the totality of reality that confronts us at every moment of our existence. Holistic education considers the spiritual dimension to be the total and direct experience of universal love that establishes a sense of compassion, fraternity and peace toward all beings. The spiritual dimension of education broadens one's sphere of existence so as to include the cosmic and transcendental levels.

The emphasis given to the six dimensions of thinking and learning testifies that the holistic approach to education focuses on the total person who is, at once, embodied and sensual, intelligent and capable of emotions and feelings, aesthetic and social, moral and spiritual. The complex

nature of human persons makes the educational process itself complex. Each of the dimensions of the human person is involved in the teaching and learning process. Overlooking any of the dimensions would make education somewhat truncated. Therefore, it is essential that all genuine educational process should take the total person into account. Education becomes genuinely holistic when each of the six dimensions of thinking is given due importance.

Besides the six dimensions of thinking, the holistic model also identifies five levels of awareness and experience that are seen as integral to the teaching and learning process. They are: Personal Level, Community Level, Social Level, Planetary or Environmental Level and Kosmic[11] or Spiritual Level of awareness and experience. The last level should not be seen as one along with the other four levels. It must be viewed as inclusive of all the individual, community, social, and environmental levels. The holistic education visualizes the Spiritual level as a presupposition for all other levels for the reason that a deep level of awareness and experience is fundamental to all genuine education.

1. The personal or individual level of awareness and experience looks at the person as an independent unit. Here the focus is on the self-awareness of the person. One acquires the awareness of the self through personal or individual experiences. It is this awareness emerging from personal experiences that constitutes one's identity. This identity allows one to expand one's awareness and

[11] Ramon Gallegos Nava uses the neologisms 'Kosmos' and 'Kosmic" to differentiate it from the planetary level and to indicate the larger spiritual sense in which he is using the term.

experience to wider levels. It is important that the process of teaching and learning should shape this identity by deepening one's self-awareness through personal experience. This will facilitate the movement of a person to wider levels of awareness.

2. The community level of awareness and experience is wider than the first in the sense that here the person is concretely situated in the context of a community where face to face relationships exist. The community provides the locus for the self-awareness and experience to take place. From this perspective it can be said that learning is primarily communal and teaching and learning is basically community education. A person's relatedness to the community in terms of interactions and exchange contributes to the expansion of one's awareness as a person and as a member of a community.

3. The social level of awareness and experience, predicated upon social education, entails a much wider awareness. The person at this level becomes aware of the cultural heritage of the society of which he/she is a part. Transcending the personal and communitarian levels, the social level of awareness enables a person to critique and expose the cultural and ideological distortions operating in a society. The function of social education is to make a person responsible for the well-being of society. The holistic education focusing on the social level of awareness and experience should equip the person to become a consciously active member of a society.

4. The planetary or environmental level of awareness and experience that has been sidelined for the greater part of the history of education has received importance and relevance with the realization of the impact of ecological

degradation on the survival of humans and other life-forms. The holistic model of teaching and learning emphasizes the role of environmental education for the further expansion of one's awareness and experience to a higher level. At this level one's awareness encompasses the planet and one perceives oneself as a knot in the planetary web of relationships. The consciousness of being a part of the entire planetary life process enables a person to be a responsible and active member of the earth community.

5. The Kosmic or spiritual level of awareness and experience is seen as the heart of holistic education because it encompasses all other levels of awareness and provides an integral vision of education. Therefore, this level of awareness that has so far been excluded from education has assumed centrality in holistic education. For this level of awareness is seen as the sphere of love and wisdom that allows us to perceive ourselves as spiritual beings. The awareness of our essential nature as spiritual beings takes a person to the vantage point from where he/she could experience universal love, compassion for all living beings, solidarity, fraternity, peace and harmony. This awareness and experience is considered to be the ultimate goal of the educational process.

The five levels of awareness highlight the dynamic process involved in education. It is marked by a movement from self-awareness toward the spiritual awareness through community, social and planetary levels of awareness. This expansion of awareness is not chronological but synthetic in the sense that at every level all the other levels are present in a greater or lesser degree. At the same time, each of the higher levels encompasses the lower levels. Thus, the community level includes the

personal; the social level includes the personal and community levels; and the planetary level includes the personal, community and social levels. The spiritual level of awareness not only encompasses the personal, community, social and planetary levels of awareness, but it also facilitates the integration of the cognitive, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, the spiritual level of awareness marks the culmination of the educational process. The challenge of holistic education for philosophical and theological formation, is to approach each of the levels of awareness and each dimension of thinking, from the spiritual level of awareness that alone can give coherence to any authentic education.

Conclusion

Our discussion so far has convincingly shown that teaching-learning is a complex process that involves theories of education, pedagogy, prerequisites for learning, understanding the student profile and methods of assessment and evaluation. Added to them are other elements such as the syllabus, schedule and resources. In this paper we have focused mainly on theories or models of education. We have discussed four models of education based on the teaching and learning activity, the expected outcome, the orientations to learning and the dimensions of teaching and learning. The main purpose of the discussion was to sharpen our perception of what is entailed in genuine education and the processes involved.

We have realized that authentic learning presupposes participatory learning as exemplified in the fourth quadrant of the first model. The teacher's participation must be characterized by the quality of nurturing as shown

in the womb model of education. Moreover, the teaching and learning process needs to incorporate the various orientations to learning as discussed in the third model. And, finally, and most importantly, the educational process must take into account the various dimensions of thinking and the different levels of awareness as shown in the holistic model of education.

These insights, if incorporated into our philosophical and theological education, can enrich our teaching and learning activity in our institutions. For this, there is a need to transcend the factory model and the unidimensional model of education that have, perhaps, become the only models we employ in our teaching of philosophy and theology. Familiarity with other models and the possible contributions that they can make to education can help us go beyond the unconsciously inherited models on which depends our current practice.

It also presupposes that we redesign our syllabus and rearrange our schedule in such a way that they facilitate the introduction of new models of education into our institutions. Only with this kind of reform and renewal can we think of introducing new pedagogies. For, improvement in the teaching and learning process is predicated upon the models of education that we adopt. The attempt to introduce new pedagogies without altering the models of education would inevitably end up as an exercise in futility. Hence, the primary challenge before us is to seek appropriate models of education and suitable pedagogies will follow in its trail. At the same time, it must be clearly borne in mind that it is not possible to bring about such reforms overnight. Hence, the process should be viewed as a long term project or goal which needs to begin now.

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011,40 -60

An Analysis of the Phenomenon of the Sacred From the Durkheim-Eliade Perspective

Lawrence S. Fernandes, S.J.
Faculty of Philosophy
Satya Nilayam, Chennai 600041.

Abstract: The Phenomenon of the sacred is central to any religion or religious studies. Given the need to study a reality from a multidimensional perspective, this article reflects on the phenomenon of the sacred as illustrated by an eminent sociologist Emile Durkhiem and a renowned historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, and would analyse its relevance in the present context.

Keywords: Durkhiem, Eliade, sacred, secular, secularization, inter-sacral, inculturation.

The sense of the sacred is vital to any religious studies and it has been a subject matter of interest to all those concerned with religion and with those who have a deeper quest in life. The phenomenon of the sacred has been studied from multiple perspectives. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel who has investigated it in popular Hinduism proposes two ways of studying the sense of the sacred.[1] One is to study people's beliefs, myths, rites and festivals from the historical perspective in the context of their sacred scripture and traditions. This is the classical approach adopted in the science of the History of Religions. Following this way, the religion of the Hindus

[1] Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism,* Christian Literature Society, Madras. 1983.

can be studied in the light of the Vedas and the Upanisads, the Puranas and the writings of the Acharyas and Gurus, both ancient and modern. The implicit assumption in such an enterprise would be that these literary sources will reveal the way in which the Hindu apprehended life and the world. The other approach is empirical. It studies the religion of a people in the context of religious consciousness. In the case of Hinduism, it would mean that the Hindu beliefs, myths, rites and festivals are studied as they are understood, experienced and articulated by the followers. The study of popular religiosity can be done through this method effectively.[2] Yet another way of looking at the concept of the sacred is to analyse how scholars have studied this phenomenon and have drawn insights from their study. The current interdisciplinary venture looks into the phenomenon of the sacred as illustrated by Emile Durkheim, a sociologist, and Mircea Eliade, a historian of religion, to draw some insights from their study for our world today.

Emile Durkheim ((1858-1917), a French sociologist, made a significant breakthrough in the concept of the sacred in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.*[3] He takes a look at the phenomenon of religion, paying special attention to the interconnectedness of religion and society. In this process, he touches upon the aspect of the sacred, so significant to religion.

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), a historian of religion, was influenced by Durkheim and also by Rudolph Otto. In his

---

[2] Lawrence Fernandes, *The Sacred in Popular Religiosity*, in Asian Journal for Priests and Religious, Vol 52 No 3, May 2007, p. 14-21.

[3] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Tr. Joseph Swain; Allen & Unwin Lt. London, 1976.

analysis of religion, he looks at the reality of the sacred in its entirety. In the process, he touches upon different areas of sacredness and its effects.

Concept of the Sacred in Emile Durkheim

Durkheim's interest to study the concept of the sacred came from his interest to study the phenomenon of religion which was influenced by the writings of Robertson Smith[4] which resulted in Durkheim studying the primitive religion. To know which is a primitive religion, Durkheim used a two-fold criterion, viz., that it should surpass others in simplicity and be able to explain it without borrowing elements from other religions.[5] So he chose the Arunta tribes of Australia. His basic aim was to study the most primitive and simple religion which is actually known.[6] In his study he discovered totemism as the original form of religion, the sacred as the important aspect of religion, and *Churinga*, the significant feature of totemism. He defined religion as

> a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, thing set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church and those who adhere to them. The second element is that religion should be eminently a collective thing.[7]

An important aspect of the totemic religion is *churinga*. Illustrating *churinga*, he said,

> They are pieces of wood or bits of polished stones, of a great

---

[4] Smith, Robertson *Religion of the Semites*, New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1889.

[5] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. p 13.

[6] *Ibid.*, 13

[7] *Ibid., 63*

> variety of forms but generally oval or oblong. Upon each of these is engraved a design representing the totem of this same group. Every *churinga* for whatever purpose it may be employed is counted among the essentially sacred things. It has marvelous powers. By contact it can heal wounds; especially those resulting from circumcision, useful to make a beard grow. It helps reproduction of totemic species and gives victory in war. The fate of the clan is bound up with *churinga*. Loss of it is the greatest misfortune[8]

The carving of the totem on wood, body or on other beings is called *churinga*. The carving of the animal/plant was more sacred than the signified object. People knew the limitation of the animal or plant which they must have seen almost daily. The thing chosen was definitely not one which would inspire fear, awe or reverence. Yet when the community decides to bestow sacredness on a totem, that very act changes the perspective of looking at it. What was so far a mere animal now becomes a sacred animal. This sacredness is superimposed by the society. So, sacredness is not an inborn quality of any reality.

It is not only the *churinga*, but also the very place where the *churinga* is placed, gets a sacral status. The sacredness of an object is not because of power within it but is conferred on it by the society. Thus objects get a religious value which is really not inherent in them but conferred from without. By doing this Durkheim deconstructed the sacred. Durkheim however, failed to explain at what point of time a particular society accepts a particular animal/plant as its totem and who takes the final decision in the choice of its totem. It is also not very clear whether a clan can change a totem or whether, once chosen, it remains forever.

---

[8] *Ibid.*, 140

Now the sacred character of objects can come from only one source: that is, they represent totems materially. Because they have the emblem of totems *churingas* get significance. The totem is at once the symbol, the vital principle (referred to as *mana* in some simple societies) and the society, because god and society are the same.

Durkheim calls the sacred power *mana,* the distinctive character of every sacred being.[9] Durkheim calls it also the totemic principle, cause of the sacredness of things. Totem is the material representation of this principle.[10] This principle of *mana* is personified in the totem.

Some Features of the Sacred

For Durkheim the sacred is irreducible. It cannot be explained or adequately viewed by reference to anything else. Sacred things form a group of phenomena which are irreducible to any other group of phenomena. The sacred cannot be broken down into constituent parts, or explained at another level.

Sacred is the ultimate category and the progenitor of gods. The sacred stands above the gods themselves. The object or idea does not become sacred because it is said to come from the gods, or because it is associated with the spirit or is said to be of divine origin. Rather, it is the reverse. Certain deities receive extremely high status because sacredness is bestowed upon them. The idea of the sacred is independent of the idea of god and is prior to it. The primacy of the sacred over the deity Durkheim saw exemplified in Buddhism. Classical Buddhism pays scant

---

[9] *Ibid.*, 79

[10] *Ibid.*, 506

or no attention to spiritual beings. A lack of gods is also evident in totemism and agrarian cults. In all these cases, Durkheim assumed, there was a sense of the sacred.

Two consequences emerge from subscribing to the primacy of the sacred. The first is the corollary that what is ultimate or of the highest value in a society is sacred. Therefore what actually constitutes the sacred within a society is boundless, although subject to time and change. Durkheim postulated a large number of items held to be sacred by given societies, but which in some people's eyes are not religious. What is ultimate in a society can thus be viewed as its most sacred idea or object. This is its *summum bonum* – its religion. The second consequence is that the sacred, since it has primacy, 'creates' what is spiritual, the gods or God himself. It is probably too strong to say that Durkheim held that the sacred is the progenitor of God and the gods. Thus the deity is established by first passing through the stage of being a human person and gradually being raised to the status of the sacred. In the *Division of Labour,* he wrote:

> In the beginning, the gods are not distinct from the universe, or rather there are no gods, but only sacred beings, without their sacred character being related to any external entity as their source (animals, plants) but little by little religious forces were detached from the things of which they were first attributes, and become hypostatized.[11]

As for the location of the sacred, in Durkheim's terminology, the sacred is a social fact and part of the collective conscience. For Durkheim and for those who follow his path, the sacred is to be located in collective

---

[11] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*. Translated by George Simpson, London, The Free press, 1984. *p.* 288.

beliefs and ideals, in the institutional religion itself, in its creeds, in its official statements and declarations. Similarly, it is determined by negative commands, prohibitions and interdicts and in negative ritual.

Durkheim considers sacred as indivisible. When the sacred is subdivided, each of its parts remains equal to the thing itself. In other words, as far as religious thought is concerned, the part is equal to the whole; it has the same powers, the same efficacy.[12] Sacredness is, therefore not dependent on crude physical laws. This, argues Durkheim, is an additional reason why the sacred virtue, which a thing is said to possess, is not dependent on its intrinsic or physical properties. The virtue comes from sentiments which the object calls forth and symbolizes. The notion of the sacred is obtained through a mental process and therefore a 'spiritual,' non-material process.

Any sacred character is to a high degree contagious; it therefore spreads out from the totemic being to everything that is closely or remotely connected with it.[13] The extraordinary contagiousness of a sacred character demands that it be ritually protected, lest it affect indiscriminately other areas and objects.

The sacred has an emotional content and the emotion associated with the sacred are of two opposite kinds. The sacred commands respect and is also an object of love and devotion – the sacred is something that is earnestly sought after, and on the other hand, the sacred is also something to be feared.

---

[12] *Ibid., 261*

[13] *Ibid.,* 254

The concept of sacred in Mircea Eliade:

Mircea Eliade was influenced by the writings of Emile Durkheim and Rudolf Otto. Speaking on the phenomenon of the sacred, Eliade said, 'We propose to present the phenomenon of the sacred in all its complexity, and not only in so far as it is *irrational.* The concern is not the relation between the rational and non-rational elements of religion but the sacred in its entirety. The first possible definition of the *sacred* is that it is the opposite of the profane.[14]

Eliade identifies the sacred as something real, yet he states clearly that the sacred is a structure of human consciousness. The sacred is identified as the source of significance, meaning, power and being, and accordingly its manifestations are referred to as *hierophanies*, *cratophanies*, or *ontophanies* (appearances of the holy, of power, or of being).

Eliade speaking of the sacred, states that one becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself as something wholly different. He calls this *act of manifesting* the sacred as *hierophany* (from the Greek *hieros,* meaning sacred, and *phanein* meaning to appear).

To perceive the sacred, one needs to have a background of religious experience. A person brought up in a non-religious environment may not be able to perceive the manifestation even when it reveals itself. In this context, he speaks of sacral (religious persons who have a positive attitude towards religion) and desacral persons (non-religious persons to whom religion does not matter)

---

[14] Mircea Eliade *The Sacred & the Profane, the Nature of Religion* (New York, Harvest Book 1959). p.10

Eliade insists that the non-religious humanity in any pure sense is a very rare phenomenon.

The hierophanies, i.e., manifestations of the sacred expressed in symbols and myths are grasped as structures, and constitute a pre-reflective language that requires special hermeneutics. Eliade's extraordinary knowledge of the history of religions, including the little-known primitive and archaic religions, has enabled him to compare a rich variety of spatial and temporal manifestations of the sacred and to comment on their significance.

In the process of manifesting the sacred, a being manifests something beyond its natural self; it becomes 'something other' even though there would be no changes in its physical properties. E.g., the sacred can manifest itself in a stone. But, then, the stone will be venerated, not for its physical properties but for its ability to reveal something beyond its physical properties. There will be no change in physical properties, yet the stone moves on to a higher realm of being in the eyes of a religious person. Even though the sacred is revealed in a local context and for a local purpose, it in no way reduces its universal quality.

> All *hierophany* is always a historical event (that is to say, always occurs in some definite situation) does not lessen its universal quality. Some hierophanies have a purely local purpose; others have, or attain, worldwide significance. The Indians, for instance, venerate *asvatta tree*: the manifestation of the sacred in that particular plant species has meaning only for them, for only to them is *asvattha* anything more than just a tree.[15]

[15] Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in comparative Religion*, trans. R. Shred, London, Sheed and Ward. 1958. p.2

One of the important assertions of Eliade is that the realm of the sacred is not limited to any particular group. It can be manifested anywhere and everywhere. He goes on to say that all beings in the society are capable of manifesting the sacred; and in fact, all beings, some time or the other did manifest the sacred. Not only that, every activity at one time or the other was deemed sacred. So the whole universe is charged with the grandeur of the sacred, though due to human choice, at a particular moment only few beings would be given sacral status by the society.

In every society there are some beings considered sacred and some profane. The question that may naturally arise is that if all beings have been hierophanies at one time or the other, then, how can there be any profane being at all? The dialectic of a hierophany implies a more or less clear choice, a singling out.[16] A thing becomes sacred, as already stated, when it reveals something other than its material self.

Here one need not be concerned with whether that something other comes from its unusual shape, its efficacy, or simply its "power", or whether it springs from the thing's fitting in with some symbolism or other, or has been given it by some rite of consecration, or acquired by its being placed in some position that is instinct with sacredness. It is basically a matter of choice. What matters is that *hierophany* implies a *choice,* a clear-cut separation of this thing which manifests the sacred from everything else around it. The thing that becomes sacred is still separated in regard to itself; for it only becomes a *hierophany* at the moment of stopping to be mere profane something, at the moment of acquiring a new "dimension"

---

[16] *Ibid., p.* 13

of sacredness.[17]

By manifesting the sacred, the object becomes *something else*; yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently (or more precisely, from the profane point of view) nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality. In other words, for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. The cosmos in its entirety can become a *hierophany*.

Eliade does state that believers for whom the *hierophany* is a revelation of the sacred must be prepared by their experience, including their traditional religious background, before they can apprehend it. To others the sacred tree, for example, remains simply a tree. It is an indispensable element of Eliade's analysis that any phenomenal entity could be apprehended as a *hierophany* with an appropriate preparation. The conclusion must be that all beings reveal, and at the same time conceal, the nature of being.

Manifestation of the sacred are not always closed. They can develop, change, disappear, and lose its importance in due course of time. Eliade narrates with the example of a sacred stone, that the stone will manifest the sacred at one time directly, and at yet another time indirectly.[18]

For Eliade the sacrality is an experience that is manifested in time, space and nature as well. According to

---

[17] *Ibid.*, p.13

[18] *Ibid.*, p.25

Eliade the experience of time is not the same, for the primitive man and the modern man.

Every religious festival or any liturgical time represents the reactualisation of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, "in the beginning". Yet, these feasts and festivities make the whole mythical reality present, here and now. Explaining the significance of festival Eliade states that 'the festival is a periodic reactualisation of divine acts. Structure of the sacred time actualized in festival and in this a person becomes contemporary with gods.'[19] There is a sacred time—time of festivities and celebrations and also there is profane time; which is ordinary mundane time. Between these two kinds of time there is, of course, the solution of continuity; but by means of rites, religious man can pass without danger from ordinary temporal duration to sacred time.[20] Myths are a means to reactualize the past.

As in time, so also in space. For a religious man space is not homogeneous; some parts are qualitatively different from others. There is a sacred space caused by *hierophany* in contrast to the profane space of our daily activities. Revelation of a sacred space makes it possible to obtain a fixed point and hence to acquire orientation in the chaos of homogeneity. Every sacred space implies a *hierophany*, an eruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different. At times a mere sign would suffice to indicate the sacredness of a place. The sign with

---

[19] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane, The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask, New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1959. pp. 87,91

[20] *Ibid., p.*68

religious meaning introduces an absolute element and puts an end to relativity and confusion.

When no sign manifests itself, it is *provoked*[21]. For example, a sort of evocation is performed with the help of animals; it is they who show what place is fit to receive the sanctuary or village. A sign is asked for to put an end to the tension and anxiety caused by relativity and disorientation. "The sacred site is not chosen by men. Men are not free to choose the sacred site that they only seek for it and find it by the help of mysterious signs."[22] So the sacredness is derived of a place from the fact that the site is either revealed by signs that are mysterious, or through a ritual action it is provoked.

The ritual through which one constructs a sacred space is efficacious in the measure it reproduces the work of the gods.[23] For a religious person every world is a sacred world.

For Eliade the whole nature reveals the sacredness. The element of sacredness is able to pervade in all realities both in animate and in inanimate beings. An aspect of this is presented by Eliade in sacredness in nature.

For a religious person, nature is never merely 'natural' it is always filled with a religious value. The world is not only filled with objects which, through consecration or through rites, receive the 'sacred' status, but also is a place where the divine expressed itself in many ways.

Durkheim and Eliade: An Appraisal and Implication:

---

[21] Eliade, *Sacred & profane* p.27

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 28

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 29

The sacred, in ordinary language is associated with religion and religious experience. The presence of the sacred, evokes in the believer a sense of wonder, awe, reverence and even fear. The sacred is something which is above the ordinary and set apart from mundane things and use, set apart for special functions. By stating that the sacred is beyond the sphere of organized religions, gods and goddesses, they stressed more on the human element and on the role of human beings in making a thing sacred.

It is Durkheim who deconstructed the sacred. He said that it is not any spiritual force that makes a thing sacred, but the human beings choose something that would symbolize them (in his study, it was the totem), which as a result gets a sacral status. The sacred, according to Durkheim, has a major role of maintaining social order. By saying so, he in fact, desacralised the sacred.

Eliade has been a bit ambiguous in his presentation of the sacred. He fails to pinpoint where exactly the sacred is located in a society. He attributes, to some extent, its origin to humans, but doesn't rule out the possibility of non-human elements in making a thing sacred. He stresses more on the different manifestations of the sacred and by doing this he tries to bring out the basic need of humans to live in a sacral world.

The presentation of the sacred by these thinkers, especially by Durkheim, as a social reality has raised questions of wider implications. His analysis poses a serious threat to those religions that claim divine origin and attribute their source of sacredness to gods. It would also challenge many a custom, tradition and behavior that claim to have their roots in gods or goddesses or at least seem to have the divine sanction, e.g., the caste system.

This understanding of the sacred also would give impetus to challenge many oppressive structures that are perpetuated in the name of religion. The whole question of mystery would fall apart when the sacred is considered as a reality constructed by the society for maintaining social order.

The illustrations of sacred as a social reality has its far reaching implications on our society even to this day. Some of them are discussed below.

Sacred, a source of unity

Durkheim spoke of the sacred as one, having the capacity to unite the society and maintain it as one body. It can also strengthen, build and bind a society. The totem becomes a rallying point for the whole community to remain united. A human being, as a social animal, has a need of the other, and has a desire to be a part of the group and to draw strength and sustenance from the group. This is provided by the clan members who worship the totem, which symbolizes the society and provides a sense of solidarity, unity and fraternal bond among them. Durkheim thus has shown the uniting power of the sacred in a society.

The totem, which is sacred, need not necessarily be a material object. Even a value, like *ahimsa,* truth or even patriotism, could as well be a totem. The sacred being has also within it the power to enthuse people for sacrifice. Sometimes totems are created by the leaders to unite its members. It has been noted, that the Ganesha festival in Maharashtra popularized by Bal Gangadhar Tilak had more than mere religious importance. Tilak used this as a means to unite the Hindus against the British.

A factor to be remembered is that, there should be a constant recourse to the totem, be it by way of narrating a myth, performing a ritual or celebrating a festival, where the totem is given prominence. If not, the sacred would lose its significance and then it would be replaced by a new totem.

Sacred, a source of power

The sacred being is powerful because its presence evokes in believers a sense of surrender. So, control over the sacred realm brings along with it, to some extent, control over persons who believe in that sacred reality. The priest, *poojary* and mullah are considered sacred people for they perform ritual sacrifices, hence in the society they exercise power in their respective communities. There are times when religious leaders decide on matters which are not purely of religious nature.

It is interesting to note that *kratophany* (sacred as power) many times goes along with economic, political and social power as well. In India the Brahmins, the high caste people had access to education and they were allowed to perform sacrifices, but the shudras were to be content with doing menial jobs. In medieval Europe, the clergy almost always enjoyed the political patronage and benefits. Subalterns, who have seen religion and the sacred as a source of power, are now learning to use it as a means to fight against oppression. The emergence of local gods and the rise in popular religiosity is one such sign.

Sacred, a hope for the better world?

Eliade speaks of sacred time, sacred place and sacred space. In each instance, he says, either through myths, rituals or festivals the individual goes back to the time of

gods and relives in the 'original' time/space or place of gods. Today when we speak of the 'time of gods', what comes to our mind (whether Eliade intended it or not), is a time when there is peace, plenitude and prosperity, when truth and good are victorious. By recalling the mythical events through narration, rituals and festivals, one is enthused to recreate (or rather rebuild) the society based on such values. For example, the ideals like the Kingdom of God and *Ram Rajya* could, thus, be a force to build a better society. To build a society like that of gods seems to be the dream of religious person. The myths and festivals provide impetus to make this dream a reality.

This tendency to go back to the time of gods also has its disadvantages. The tendency to look back on the 'glorious past,' to the age of gods can make people remain in a dream world and forget their responsibilities and situations in the changing society today. This may also lead to escapism, when the people are carried to the dream world, and the hard facts of the present day life are not paid attention to. The desire to go back to the time of gods, without paying attention to the social changes that have come about in the society, can cause serious harm to the society as well. For example, in some scriptures women are depicted as inferior to men. Such attitudes in the present would hamper the feminist movements that are trying to restore dignity to female children and women.

Secularization of the sacred

According to Eliade, a non-sacral being is a rare phenomenon[24], even in modern times. For, humans give special importance to the place they are born in, the time

[24] Eliade, *Sacred and Profane,* p.210

they met their beloved, etc. Eliade considers this tendency in human beings as a sign of their craving for the sacred. Given this understanding of the sacred, the phenomenon of secularization is a question worth considering.

> Secularization relates essentially to a process of decline in religious activities, beliefs, ways of thinking and institutions that occurs primarily in association with, or as an unconscious or unintended consequence of, other processes of social structural change.[25]

In the traditional society religion provided the overall meaning system for different institutions. In the secularization process religion will no more enjoy the same status. In this process religious consciousness, activities and institutions lose their social significance. Religion becomes marginal to the operation of the social system, and the essential functions for the operation of society become rationalized passing out of control of agencies devoted to the supernatural.

Durkheim and Eliade share the possibility of the existence of the sacred without recourse to the supernatural. Both feel the need to express the whole concept of the sacred without any reference to god and religion. They think the sacred sphere is much wider than the sphere of religion.

Will secularization sweep out the element of the sacred from our society? This is the question one would ask today. According to Durkheim, the sacred is bound to survive, for the core of the sacred is the society itself and as long as it exists, the sacred aspect in it is bound to be there. Eliade seems to have a different opinion. Though he

---

[25] Mircea Eliade, (Editor-in--Chief) *Encyclopaedia of Religon 1987*, Vol 13. p.159.

doesn't directly speak of secularization, he thinks that throughout history there will be always elements that would manifest the sacred; and, based on the time, situations and culture, people would give some elements the sacral status.

Inter–sacral dialogue

Durkheim, who speaks of each tribe having a totem, doesn't mention the interconnectedness or dialogue among tribes regarding totems. Each tribe seems to have an independent existence. Tribe, in the Durkheimian analysis, didn't feel the need to dialogue. However, as we live in this pluralistic society with multiple experiences and expressions of the sacral reality, there seems to be a need of dialogue among people on important aspects of life, especially on the sacred. For a harmonious society, to exist there seems to be a need to respect, understand and learn from each other which is possible only through dialogue. Dialogue not to destroy the sacred sphere nor to ridicule the sacral aspects of the other, but to learn, appreciate and respect what is so central to the living of faith. In India, which is the home of many religions, it is essential to dialogue for the peaceful co-existence and for the removal of built-in prejudices against other religions and beliefs.

The content of dialogue can take different forms. It could be a sharing of one's experience of the sacred; it can also take the form of a joint social action; or it can also take the form of theological reflection on the sacral reality of each other.

Inculturating the sacred

Durkheim and Eliade in their analysis see the sacred as one which is not imposed by outside factors but as that

which originated from within and is accepted by the social group. In that case, can the sacred be transplanted from one culture to the other? Can something that is sacred to one society at one time be sacred to another society later on in a different cultural milieu?

Durkheim and Eliade do not speak directly of inculturation. But, according to them, for the sacred to be meaningful to a society, it has to speak the language of the people and represent the society. That which is 'foreign' cannot form a sacral core of a society. For Durkheim, the totem symbolises the society. It is very much part of the life of the people. That which is not part of them cannot find a home in them. This is seen clearly in the case of Christianity in Asia.

Christianity, which came to Asia in a Western garb, could not make any dent on the Asian masses partly because the questions it claimed to answer were not their questions. It did not vibrate with their spirit, nor could it capture their soul.[26] Hence, it remains a challenge for Christianity to find its roots in Asia to be meaningful and relevant for its people.

This leads to the question of inculturation of the sacred. According to Michael Amaladoss, "inculturation is a process through which a particular community in the context of its reality, culture and life, responds to the word that is proclaimed."[27]

---

[26] Cf. Felix Wilfred. *Sunset in the East*, University of Madras, 1991. *p.170*

[27] Michael Amaladoss, *Becoming Indian, The Process of Inculturation*, Rome, Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies, 1992. p.10

The concept of the sacred as a reality is not exhausted by the writings of Durkheim or Eliade. Durkheim and Eliade have studied the reality as a non-religious phenomenon and their reflections are still relevant and meaningful even in this post- modern world.

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011, 61-76

Religious Assertions : A Linguistic Approach

Dr. (Mrs.) Sanjyot D. Pai Vernekar
Associate Professor,
Department Of Philosophy, Goa University.

Abstract: This article makes an attempt to understand religious assertions from a linguistic perspective. The terms that are applied to God in religious discourse are being used in special ways, different from their use in the scientific or in the ordinary day-to-day contexts. Religious assertions could be viewed as explanations, self-justified, derived from authority, analogical statements, faith statements, symbolic, non-cognitive and as language-games.

The pertinent question is whether religious utterances or assertions are verifiable. Religious assertions are not verifiable in the sense of being publicly verifiable, namely there being publicly agreed methods of verifying them. However this does not entail that they are not informative. As far as religious assertions are concerned, one should concentrate more on the practical usefulness of these beliefs and utterances rather than questioning their truth and verifiability. For those with faith in the religious assertions, no proof is required, but for those without faith no proof is possible.

Keywords: Religious Assertions, Analogical Statements, Symbolic, Non-cognitive, Language-games, Verification.

1. Introduction

Philosophy's task with regard to religion is mainly analytic. The task of philosophy with respect to religion is of a 'second-order' or 'meta', that is philosophy of religion is to religion as meta-ethics is to ethics or philosophy of science is to science. Philosophy of religion analyses the function and peculiarities of religious language as well as

tries to understand the logic and grammar of religious assertions and utterances. Do the religious utterances like 'God is loving' which have the form of factual assertions refer to a special kind of fact, different from the scientific fact or do they perform a different function altogether? There is a long shift of meaning from the secular use of the words like 'loving' and their theological usage. In this article, I have made an attempt to understand the religious assertions from a linguistic perspective.

2. Nature of Religious Assertions

There are a number of beliefs and assertions that form a necessary aspect of religion. Religious assertions refer to a reality external to and beyond the believer. The terms that are applied to God in religious discourse are being used in special ways, different from their use in the scientific or in the ordinary day-to-day contexts. Religious assertions could be characterised in various ways. I shall now deal with some of them.

2. 1. Assertions as Explanations

The most common view about religious assertions is that they are significant in so far as they fill the gaps left by science. It is felt that science cannot explain the whole structure of reality particularly when the supernatural intrudes into the natural world. Religious assertions help in explaining these intrusions which are unexplainable in science. Some feature of the supernatural world is used to account for the occurrences in the natural world. There are certain particular features of the natural world which call for a supernatural explanation. The miraculous order and beauty of the natural world is quoted as a reason for believing in a Creator, particularly on the grounds that it is

otherwise unexplainable.

This view is however criticized on two grounds. Firstly, there might be a natural explanation for the phenomena in the sense that our present scientific knowledge with some extension of it, in terms of knowing some more facts, would explain the phenomena without attributing it to any supernatural cause. Secondly, if God is made use of for giving explanations, then God is reduced to the level of a natural cause and becomes one cause amongst others.

2. 2. Assertions as Self-justified

Religious assertions are regarded as having some reference and relevance to external reality, but no evidence can be provided for them in the outside world. They are considered as self-justified, that is they are justified by their intrinsic merits. In the strict sense, nothing can be self-justifying, for to justify something means to give good reason for it in terms of something else. Religious assertions however are justified not by something else, nor by its effects or its accuracy, but the believer or hearer commits himself to it. When a symbol or set of symbols arouse our feelings or imagination there need not necessarily exist in reality something for which the symbol stands.

Religious assertions are in a class by themselves – they are not descriptive and hence need no justification. One can accept religion or reject it in its own terms. There is no way of justifying it by translating it into other terms. John Wilson comments, "believers come to believe or accept religious assertions... because of their form and content, and not because of their correlation with the outside

world"[1].

2. 3. Assertions as Derived from Authority

Many believers adhere to religious beliefs and assertions because they accept a certain authority which ultimately takes the form of a person – Christ, Buddha, Krishna, etc. – by reference to whom subordinate authorities like the Bible, the Gita are also accepted. A. MacIntyre writes "we justify a particular religious belief by showing its place in the total religious conception; we justify a religious belief as a whole by referring to authority. We accept authority because we discover some point in the world at which we worship, at which we accept the lordship of something not ourselves. We do not worship authority but we accept authority as defining the worshipful"[2]. The religious authority is the ultimate criterion which gives the particular belief or assertion its logical location and status.

The critics however point out that there must be some evidence that the authority is trustworthy. We cannot accept religious assertions on our inner experiences or inner insight. If a religious personage is accepted as a authority for believing in religious assertions, then it is necessary that the personage is an expert in the field of religious knowledge and that the personage is not likely to be biased or prejudiced in any way. However, it is not possible to know that a religious authority is an expert in the field of religious knowledge unless we know that there is such a field whose pronouncements could be checked.

---

[1] J. Wilson, *Philosophy and Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 54.

[2] A. MacIntyre (and others), *Metaphysical Belief* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1957), p. 202.

It could also be possible that the religious assertions were made to fulfill certain selfish purposes. It may be perfectly reasonable to follow a religious personage but that does not mean that one could accept him as an authority on religious knowledge. Accepting religious assertions on the basis of authority is giving a psychological explanation and not a rational justification. Therefore, many a time the assertions in religion are dismissed as meaningless or nonsensical.

2. 4. Religious Assertions as Analogical Statements

Thomas Aquinas held that in the religious assertion 'God is good', the term 'good' is applied to the Creator and the created neither univocally nor equivocally but analogically. When the term 'good' is applied to a created being and to God, it is not being used univocally (that is, with exactly the same meaning), that is God is not good in the same sense in which human beings are good. Nor is the term 'good' used equivocally (that is, with completely different meanings). Human goodness and divine goodness are definitely related due to the fact that God has created mankind. Thus religious assertions are analogical.

Analogy could be 'downward' analogy or 'upward' analogy. Analogy downwards would be for example, man to a lower form of life. We speak of a dog as being faithful and we also describe man as faithful. We make use of the same word 'faithful' because there is some similarity between the faithfulness of the dog and of the human being. Therefore, the term is not used equivocally, that is with completely different meanings. However, the term is not used univocally. There is a great difference between the dog's faithfulness and that of a person. The person is superior to the other in terms of responsibility, self-

consciousness as well as in terms of moral purposes and ends. We are therefore, using the term analogically to indicate that at the level of the dog's consciousness there is a quality that corresponds to what at the human level we call faithfulness. In the case of analogy downwards, the true and normative faithfulness of man and the imperfect faithfulness of the dog are compared. In the case of analogy upwards, the situation is reversed. The goodness, love or wisdom of man which are thin shadows, are compared to the perfect qualities of God. Thus when we say that 'God is good' we are implying that there is a quality of the infinitely perfect Being which corresponds to what at the human level is called goodness.

The doctrine of analogy also comprises the aspects of attribution and proportionality. Speaking about the aspect of attribution, Y. Masih holds that "the analogy of attribution requires that one of the terms be 'prime analogate' of which the analogous property is predicted formally or intrinsically, while the other analogate receives it derivatively or secondarily by virtue of its relevant relation to the prime analogate"[3]. For example, 'faithfulness' is an attribute which man, the prime analogate possesses. But we also apply the term faithful to the dog. Thus the term 'faithful' is analogically attributed to the dog. The other aspect is that of proportionality. We say that 'dog is intelligent' and we say 'man is intelligent'. The term 'intelligent' is used in strict proportion to the essence of the dog and the man. The dog's intelligence is in proportion to his being and the man's intelligence is in proportion to his being.

---

[3] Y. Masih, *The Nature of Religious Knowledge* (West Bengal, India: Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy, 1971), p. 27.

There are some criticisms leveled against this doctrine of analogy. Firstly, the qualities of infinite love, goodness, etc., are applied to God who is the primary analogate and man's goodness or love are applied to him only derivatively. This would require that we have direct knowledge of the divine attributes. But this is not possible and even if one says it is possible to have direct or non-analogical cognition of divine attributes, then what is the necessity of an analogical predication? Secondly, God's goodness and wisdom are in proportion to his mode of existence and we can never know this proportion at all. Thus, divine goodness and wisdom remain unknown to us and hence cannot be proportionately applied to human beings.

Thirdly, the doctrine of analogy does not spell out the concrete character of God's perfections but only indicates the relation between the different meanings of a word when it is applied both to humanity and to God. John Hick however points out that " analogy is not an instrument for exploring and mapping the infinite divine nature; it is an account of the way in which terms are used of the Deity whose existence is, at this point, being presupposed"[4]. Fourthly, normally in an analogy we consider objects or beings inferior to our own reality, like material objects or animals or level to our own reality, like fellow human beings. In the case of religious assertions, we apprehend and affirm realities superior to ourselves which are obscure and unclear.

2. 5. Religious Assertions as Faith Statements

[4] John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1987), p. 78.

We believe in religious statements as a matter of faith. Faith is a belief and the belief may not be rational. However, knowledge has rational justifications in its favour.' Hick maintains that we know God by faith. According to him " our knowledge of Him is ... like all our knowledge of environment, an apprehension reached by an act of interpretation; but it differs from the rest of our knowing in that in this case the interpretation is uniquely total in its scope"[5]. It is due to faith that we see all things in relation to the divine purpose or find God in all things and live consciously in his presence. The assertion like 'God exists' has to be viewed at a deeper level and from the 'inside' of the believer who formulates the notion of God. Hence only a believer can meaningfully use religious assertions. Religious language is therefore convictional and not the depersonalised factual language of science.

2. 6. Religious Assertions as Symbolic

Paul Tillich maintained that religious assertions or statements are symbolic in nature. Tillich distinguishes between a sign and a symbol. According to Paul Tillich both sign and symbol point to something beyond themselves. But a sign signifies that to which it points by arbitrary connection whereas unlike this purely external connection, a symbol participates in that to which it points. Paul Tillich further points out that symbols are not arbitrarily instituted like conventional signs, but "grow out of the individual or collective unconscious"[6] A symbol

---

[5] J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 150.

[6] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), p. 43.

thereby opens up the levels of reality which are otherwise closed to us. Religious faith which is concerned with the ultimate can only express itself in symbolic language. All the religious assertions about God, like God is eternally good, loving or perfect, are symbolic except for one statement namely, 'God is Being itself'.

Tillich is criticised on the ground that he does not explain or define the notion of 'participation'. A symbol according to him participates in the reality to which it points. If one considers the symbolic statement that 'God is good'; is the symbol in this case the proposition 'God is good' or the concept of 'goodness of God'? Does this symbol participate in Being itself in the same sense as that in which a flag participates in the power and dignity of a nation? Tillich does not analyse this aspect. The second criticism leveled against Tillich's theory is whether it is really possible to speak of a theological statement such as 'God is not dependent for its existence upon any external reality' to have arisen from the unconscious – individual or collective? Does this assertion not seem to be formulated by a philosophical theologian? Does this statement really open up levels of reality which are otherwise closed to us?

2. 7. Religious Assertions as Non-cognitive

A cognitive utterance or statement like 'It is raining' or 'Two plus two equals four' is either true or false. The other types of utterances for example, commands, interrogations, exclamations, etc., are those which are neither true nor false. They do not describe facts. Now the question arises as to whether the utterance 'God is loving' is cognitive or non-cognitive? As a matter of historical fact religious people have believed statements regarding God to be not only cognitive but also true. However, there

are a number of theories which consider religious assertions to be non-cognitive.

One of the theories about the religious assertions being non-cognitive is proposed by J. H. Randall. Randall holds that religion is a human activity which plays an important role in human culture. Religion works with symbols and myths and these symbols are both non representative and non-cognitive. Randall speaks of religious symbols as having a four-fold function. [7] Firstly, they arouse emotions and stir people to actions. Secondly, they bind a community together through a common response to its symbols, thereby stimulating co-operative action. Thirdly, they communicate qualities which cannot be expressed literally. Fourthly, they evoke and clarify the human experience with the help of the Divine. Randall believes that God or Divine does not exist as a reality independent of the human mind. Therefore J. Hick writes " God is fleeting ripple of imagination in a tiny corner of space-time"[8]. For Randall religion which is a human enterprise forms a sociable indispensable function. Religion enables the individual to achieve harmony internally and in relation to the environment.

The second theory that asserts the non-cognitive nature of religious language is offered by R. B. Braithwaite. For him, religious assertions serve an ethical function. Religious statements express and recommend a commitment to a certain way of life. Braithwaite however raises the question as to how two religions like Christianity and Hinduism which recommend essentially

---

[7] Refer to J. H. Randall, *The Role of knowledge in Western Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

[8] J. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1987), p. 85.

the same quality or way of life are different? There are differences in the rituals of the two religions, but the more significant difference is the set of stories, myths or parables that are associated with the two religions. Braithwaite holds that these stories need not be true or even believed to be true.

The relation between the religious stories and the religious way of life is psychological and causal. People find it more convincing and easier to follow a course of action which may be contrary to their natural inclinations if this policy or action is associated with certain stories. Therefore, R. B. Braithwaite maintains that "a religious assertion ... is the assertion of an intention to carry out a certain behaviour policy, subsumable under a sufficiently general principle to be a moral one, together with the implicit or explicit statement, but not the assertion, of certain stories".[9] God is a character in the stories. The Christian stories referred to by Braithwaite are of diverse kinds. They include straightforward historical statements of the life of Jesus, mythological expressions of belief in creation and belief in the existence of God. Of these only the first type constitute stories. Statements such as 'God loves mankind' do not fit into Braithwaite's definition of a story.

Braithwaite's theory can be criticised on the grounds that his stories focus on only a peripheral type of religious statements, and are not able to account for the more directly and distinctively religious statements that refer to God. Thus these important beliefs and assertions of

---

[9] R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's' View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Folcroft, Pa: Folcroft Library Editions, 1955), p. 32.

religion remain unanalysed in Braithwaite's discussion. Braithwaite has also not sufficiently explained the nature of a 'story'. He says a story could be a parable, a fairy-tale, a myth, a fable and so on. Are all these terms synonymous? The stories are dealt with superficially by Braithwaite.

2. 8. Religious Assertions as Language Games

Wittgenstein proposes a theory of meaning according to which the meaning of any utterance can be determined by the use or function or role it has within the context of a given 'language-game' and these language-games are themselves involved with what Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'. M. J. Charlesworth is of the opinion that "there is ... no such thing as language *tout court* but rather particular 'language-games' and similarly there is no general criterion of the meaningfulness of language, but each language-game has its own criterion of meaningfulness proper to it which can only be discovered by looking at the 'form of life' in which it is involved"[10].

Wittgenstein himself has said very little about religious locutions or utterances, however one could apply his theory to the latter. Thus one can say that there is a religious form of life and that it was only within the context of this distinctive form of life that the meaningfulness of religious assertions could be assessed. Thus Wittgenstein says "what has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life"[11]. Any attempt which shows that religious utterances are meaningless

---

[10] M.J. Charlesworth, *Philosophy of Religion: The Historic Approaches* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1972), p. 161.

[11] G. Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1964), p. 226.

because they fail to satisfy the criterion of meaning such as the verifiability principle or the falsifiability principle could then be dismissed. Wittgenstein holds that religious utterances involve a 'picture' or way of looking at the world and at life, thus influencing the way in which we live. Religious language is meaningful and intelligible within the religious language-game or within the activities, attitudes, procedures, beliefs or institutions that make up the religious form of life and the religious utterances function within this context. The difficulty that arises is how we characterise the religious form of life within which religious locutions or utterances have their meaning. There is no clear way of determining whether there is a genuine realm of religious discourse and an irreducibly distinctive religious form of life.

3. Religious Assertions and Verification

Having discussed the nature of religious assertions, the pertinent question is whether religious utterances or assertions are verifiable. According to logical positivists, a proposition has a factual or cognitive meaning if it is in principle verifiable or at least 'probabilifiable' by reference to experience. The concept of verification involves the removal of ignorance or uncertainty concerning the truth of the propositions.

The question that can be asked is whether the process of verification is logical only or is both logical and psychological. Is the statement that P is verified, a statement that a certain state of affairs exists, or is it a statement that someone is aware that this state of affairs exists (or has existed) and notes that its existence establishes the truth of P? The only sort of verification that one can speak of with regard to religious assertions is one

in which human beings participate. Therefore it would be better to treat verification as a logico-psychological concept rather than a purely logical concept. B. Mitchell is of the opinion that " verification is ... primarily the name for an event which takes place in human consciousness"[12].

We could speak mainly of two classes of meaningful statements, namely, statements about particular matters of empirical facts and the logically necessary statements of logic and mathematics. Religious assertions and statements cannot fit into any of these classes. Does this imply that religious utterances are not verifiable? Do they have no meaning or are they nonsensical? The logical positivist holds that religious utterances are nonsensical or meaningless. Religious assertions are not verifiable in the sense of being publicly verifiable, namely, there being publicly agreed methods of verifying them. However this does not entail that religious assertions are unverifiable and hence not informative.

The religious assertions might be verifiable and informative within a limited group of people. There are some beliefs which are peculiar to certain groups and the same religious assertions may differ in meaning, verification and information from one group to another. The group members would share certain common experiences to which their assertions referred. However the non-believers or critics would not accept the assertions unless they are conclusively proved, however long a history the beliefs may have, and however respectable and high-minded the believers may be. Different religious groups have different terminologies which have more or

[12] B. Mitchell, *The Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 54.

less precise usages within the groups, but since there is no common testing system the usage is bound to seem vague to the non-believer. An assertion such as 'Christ answers prayers' seems impossible to verify unless one happens to be a member of a sect in which it has a precise meaning. Similarly, 'God' means different things to different religious groups, nevertheless, a basic and minimal criterion is adopted for its universal application. For R. M. Hare religious assertions cannot be classified as true or false. He suggested that religious assertions express a distinctive *blik*, a *blik* being an unverifiable interpretation of one's experience[13].

4. Conclusion

Religion serves a purpose in human life. As far as religious assertions are concerned, one should concentrate more on the practical usefulness of these beliefs and utterances rather than questioning their truth and verifiability. Most religions postulate a reality which permits a belief in unseen and otherwise potentially unknowable aspects of life, including the hope of eternal life and after-life. Many people from many faiths contend that their faith in religious assertions brings them fulfillment, peace, joy apart from the worldly interests. Many religions also provide their adherents with spiritual and moral role models who they believe can bring highly positive influences to the believer as well as society in general.

---

[13] Cf. A. Flew in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: S. C. M. Press Ltd., 1955) The New Essays discussion by Flew, Hare, Mitchell and Crombie is reprinted in J. Hick ed. *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice Hall Inc., 1970).

Religious utterances are meaningful in so far as they make a difference to the way a person acts and feels, that is, to his behaviour. Religious assertions in religious language have a *sui generis* function of their own, just as scientific knowledge has its own distinctive function and moral language has its own function. G. E. Hughes claims that religious language comprising of religious assertions and beliefs "is a long-established *fait-accompli* and something which does a job which ... no other segment of language can do"[14]. Religious assertions may not be true or false from a scientific or empirical point of view, but for the believer they are not only meaningful and useful, but also true. For those with faith in the religious assertions, no proof is required, but for those without faith no proof is possible.

[14] G. E. Hughes, "Critical Notice 'Religious Belief'" by C. B. Martin, *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, XL, 1962, p. 215.

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011, 77-98

Conviction, Commitment and Creativity: Philosophising in the Contemporary Indian Christian Context

Kuruvila Pandikattu S.J.
Papal Seminary, Nagar Road, Pune 411014

Abstract: This paper proposes, to Indian Christians, a method of philosophizing in the Indian context, responding to the context of subaltern people, variety of religions, openness to society and the world, and especially the findings of contemporary scientific research.

Keywords: Philosophizing in Indian context, Indian Christian, subaltern, interreligious dialogue, response to scientific research.

India is poised to become an information society and a "knowledge power."[1] Given the fact that an Indian has been traditionally an "Argumentative Indian", with a theoretical orientation and scholarly mindset, it is not surprising that Indians were the first to discover zero and to reach tremendous philosophical depth, even in ancient times.

So this paper attempts to offer some guidelines for philosophising for Christian leaders in India. It pleads for a philosophising that takes into account the contemporary context of India and is rooted in the basic Christian experience.

---

[1] See the call of the Prime Minister in "Unleash a Decade of Innovation Indian PM Manmohan Singh to Scientists." See http://wn.com/Unleash_a_Decade_of_Innovation_Indian_PM_Manmohan_Singh_to_Scientists. accessed March 12, 2009.

To begin with, I take up three issues which I believe are central to philosophizing in the context of Indian Christianity: subalternity, inter-religiosity and openness to the world. The next section deals with the openness to the world, essentially as openness to the world of science and technology. This is because in the contemporary situation science and technology are radically changing not only our life-style, but also, at a deeper level, our world-view. Then I take up the classical division of philosophy as reflection on the world, on humans and on God, and see how the emerging scientific world poses new questions and offers novel opportunities in our philosophical appraisal of the world, humans and God.

Finally I argue that only when we as Indian Christians can weave a story in consonance with our faith commitment, intellectual depth and contemporary relevance, will our story be adequate. Without such an adequate reformulation of our Indian Christian story, what is at stake, I believe, is the very destiny of Christianity in India.

1. Subaltern Perspectives

In this section we focus on our first priority or perspective, as Indian Christianity in terms of the privileged position of the subaltern, or the "preferential option" for the poor and marginalized, that is characteristic of the Christian message.

Christianity has experienced and lived out God's option for the poor. It has proclaimed a God who liberates the oppressed and takes sides with the marginalized. In spite of the institutionalization that the Church has gone through and the political and cultural power that the Church has exercised, throughout the history of the Church it has

championed the cause of the marginalized and stood for their cause, right from its beginning when Christianity was mainly a religion of the outcasts and the slaves.

It was this experience that led the Church in the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America to articulate liberation theology, which mainly focused on the material welfare of the economically exploited, in order to achieve their full salvation, which is also essentially spiritual. In the 1980s in India this movement was very strong, and was represented by stalwalts like George Soares-Prabhu,[2] Sebastian Kappen,[3] Samuel Rayan,[4] Kurien Kunnunpuram,[5] etc.

Continuing this concern and commitment, the Church in India has taken the side of the marginalized in the contemporary world: the Tribals and the Dalits. Not only has the Christian message found ready acceptance by the Tribals and Dalits, they have gained considerably from the

---

[2] Soares-Prabhu, George, and Francis X. D'Sa. *Theology of Liberation : An Indian Biblical Perspective*. Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series. Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001.

[3] See Kappen, Sebastian. *Jesus and Freedom*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977 and
Kappen, Sebastian, Philip Mathew, and Ajit Muricken. *Religion, Ideology, and Counter-Culture : Essays in Honour of S. Kappen*. Bangalore, India: Horizon Books in association with Asha Kendra, 1987.

[4] Rayan, Samuel, T. K. John, and Gujarat Sahitya Prakash (Anand, India). *Bread and Breath : Essays in Honour of Samuel Rayan, S.J., on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birth Anniversary*. Series XI – Jesuit Theological Forum Reflections. Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991.

[5] Kunnumpuram, Kurien, and Bombay Saint Paul Society. *The Eucharist and Life : Indian Christian Reflections on the Lord's Supper*. Mumbai: St Pauls, 2006.

Church's commitment to them. That is why it is no wonder that people fondly remember the works of great missionaries like Constant Lievens or Hans Hendricks in Chotanagpur. So we can understand that 33% of the Tribals in India are Christians, who constitute 8.2% of the Indian population. Coming to the Dalit scene, the explicit Christian commitment to the Dalits can be traced to the last thirty years. Dalits who constitute 16.2% of the Indian people feel affinity to the Christian message that stresses the unique dignity and personhood of each individual. So it is understandable that 9% of the Dalits are Christians, whose concerns are taken seriously by the Christian Church.

Related to the priority for the subalterns are issues like folk traditions and popular religiosity. The poverty, injustice, exploitation that many of our people face is also a related issue.[6] In the next section we deal with the respect we need to give to other religions and the need for healthy interaction with them.

2. Interreligious Dialogue

Another significant area of concern both for the Church and the world is a friendly and respectful relationship with other religions. Especially after 9/11 or 26/11, the future of the world, nay the very survival of humanity, is intimately tied with the way religions can relate and interact with one another.

Gone are the days we can use the rhetoric of a "clash of

---

[6] It may be noted that today philosophy has taken seriously the insights and challenges from Social Sciences (Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, etc.).

civilizations."[7] Unfortunately when some of the right wing group use such rhetoric to whip up religious feeling against another group, they are truly doing, unwittingly perhaps, great harm not only to themselves but to the whole world. In a world, which is so closely interconnected and where Hindus, Christians and Muslims form substantial groups of the population, there is no way, one can ignore or leave alone or annihilate the other. Sometimes the right wing rhetoric gives the impression that the only way of "winning against the enemy" is by defeating them intellectually and even physically.

In the world, where there are as many Catholics as Muslims, such a scenario of defeating the other is unacceptable. There is no way the world today can survive if the "clash of civilizations" between the so called Christian West and the Islamic or Hindu cultures were to occur. Thus the need of the hour is to enter into meaningful dialogue between religions, which respects their differences and diversity, and at the same time opens our eyes to the common destiny that humanity faces. For such a scenario to occur, dialogue, based on rational discourse and respect for each other, is a must.

In this context, the living dialogue that India has been practicing right from its inception is a classical case. The cases of Robert De Nobili and Joseph Constantius Beschi were new initiatives and enterprising initiatives from the part of the Christians. In the recent years numerous attempts by people like Abhshikatananda,[8] Bede Griffiths,[9]

---

[7] Huntington, Samuel P., and Lawrence E. Harrison. *Culture Matters : How Values Shape Human Progress*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

[8] Shirley du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda*, (Orbis Books, New York 2005)

Raimundo Panikkar[10] have focused on the need and vitality of such inter-religious encounters.

Today the Church in India is aware also of the need to take dialogue beyond the advaitic/brahminic tradition to the level of the ordinary people. So religious dialogue at the level of the folk traditions, taking into account the way of life of the common people, needs to be undertaken.

Such a dialogue will still focus on the theological content of different religious, but it will be based more on the experience of ordinary people with different religious traditions and experiences, meeting and living together. So, based on our rich and multifaceted Indian tradition, we can expect interreligious dialogue as a living and vibrant reality.

There we need to take up various issues like tolerating intolerance, and the mysticism of the marketplace, where the lived religion becomes dialogical. In other words, we need to rediscover that dialogue is "a way of life"[11] in the Indian context and that it involves the market place. Obviously the atheists and a-theists also will have something to contribute to our collective search.

So given the experience of Indian life and tradition, for

---

[9] Pandikattu, Kuruvila. *Religious Dialogue as Hermeneutics : Bede Griffith's Advaitic Approach to Religions*. Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series IIIb, South Asia. Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001.

[10] Abhishiktananda, and Raimundo Panikkar. *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary(1948-1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom H. Le Saux)*. 1st English ed. Delhi: ISPCK, 1998.

[11] See Kuruvilla Pandikattu, *Dialogue as the Way of Life: Bede Griffiths' Attempt at Integrating Religions, Cultures and Sciences*, Mumbai: Zen Publications, 2001.

us contemporary Christians, without in any way diluting our basic experience in Jesus and his saving action, it is no exaggeration to say that "to be religious is to be inter-religious." For without such an attitude of committed openness, no religion, and our human society itself, can survive.

3. Openness to Society

One of the fundamental Christian attitudes is that we are basically open to the world and affirmative of it. We are in the world. Though we may not be always for the world and its values, Christians are called to be deeply committed to the world and to find the presence of God in the world, which is totally created by God, who found it good.

Thus by our openness to the world and the worldly concerns, we accept that "Only when we affirm and accept the world can we assess it." The things around us are not always ideal. There is so much evil and unnecessary pain and suffering in the world, which we should try to eliminate. Thus against the prevalent injustice in the world, there is need to be counter-cultural and to be prophetic, specially to take the side of the victims. So we are called to be part of our own future destiny by critiquing it, by suggesting alternatives, guiding it and also by appreciating and affirming it. So our Christian commitment urges us to guide and foster the things in the world based on our experience that God loves us unconditionally. It also urges us to learn from the world the mysteries of God and of human beings and so direct the world towards the Kingdom of God.[12]

---

[12] The relation between the world and the kingdom of God is a

Related to this issue is the phenomenon of globalisation that we encounter today, makes this concern all the more grave and even dangerous at times. Today we just cannot live in the safe and secure world of the frog's well. We are all threatened alike; we are also secured together. In fact in the globalised world of ours, the tendency for uniformisation and homogenisation is strong, which we need to resist. So as Christians, with our catholic vision, we need to reaffirm that "diversity defines us and not divides us." In the following section, when we deal with philosophizing, it may be noted that we limit our treatment of openness to the world only to science and technology, because of the paucity of space.

4. The Emerging Reality

In a general way, we can understand philosophizing as a reflection on God, world and human beings. As humans it is imperative that we ask basic questions like:" Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?[13] To simplify: when human beings ask, carefully and critically, questions about themselves and the world around, they are philosophizing. If "every understanding is self-understanding," then every considered question is an attempt to understand something more and to embrace reality even more. Thus basically all of us are philosophers and the living out of life is philosophizing. Philosophising is in fact, weaving a story that takes into consideration our basic aspirations, relating ourselves to the rest of the world

---

dynamic and complex one, which cannot be taken up in this article.

[13] Encyclical Letter *Fides Et Ratio Of The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II To The Bishops Of The Catholic Church On The Relationship Between Faith And Reason no.* 1

and to the Divine.

Traditionally philosophy has been subdivided as the stud of the study of world, God and the self. It explores the nature of the world (e.g.: cosmology, metaphysics) and that of God (Philosophy of God, theodicy). Then it enquires into one's own nature (philosophical anthropology, epistemology, ethics, etc.). In this section we see how modern science has altered the way we understand these three broad subdivisions of philosophy.

a. Nature of Reality: Complexity

The world in the last century has seen a dramatic transition from Classical to Quantum Mechanics. So the deterministic world of classical mechanics was very harmonious and even aesthetically beautiful. Such a world is irrevocably shattered by quantum mechanics, which definitely is the most successful theory humans have ever produced. And no one understands it.[14] So the questions to

---

[14] "I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics." Richard Feynman, in *The Character of Physical Law* (1965). Further: "We have always had a great deal of difficulty understanding the world view that quantum mechanics represents. At least I do, because I'm an old enough man that I haven't got to the point that this stuff is obvious to me. Okay, I still get nervous with it.... You know how it always is, every new idea, it takes a generation or two until it becomes obvious that there's no real problem. I cannot define the real problem, therefore I suspect there's no real problem, but I'm not sure there's no real problem." Richard Feynman, in *Simulating Physics with Computers* appearing in *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* (1982) p. 471. We may also take note of the quote: "For those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum theory cannot possibly have understood it." Niels Bohr, quoted in Heisenberg, Werner (1971). *Physics and Beyond.* New York: Harper and Row. pp. 206.
See also "QM is THE most successful theory of the physical world

be raised are: With Quantum Mechanics, have we come to limit of our comprehensibility? Are we hovering between the "laws of the mind" and "laws of reality" that the classical philosophers thought are identical? So after Quantum Mechanics, we can no longer talk of "mechanical philosophy of nature," but of a dynamic and evolving world.

To make the situation still more paradoxical or insightful, other recent theories like Theory of Chaos, Nanotechnology and Emergence make our understanding (nay non-understanding) of the world still more complex. Chaos theory is a mathematical theory that describes chaotic behavior in a complex system. It is the study of nonlinear dynamics, where seemingly random events are actually predictable from simple deterministic equations, which are heavily sensitive to the initial conditions.[15]

Nanotechnology is the engineering of functional systems at the molecular scale. It is manipulating matter on an atomic and molecular scale. Generally, nanotechnology deals with structures sized between 1 to 100 nanometer in at least one dimension, and involves developing materials or devices within that size. Quantum

---

that humans have invented up to now and no experimental observation so far has contradicted it. So that alone is a very strong argument that we DO understand QM. However, if we ask if we understand how QM comes up with all the correct predictions of what nature does, or if there's anything underlying all the QM's predictions, then no, we don't." http://physicsandphysicists.blogspot.com/2007/04/no-one-understands-quantum-mechanics.html

[15] The butterfly effect is a metaphor that encapsulates the concept of *sensitive dependence on initial conditions* in chaos theory; namely, a small change at one place in a complex system can have large effects elsewhere. Although this may appear to be an esoteric and unusual behavior, it is exhibited by very simple systems.

mechanical effects are very important at this scale, which is in the quantum realm.

Nanotechnology is very diverse, ranging from extensions of conventional device physics to completely new approaches based upon molecular self-assembly, from developing new materials with dimensions on the nanoscale to investigating whether we can directly control matter on the atomic scale.

Emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions. Emergence is central to the theories of complex systems. This studies how highly complex phenomena, like volcanoes or human intelligence, can arise from simple facts like atoms.

Thus given the present state of scientific knowledge we can safely conclude that the nature of reality (including our own bodies) is far more complex than we normally assume. Given the pace of scientific knowledge, we can safely assume that we will come up with astounding discoveries of the nature of the extremely complex reality in the near future.

b. Nature of Self: Consciousness

Before understanding one's self and human nature, we need to raise the question: What is life? It used to be a problematic question till the last century. Though many scientists have attempted to recreate and explain life, it retained its inaccessible character till recently.

On the other hand, scientists have been trying to conquer nature and to take possession of the material world. They have succeeded in this attempt tremendously. The steam engine, the travel to the moon, and the theory

of the Big Bang are paramount examples of it. Such enterprises have also made the scientists feel proud of themselves and of human rationality. But as we have seen, quantum mechanics has enabled them to see that reality is much more complex than it was thought to be, and so, quantum mechanics, in spite of its great success, has been a humbling experience for many of the physicists.

Only recently, with the rather new disciplines like Genetics, Human Genome Project, Stem-cell research, could scientist advance to the next level: that of conquering life or taking life into their own hands. If the cloning of Dolly was the first example of it, the creation of artificial bacterium by Craig Venter's team[16] has captured best the imagination of the popular audience to the power of synthetic biology if not to explain, but at least to create life, the most priced prerogative of gods till now.

Moving to the understanding of human self (or personal nature), the Jesuit paleontologist had defined humans succinctly as "Evolution become conscious of itself." Sixty years ago, when biology was still at its nascent stage, it was a revolutionary self-understanding of humans. That we are not just products of evolution, but we are the evolution that has become self-conscious and in the process we have, at least metaphorically and conceptually, taken evolution into our own hands.

---

[16] As reported in May 2010, Genome researchers Thursday unveiled the first bacteria strain with a man-made collection of genes. "This is the first self-replicating cell we've had on the planet whose parent is a computer," says team chief Craig Venter of the J. Craig Venter Institute in Rockville, Md., who called the bacteria "the world's first synthetic cell." See http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/discoveries /2010-05-21-genome21_ST_N.htm. accessed Februry, 2011.

Today the scenario has altered much. Given the technological know-how (like stem-cell research and genetic engineering), we are in a position to intervene and manipulate genes, the basic building block of life. It is not very difficult, at least technologically, to produce not just transgenic or bionic animals, but further, it is possible for scientists to enhance the genetic structure of human beings. Some scientists have gone forward and begun talking about the creation of a new species, a trans Homo sapiens, which are called Transhumans or Extropians. They think that we can shape the next stage of human evolution, using the tremendous scientific and technological knowhow at our disposal.[17]

Further, today we are in a position to put an end to all of human life. And maybe even to the whole of life itself, given the biological, chemical and nuclear weapons we have at our disposal.

So today we need to redefine Teilhard de Chardin's remark as I suggest: Humans today are "Evolution capable of either eliminating itself or enhancing itself." Thus human nature, by definition, is an ever evolving one, a horizon that expands almost infinitely and in the process attempts to comprehend everything.

The next issue to be raised is the most intimate question: Who am I? This is the fundamental question of one's personal identity. In the last centuries, psychology, sociology and anthropology have helped philosophers to

[17] Today the biologists want to take life into their own hands, just as physicists did with nature a century ago. The physicists have become humble today, and the biologists, I am sure, will experience the limits of their knowledge soon. Meanwhile, I am afraid, they can cause real and sometimes irrevocable harm to humanity.

nuance this question to explore the notion of personal and collective identities. Recently postmodernity has challenged many of the assumptions of human nature. The classical philosophy of mind also had shed light onto this question.

But the recent research into artificial intelligence and the connected robotics, brings into question the notion of personal identity again. Can robots think? Can a robot that defeats the chess champion and plays basket ball be considered as a thinking subject? The Turing Test (1950)[18] gives a way of answering this question and is still valid today.

Further, studies in cognitive science and neuroscience explore how the neuronal activities in the brain give us a sense of "identity" and self-understanding. The brain is the most precious and complex organ in our body. "It is unmatched in its ability to think, to communicate, and to

---

[18] The Turing test is a test of a machine's ability to demonstrate intelligence. A human judge engages in a natural language conversation with one human and one machine, each of which tries to appear human. All participants are separated from one another. If the judge cannot reliably tell the machine from the human, the machine is said to have passed the test. In order to test the machine's intelligence rather than its ability to render words into audio, the conversation is limited to a text-only channel such as a computer keyboard and screen. By extrapolating an exponential growth of technology over several decades, futurist Raymond Kurzweil predicted that Turing test-capable computers would be manufactured in the near future. In 1990, he set the year around 2020. By 2005, he had revised his estimate to 2029.
The Long Bet Project is a wager of $20,000 between Mitch Kapor (pessimist) and Kurzweil (optimist) about whether a computer will pass a Turing Test by the year 2029. The bet specifies the conditions in some detail.

reason. Most striking of all, it has a unique awareness of its identity and of its place in space and time. Welcome to the human brain, the cathedral of complexity."[19] They experiment with the different regions in the brain using various mechanisms that tell us how our neural function enhances our self-awareness and leads us to the notion of "subject" and object. That will give us a more adequate picture of our consciousness (including self-conscousness).

c. The Nature of God: Completeness

To understand and critique our understanding of God, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx have helped us much. In "The Future of an Illusion," Freud described belief in God as a collective neurosis: he called it "longing for a father." But in his last completed book, "Moses and Monotheism," something new emerges. There Freud, without abandoning his atheism, begins to see the Jewish faith that he was born into, as a source of cultural progress in the past and of personal inspiration in the present. Close to his own death, Freud starts to recognize the poetry and promise in religion.

Karl Marx is famous for his simple analysis: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." At the same time Marx is ardently religious, since he holds: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the

---

[19] Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield (from *Frontiers of Complexity. The Search for Order in a Chaotic World*, R., New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1995, p. 279).

oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions."

Later, sociobiology tried to explain altruism as a survival technique, and the game theory and prisoner's dilemma, taught us to weigh the probabilistic change implied in moral considerations.

The contemporary challenge religion and God face from neuroscience, has been mentioned briefly above. The brain is highly complex[20] and insights about God can be had through brain studies. True, some of them talk of a "God-Spot" in the brain analogous to the "God-Gene"[21] or even "God-particle".

But going further, when we know the structure, functions and dynamics of the brain, we may come to appreciate our human brain that is open to infinity, transcendence and God (or non-God). I do not ever believe that neuroscience will be able to explain God away. Such attempts will fail, just as the earlier attempts by sociology, sociobiology or psychology. But I do wish that

---

[20] "The brain immediately confronts us with its great complexity. The human brain weighs only three to four pounds but contains about 100 billion neurons. Although that extraordinary number is of the same order of magnitude as the number of stars in the Milky Way, it cannot account for the complexity of the brain. The liver probably contains 100 million cells, but 1,000 livers do not add up to a rich inner life." Gerald D. Fischbach (from *Scientific American*, September, 1992)

[21] See Time Magazine, Oct 17, 2004. The God gene hypothesis proposes that human beings inherit a set of genes that predisposes us towards spiritual or mystic experiences.

neuroscience will be able to give us deeper insights into our spiritual realm and our experience of God. So some pertinent issues that neuroscience will enlighten us in the near future are:

1. Can the brain account for our own identity (soul)?
2. Can our moods and happiness be generated by brain intervention? Legitimate or ethical?
3. Can the neurons produce mystical experiences?
4. Can the brain explain (away) God?
5. Why is the brain such an astonishing phenomenon?[22]

Extending our earlier analogy, if classical mechanics helped us take possession of nature and biotechnology helps us to take possession of life, neuroscience helps us to take possession of ourselves (including consciousness and God.).[23] That may give us a completeness that is ever expanding, but never exhaustive.[24]

To visualise the next few decades many thinkers speak of the coming together of different scientific disciplines as

---

[22] "What seems astonishing is that a mere three-pound object, made of the same atoms that constitute everything else under the sun, is capable of directing virtually everything that humans have done: flying to the moon and hitting seventy home runs, writing *Hamlet* and building the Taj Mahal -- even unlocking the secrets of the brain itself." Joel Havemann (*A Life Shaken*, 2002)

[23] Julian Paul Keenan affirms: (*The Face in the Mirror*, 2003) "When considering the abilities and complexities of the brain, one is struck by the incredible efficiency and splendor expressed in gray and white matter."

[24] Earlier I have used the expression, "ever approachable, but never attainable," to decipher the depth dimensions of humans and of reality. That very inexhaustibility could be denoted to God also, who may be an ever completing completion.

NBIC convergence. "NBIC convergence", that is, the convergence between Nano-, Bio-, Info-technologies, and Cognitive science. Such an ongoing unification of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technologies and cognitive science is not merely complementing, but gradually merging, yielding to unexpected and unexplored results. When we add the findings of neuroscience, we shall soon be experiencing unimaginable scientific and technological revolution.

And it is no wonder that in the coming years, every branch of philosophy (anthropology, ethics, epistemology, philosophy of God, aesthetics, etc.) will be faced with radically new data and will be, in turn, shaped by these incredible advances.

Just to substantiate with one issue: In the near future philosophy will have to confront the phenomenon of overcoming physical death! At the moment it still remains an esoteric or even exotic subject, limited to a powerful few. Soon it will become part of the collective consciousness of the mainstream youth, who are techno-savvy and wait for opportunities that are never-ending and unbridled.

After posing the ever evolving dimension of nature, humans and God, we, as Christians and Indians, are in a position to face the challenges in front of us.

5. Challenges Ahead

As Christians and philosophers, what are the issues that we need to face and opportunities that we can grab? I believe the greatest challenge is to revision a world-view that is consistent with contemporary aspirations, in consonance with our Christian experience and at the same

time committed to our Indian roots! In other words, can we reformulate a story that is true to our scientific world, based on our Christian vision and relevant to our Indian audience?

To explore the situation further: As Indians and as Christians, we need to be thinkers and leaders. Truly it is "Imagination that rules the world."[25] With reasoned knowledge, creative imagination and mature faith, we are in a position to guide the collective destiny of our world.

We just cannot afford to shy away from the world of technology and end up as a "pious sect." That would be a basic disservice we do to our own human commitment. This urges us to take a stand against fundamentalism and fanaticism at all levels and be open to interactive and collective search.

Along with such critical thinking and problem-solving (conceptual categories/concepts), we also need to develop our ability to communicate effectively. In the contemporary world of lobbyists and PROs, we need to evolve a healthy and positive style of communicating our vision and goals. In the world of tweets, sms and mms, we cannot always depend on our classical forms of communications: elaborately written dissertations or obtrusively constructed homilies. Further, we need to enhance our ability to collaborate with different people. Gone are the days of "individual geniuses" who could sit together and come out with brand new inventions that will save the world. Today all scientific projects are inter-disciplinary, flexible and elaborate. So we need today not

---

[25] Quote from Napoleon Bonaparte. See *Think Exist*, at http://thinkexist.com/quotation/imagination_rules_the_world/11611.html, accessed February 10, 2011.

"geniuses in isolation but scholars in collaboration" who may be guided by a "project leader" who is responsible in a democratic set up.

This impels us to collaborate not only with other centers of philosophy, but also with other centers of higher learning (technology), both religious and secular.

The above venture to reach out to others, to share our common story and to help weave a collaborative story is based on the assumption that we as Indians and Christians have something significant and unique to contribute towards the building up of a future world. We can truly believe that our collective concept of the world, our common vision of humans and our coherent idea of God makes sense to ourselves and is a chapter in the larger story of the world-story.

Our Christian story, with the preference for subalterns, respect for religions and openness to the world, has not been merely academic exercises, but realistic, affirmative, optimistic, forward-looking experiences that we have been living both as individuals and as communities.

To weave such a story, we need to appropriate an interdisciplinary approach, taking into consideration India's rich intellectual, cultural and spiritual heritage. And we need to do it courageously, creatively, convincingly, without the ostrich mentality of refusing to confront the problem.

For such an adventure, we require not necessarily the best brain, but mutually affirming, creatively realisable teamwork, criticism that empowers, networking that facilitates, and technology that liberates.

The Church of Tomorrow

Can the Church today learn from its experience with

enlightenment? It has suffered under it, but it was not defeated, but has grown more mature. In the same way, the Church today has to collaborate and even confront today's world of Science, Technology, Globalisation. The church may come out bruised, but there is no other alternative. The hope is that after such a healthy confrontation, even if the Church becomes more humble, it would have contributed its own share to the collective growth of the world.

Such a church can creatively talk with Hinduism, Islam, New Age Religions and even Atheists. Such a Church will have dynamic and intellectual leadership, based on its spiritual heritage and technological openness.

Then we will be contributing to a new story of the nature of reality. Such a story takes into account the Big Bang, Big Crunch and even Multiple universes. In such a world, we do not need be afraid of asking the question: Can our scientists create new universes through quantum vacuum? Of course we need to be cautious, but not afraid. We also need to evolve ecological sensitivity and be open to the novel properties opened up by nanotechnology. We will then be able to appreciate the fractal nature of the universe and see how it is mostly the virtual reality that shapes our life today.26

Then we can also face courageously crucial questions on the Philosophy of the Human Being. Some of the basic questions on our self, identity and intelligence can be reformulated as: Can we create intelligence? Does the chips embedded in our brains make us more human? Will

---

[26] Virtual reality or cyber space shapes us much more than we imagine. In fact we can say that the real world of substance and accidents has blurred itself and merged with the cyber world of TVs, Internet and virtual existence.

brain studies throw more light on the nature of the soul? So questions on human dignity, freedom and respect for individuals will continue to haunt us even in the world of cyborgs, bionics and transgenic beings. The issue of the soul will accompany us still, though with new nuances.

This will enable us to appreciate God deeper and will help in the formulation of a new philosophy of God. Can we think of an 'Involving' God in an evolving world? Is God the cosmic power, the physical power and the inexhaustible energy? Are we hard-wired for God? Is transcendence an emergent property of matter? Thus we need radically new answers, based obviously on our perennial spiritual wisdom and relevant to our contemporary concerns. We need to ask ourselves repeatedly, based on our experiential faith: How do we make sense of Jesus' Abba experience in such a world?

6. Conclusion: Weaving a New Story

The philosophy, we as contemporary Christians weave out today, is based on critical conviction, commitment and creativity. It is rooted in the faith conviction, that draws itself from our basic experience that God loves us. It leads to commitment, that is, sustained and persistent hard work that one enjoys. It leads to creativity, that is, imagination, ideals and dreams which inspire and which at the same time realize their own limitations.

In weaving such a story, can be affirm our preference for the subaltern, respect for other religions and affirmation of the world, without giving up our right to critiquing them? I believe the future of the Indian Church depends on how we are able to weave such an adequate and evolving story that embraces others, without losing our own uniqueness, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011, 99-127

The Significance of the Dalit Sant Ravidas: A Theological Response

Dionysius Rasquinha, S.J.
'Gyanodaya' Patna Regional Theology Centre,
St. Stephen's Church, Danapur Cantonment,
Patna Dt., Bihar 801 503.
E-mail Address: dionysiusr@gmail.com

Abstract: The life and teaching of Sant Ravidas provide all Dalits encouragement and a shining example of gaining their dignity and place in society as equal human beings. It is clearly shown that the Bible affirms this, and theological analysis and reflection reconfirm the mission of the Church to help all Dalits gain their rightful, respected and dignified place in society.

Keywords: Ravidas, Ravidasas, Ravidasis, Dalit theology, human dignity, dignity of labour, goodness of creation, outcast, caste equality.

Introduction

"*Man changa hai tho kattauthi mein Ganga*". If one's mind is pure one will find the goddess Ganga (God) in the water used to wash hides in a shoemaker's basin.[1] These

---

[1] Jose Joseph, *Social Protests and Revolts of the Dalits in Bihar* (Bodh Gaya: Magadh University, 1999), Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, p. 239.
Ravidas Smarika (Sant Ravidas Ashram, Patna: Bihar Prantiya Ravidas Mahasabha, 1988), Hindi. A source of dalit interpretations of Sant Ravidas.
Ravidas Smarika (Sant Ravidas Ashram, Patna: Bihar Prantiya Ravidas Mahasabha, 1992), Hindi. A source of dalit interpretations of Sant Ravidas.

are the immortal words of ***Sant***[2] ***Ravidas***. The exact date of his birth is not clear. However, the 18th February is celebrated as ***Ravidas Jayanti***. He is born in Banaras late in the 15th century and preaches in medieval India. He is considered to be a contemporary of Kabir and Mira and a disciple of Maharshi Ramananda of the Vaishnav sect.[3] Ravidas belongs to the ***chamar***[4] community which is

---

[2] The term ***sant*** is derived from the Sanskrit ***sat*** which means truth or reality. Hence, the root meaning of sant is one who is the truth or one who has experienced the Ultimate reality. In the medieval period, the dalit protest against brahminic oppression takes the shape of the bhakti movements. They first emerged in the seventh century A.D. and reached their peak between the 15th and 17th century A.D. Ravidas needs to be situated in this tradition of the ***sants*** (poet-saints) of the bhakti movements. They express ***social protest in and through the language and idiom of religion and morality***, appropriate to a pre-modern and traditional population. Refer to K. Schomer, "Introduction: The Sant Tradition in Perspective" in K. Schomer & W. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi, Patna: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), pp. 2-3. Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 247-248. D. Lorenzen, "The Kabir Panth and Social Protest" in K. Schomer & W. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants...*, p. 292. W. Fernandes, "Bhakti and a Liberation theology for India" in P. Puthanangady (ed.), *Towards and Indian Theology of Liberation* (Bangalore: Indian Theological Association), pp. 89-99.

[3] Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 239. The dalit version of Sant Ravidas says that he was never a disciple of Ramananda. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 239. Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, *Sant Prawar Raidas Saheb* (Lucknow: Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan, 1984), Hindi. He presents a dalit refutation of the brahminic legends about Sant Ravidas.

[4] The term ***chamar*** includes the tanners (***charmamna***, Rig Veda, VIII.5,38; Tait. Br. III.4,13) of leather or hide (***charman*** or ***charma***, Rig Veda III.60.2; IV.13.4), the preparers of skins (***charman*** or ***charma***, Rig Veda I.85.5; I.110.8), the manufacturers of leather articles and the makers of shoes (***carmakara***, Sat.Br. V.4.3.19; Manu, IV.66,74). The term *chamar* of today corresponds to the *charmamna*

mainly found in northern and western India. Chamars are not only persons who work on skins (***chamada***), but they belong to a social group which has a long history of being dominated, exploited, treated as ***untouchable*** and ***socially outcast*** by the ***varna*** society. The word *chamar* is now an abusive[5] term. Chamars are one of the communities included in the category of the ***Scheduled Castes***[6] and one

---

or ***charmamla*** and the *charmakaras* of the past. Refer to G. Briggs, *The Chamars* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), pp. 11-15.

[5] ***Chori-chamari*** is the prevalent term used for the act of stealing. The saying ***chamar siyar sada hosiyar*** equates the chamar with the mythological cunning jackal. Refer to K. Kizhakekala & J. Vadassery, *The Chamars: Their Beliefs and Practices* (Patna: St. Xavier's, 1985), pp. 5-6.

[6] A schedule was promulgated by a Presidential Order in 1950. The communities treated as untouchable whose names were enlisted in this schedule came to be known as *Scheduled Castes*. This term is used in India for administrative and legislative purposes. Refer to Tomy Joseph, *The Musahars: Cultural Life of a Dalit Community in Bihar* (Mumbai: University of Mumbai, 2007), Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, p. 1.

The *Scheduled Castes* are to be considered as castes (***jatis***) in the loose sense of the term and not in the strict sense. A *jati* (caste) in the strict sense is a local social unit which is included in one of the four ***varnas*** (castes) of brahminic society. The criteria of purity and pollution determine the *varna* (ritual status) of a given *jati*, which in turn determines the social status of the *jati*. Those social units which are outcast i.e., outside the *varna* system are not *jatis* in the strict sense. However, since the system of *varna* and *jati* dominates Indian society, the outcasts consider themselves as *jatis*. They imitate the religious and social customs and practices of the Hindu upper castes, with the illusory hope that one day they will be admitted into the *varna* system. It is only in this loose sense that we refer to outcast social units which are functionally included in the *varna* society, but ritually and socially excluded from it, as *jatis*. Refer to W. Fernandes, *Caste and Conversion Movements in India* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1981), Monograph Series. H. Gould, *The Hindu caste*

of the 400 dalit[7]communities.[8]

With the solidification of the caste system, dalits have become a fixed group who are forced to inherit their situation of inequality, permanent pollution by virtue of ***birth*** and involvement with organic matter, untouchability, inferiority, segregation, social exclusion and deprivation of human rights. This is the ***specificity*** of dalit oppression which has been destroying their humanity and peoplehood,

---

System: The Sacralization of a Social Order (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1987).

[7] The term *dalit* is originally a Marathi word and as a noun or adjective means broken, oppressed, crushed, etc. Refer to E. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992), p. 267. A. Nirmal, "Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective" in A. Nirmal (ed.), *A Reader in Dalit Theology* (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Centre, 1991), p. 139. For a detailed discussion on the meaning of the term *dalit* refer to D. Rasquinha, "A Critical Reflection on the Meaning of Dalit Christian Theology" in *VJTR*, vol. 66, no. 4, pp. 252-260.
Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890), a backward caste Marathi social reformer, was the first to use the term *dalit* to describe the outcast untouchables as the oppressed victims of Hindu society. Refer to M. Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology" in A. Nirmal (ed.), *A Reader...*, pp. 41-42, 45. J. Massey, "Dalits" in *PCR Information*, no. 27, 1990, p. 69.
Many outcasts in India have been inspired to choose the name *dalit*, ***exclusively*** for themselves to bring out the ***specificity*** of dalit oppression, liberation and the socio-cultural factors important for dalit mobilization. Refer to T. Nath, *Politics of the Depressed Classes* (Delhi: Deputy Publications, 1987), pp. 1-2. V. Devasahayam, "Pollution, Poverty and Powerlessness " in A. Nirmal (ed.), *A Reader...*, p. 1. D. Rasquinha, "A Critical...," pp. 254-255.

[8] T. K. Oommen, *Protest and Change: Studies in Social Movements* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 254. Dr. K.S. Singh puts the number of dalit communities at 471. Refer to K. S. Singh, *The Scheduled Castes*, Peoples of India, Vol. 2 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 1.

impoverishing them, rendering them politically powerless and damaging their psyche. In this they are distinguished from the most backward castes and the adivasis. Dalits have been and are the most oppressed and exploited people in Indian society.[9]

According to the Census of 2001 dalits comprise ***16.2%*** of India's population. There are ***25*** million Christians in India which is just below ***3%*** of the total population of the country.[10] About ***70%*** of Indian Christians are ***dalits.***[11] ***Thus they constitute the vast majority of Indian Christians. Moreover, Sant Ravidas has made an important contribution in deed and word to dalit liberation.*** Hence, it becomes important for us as Indian Christians, to articulate the significance of the dalit Sant Ravidas, and the action of the Creator-Saviour God in and through him, so that dalits and all people in the Church and India are enabled to participate in, cooperate with and respond to God's action.

2. Dalit Interpretations of Sant Ravidas

---

[9] M. Prabhakar, "Beginning and Growth of Dalit Studies in the CISRS and its Joint Programmes" in *Religion and Society*, vol. XL, nos. 1 & 2, March-June 1993, p. 106.
J. Massey, *Roots: A Concise History of Dalits* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), Second Revised Edition, p. 6.
S. Chatterji, "Why Dalit Theology" in A. Nirmal (ed.), *A Reader...*, p. 23.
G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste" in *Sedos*, vol. 26, nos. 6&7, May 1994, pp. 172, 176.
D. Rasquinha, "A Critical...," p. 257.

[10] http://berchmans.tripod.com/today.html, accessed on 31st January 2011.

[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalit_Christian, accessed on 31st January 2011.

The dalit intelligentsia has been making an attempt, to reinterpret in the present context, the life and message of Sant Ravidas, so that they come alive in the hearts of his followers leading them to praxis. These reinterpretations are done from the perspective, of what dalits consider to be significant for their human well-being. Hence, they select relevant aspects of the life of the saint. The dalit interpretations are very important, because they are also an attempt, to counter the brahminization of Sant Ravidas by the upper castes. The enlightened dalits maintain, that the legends woven around him are brahminic inventions; he worships the formless, attribute free God and not Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu and that his opponents have burnt his sayings.[12]

According to the dalits the original name of Sant Ravidas/Raidas is Ravi. He is trained by Sadan Muni in the hilly tracts of Kaimur. The Rohtas garh (fort) in Sasaram, also known as the Ravidas garh, is the place of enlightenment and the field of action for Ravidas.[13]

We rely on these dalit interpretations and the study

---

[12] Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 240-251.
D. Rasquinha, "People's Theology and the Meaning and Need for Significant Criteria of Discernment" in *VJTR*, Vol. 74, No. 8, 2010, pp. 619-621.
Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, *Sant...*

[13] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Arun Bhojpuri, a dalit writer. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 241, 245.
Ravidas Smarika (Sant Ravidas Ashram, Patna: Bihar Prantiya Ravidas Mahasabha, 1988), Hindi.
Ravidas Smarika (Sant Ravidas Ashram, Patna: Bihar Prantiya Ravidas Mahasabha, 1992), Hindi.
According to another dalit version of Sant Ravidas his original name was Raidas. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 239.

done on them, to articulate the deeper dimensions of the life and message of Sant Ravidas.[14]

3. The God-experience of Sant Ravidas

Sant Ravidas is a great mystic who is intimately united to the Absolute. He describes the intensity of this union in the words "***tohi mohi, mohi tohi antar kaisa***" (Between thou and me, me and thou, how can there be a difference?). Since this union with the Absolute is so basic to him, he perceives the whole of reality from the perspective of the Absolute, the one source of everything. Hence, he says that there is no distinction between a ***mandir*** and a ***masjid***, and there is no quarrel between ***Ram*** and ***Rahim***.[15] And so, he preaches the oneness of humanity saying, "How can you maintain the distinction of high and low, when all have arisen from the same Divine Flame? How can you give discriminatory names to some, When the Audible Life in all remains the same?" Thus he sees that the same Lord, the formless attribute-free God is the creator of them all. Brahmins, kshatriyas, vaisyas and shudras belong to the same caste. And so, he

---

[14] For the study of dalit interpretations of Sant Ravidas refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 240-51.
Ravidas Smarika (Sant Ravidas Ashram, Patna: Bihar Prantiya Ravidas Mahasabha, 1988), Hindi. A source of dalit interpretations of Sant Ravidas.
Ravidas Smarika (Sant Ravidas Ashram, Patna: Bihar Prantiya Ravidas Mahasabha, 1992), Hindi. A source of dalit interpretations of Sant Ravidas.

[15] Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 246-247.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by A.S. Nimbran, a dalit I.A.S. officer. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 242.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Paras Nath, a dalit poet. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 244.

deals with both brahmins and shudras, hindus and muslims as humans who are equal, and not on the basis of their caste or religion.[16]

Sant Ravidas' famous words are ***man changa hai tho kattauthi mein Ganga*** i.e., if one's mind is pure, one will find the goddess Ganga (God) in the water used to wash hides in a shoemaker's basin. The upper castes consider this water to be polluted. Thus Ravidas discovers that purity and pollution are a matter of a person's mind and heart i.e., interior to, and not exterior to a person, as brahminism understands. He also realizes that hides and leather and other organic materials, do not pollute, and neither does contact with them. Being pure of heart he is able to find God in all things. Hence, he cannot be denied access to God, although he is denied access to the holy river Ganges by the brahmins.[17]

Sant Ravidas believes in ***shrameva jayate satyameva jayate*** (let labour prevail, let truth prevail). He preaches the importance and dignity of labour, and its integration with devotion to God, whom he discovers in hard work. Ravidas earns his living through physical labour as a cobbler. He thus valorizes occupations connected with

---

16 Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 239, 246-247.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by A.S. Nimbran. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 242.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by a dalit thinker named Mr. Anirudh Ram, the President of Central Government Employees Association, Bihar. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 243.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by a dalit intellectual named Dr. Avadesh Kumar, the Director, Sant Ravidas Literary, Social and Cultural Research Institute, Patna. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 244.

17 Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 239, 248.

organic matter, which brahminism considers as polluting and menial.[18] He lives on the meagre income he receives from his work on leather, and refuses to live on the labour of others, especially the poor. According to him begging is sinful, and receiving gifts from devotees is undignified, and against a true religious spirit. Sant Ravidas accepts his life of poverty, although people laugh at his poor miserable existence. Yet, he is able to donate lavishly to the poor from his little income. God has compassion for Ravidas who is poor. Hence, God appears to Ravidas in the guise of a sadhu, and offers him a miraculous stone called ***parasmani*** (philosopher's stone), which has the power to transform iron into gold. But he politely refuses this offer, preferring a life of honest labour.[19] Sant Ravidas thus represents and symbolizes the dalits, articulating in life and word the significance of their labour for them and society.[20]

Ravidas humbly accepts that he belongs to the community of *charmakars* who are considered low by the upper castes. Because they live in poor houses, and carry dead animals in and around the city of Kashi. He experiences God as merciful, who raises him from this lowly situation, to the heights of a great saint who is

---

[18] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by A.S. Nimbran. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 242.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Dr. Ashok Kumar, a dalit member of the Legislative Assembly of Bihar. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 242-243.

[19] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Dr. Ashok Kumar. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 242.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Paras Nath. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 244.

[20] Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 246.

revered by people from all the four varnas. Ravidas realizes that God is essential for his life to be fragrant, just as water (***pani***) is necessary for sandalwood (***chandan***), and a thread (***dhaga***) for a string of pearls (***moti***).[21]

4. The Contribution of Sant Ravidas to Dalit Liberation in India

The God-experience of Sant Ravidas leads to his enlightenment, and takes place in the context, wherein caste as a social structure, untouchability as a social institution and brahminism as a religio-cultural ideology are at their zenith. Having become an enlightened person, he spreads the light of enlightenment. ***Ravi*** means sun and ***rai*** means a collection of suns i.e., enlightenment. So ***raidas*** is a state of enlightenment. A person who spreads the light of enlightenment is a *raidas* or *ravidas*.[22]

On the basis of his mystical experience, Sant Ravidas struggles relentlessly, and protests[23] against caste

---

21 The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Paras Nath. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 243-244.

22 The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Arun Bhojpuri, a dalit writer. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 241.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Anirudh Ram. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 243.

23 There is no consensus among scholars regarding the definition of the term protest. Various definitions each with their own relative merits and demerits have been proposed. I define protest as the public expression of dissatisfaction with the existing situation, dissent and rejection of the existing values of society which oppress and deprive the protesting group of the wholeness of human life and the affirmation of, and attempt to establish genuine human values such as love, justice, equality, dignity and fraternity which bring wholeness to the human community and especially to the protesting group. Refer to Y. Damle, "Protest, Dissent and Social Reform: A Conceptual Note",

inequalities and discrimination, untouchability, social injustice, superstitious practices, religious ritualism, hypocrisy, traditionalism and communalism.[24] He revolts against the system of caste to which people are enslaved, and advises them not to follow it. He considers this slavery as the greatest sin. His conflict with brahminism continues till the end of his life, and even beyond his death, as there have been attempts to distort his teachings.[25] He positively advocates the establishment of society based on the equality of persons, justice, peace, harmony and the eradication of divisions in society on the basis of religions. He wants a society wherein there is food for everyone.[26] On the basis of his mysticism, Sant

---

in S. Malik (ed.), *Dissent, Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1977), pp. 28-31. S. Misra, "Dissent, Protest and Reform: A Note on Definitions" in S. Malik (ed.) *Dissent...*, pp. 52-54. M. Rao, "Themes in the Ideology of Protest Movements" in S. Malik (ed.), *Dissent...*, pp. 56-57.

[24] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Arun Bhojpuri. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 241.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by A.S. Nimbran. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 241-242.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Avadesh Kumar. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 244-245.

[25] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Arun Bhojpuri. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 241.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by A.S. Nimbran. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 242.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Anirudh Ram. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 243.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Avadesh Kumar. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 244.

[26] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by A.S. Nimbran. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 241-242.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Avadesh Kumar. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 244.

Ravidas challenges the brahminic values of purity and pollution and understanding of organic matter, making a significant contribution to the cultural liberation of the dalits.

The brahmins try to suppress his protest movement, humiliate and insult him time and again. But they do not succeed, as Ravidas is a wise and saintly man, who is filled with the power of God. The fame of Ravidas spreads far and wide, and so Jhali, the king of Banaras and Mirabai, the queen of Rajasthan become his disciples. He does not retaliate against the brahmins, but remains calm showing that his fight is not against individuals, but against the oppressive ideology, structures and institutions. He condemns brahminism without any trace of anger.[27]

The real triumph of the caste system lies in the creation of a false consciousness in the dalits. Consequently, they accept their inferior status in the ritual hierarchy, and the supremacy of the brahmin, as a part of the natural order of things. Given this context, the greatest contribution that Sant Ravidas makes, is helping the dalits become aware, that they are human and equal to all people, who have come from the same flame. Thus he shows dalits that they should reject their false consciousness, and accept a true consciousness which liberates them. He does this by proudly affirming, and boldly proclaiming, that he is human and dignified as a chamar. He does not feel inferior to any person and so, he does not hide his identity as a member of a community, that is considered low and untouchable. This enables him to be free from the

---

[27] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by A.S. Nimbran. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 242.
Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 245.

psychological and cultural impact of social oppression. Sant Ravidas shows that a human person, especially a dalit has the capacity to face the harsh reality of oppression, lead a dignified life and attain the highest spiritual bliss. Ravidas acquires knowledge and wisdom, access to which has been denied to the dalits. And so he contributes to dalit liberation at the social, cultural, spiritual and psychological levels.[28] Sant Ravidas is the voice of the voiceless. He enables them to give up their sense of worthlessness, and rediscover the dignity and identity, which they think they have lost. His songs continue to inspire the dalits to live with confidence and courage.[29]

5. Reflections on the Dalit Appropriation of Sant Ravidas

The dalits do not make any serious attempt to deify Sant Ravidas. The emphasis is on his humanity. Therefore, they do not perceive him as a person with miraculous powers, who fights the battles for the dalits. They also do not see him as someone, who takes away all their infirmities and sufferings. He continues to remain one

---

[28] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by A.S. Nimbran. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 241-242.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Avadesh Kumar. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 244.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Anirudh Ram. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 243.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Paras Nath. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 243-244.
Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 245-246.

[29] The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Anirudh Ram. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 243.
The interpretation of Sant Ravidas by Avadesh Kumar. Refer to Jose Joseph, *Social...*, p. 244.

among them, yet a model whom they can follow in their struggles against oppression.[30]

The term *chamar* is not the name of a *jati* in the strict sense, as it does not belong to and is not included, in any one of the four *varnas* of the system. However, since the system of *varna* and *jati* dominates Indian society, the chamars consider themselves and act as a *jati*. Because of the abuse that the term chamar connotes, the people prefer to be called by the name ***ravidas / ravidasas / ravidasis***[31] i.e., the members of a community which identifies with Ravidas, regards him as a great saint and lives according to his teaching and message. The name *ravidasa is* a socio-cultural ethnic identity and not a caste identity. Because he rejects the caste system and its value of graded inequality.

Unfortunately, only an enlightened minority of the chamars, know and understand the liberative potential of the life and message of Ravidas and the name *ravidasa*. The majority of the chamars, wilting under the domination of brahminic society, do not follow the teaching of Ravidas. They understand the name *ravidasa* as a caste identity which is not abusive. This is illusory, because the term *ravidasa* is not, and in all probability will not be included in the *varna* system as a caste identity. In this process, the *ravidasas* enslave themselves to the brahminic society, and deprive themselves of the liberative potential of the person and message of Ravidas, and the name *ravidasa*. Moreover, because of the impact of brahminism, most dalits who are not chamars do not know and accept Ravidas as a dalit saint, with his potential to inspire,

---

30 Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 244-245.

31 K. Kizhakekala & J. Vadassery, *The Chamars...*, pp. 5-6.

strengthen and guide them in their struggle for liberation. Today, most of the Ravidas statues are adorned with ***genev*** (sacred thread), and many members of the dalit community proudly believe that Sant Ravidas was a brahmin in his previous birth. This is the effect of a process which Jigyasu, a dalit ideologue of Lucknow calls ***brahmanikaran*** or brahminization, a powerful expression of the brahminic appropriation and domination of dalit culture.[32]

6. Sant Ravidas Through his Life and Message Manifests the Action of the Creator-Saviour God

Ravidas ***explicitly affirms the God, who is the depth of the values***, for which he has been striving. A section of the dalits by accepting baptism, have linked some of these values to their explicit faith, in the God who has revealed himself decisively in Jesus Christ.[33] Their faith and that of the universal Church, enable us to reflect on the life and teaching of Sant Ravidas, and show that they manifest the creative and saving action of God.

---

[32] Jose Joseph, *Social...*, pp. 239, 251-252.
Nabhadasa, *Bhaktamala* (1969), 5th Hindi Edition. Source of brahminic legends regarding Sant Ravidas.
Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, *Sant...*, p. 88.

[33] D. Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity, 1860-1960" in G. Oddie (ed.), *Religion in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1977), pp. 15, 35, 37.
J. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), pp. 26, 31, 40-41, 45-47.
J. Boel, *Christian Mission in India: A Sociological Analysis*, (Amsterdam: Academische Pers, 1975), pp. 30, 37-39.
W. Fernandes, *Caste and Conversion Movements in India* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1981), Monograph Series, pp. 16-21, 26.

6.1 Sant Ravidas Manifests the God who Establishes Justice and the Humanity, Equality, Community and Oneness of All People

Ravidas believes in the humanity, equality and oneness of all people which he sees as founded by the one, absolute, formless, creator God, the Lord and source of everything. As Christians, we see that the faith and values of Ravidas are a ***free gift*** from their ***founder God***, whose reliability, faithfulness, trustworthiness, love, omniscience, truth, light and revelation make faith possible. He acts through the Holy Spirit[34] on the reason, will, body, emotions, senses and imagination of a person producing desires, ideas, values, decisions and actions in the direction of divine values (Ex. 3; Ps. 139; Jn. 1:9, 14; 3:14-16; 14:6; 1 Jn. 1:5; 4:7ff.; Rom. 5:5; Gal. 4:8-9; 5:22; 1 Cor. 13; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 4:18; 5:8; Lk. 4:18; 6:20ff; 7:22).

For Christian faith, everything God has created is good (Gen. 1:18, 21, 31), because his goodness is present in everything. However, only the whole of humankind and each person has been created by God according to his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27).[35] The dignity of

---

[34] The Holy Spirit continues in creation and history the action of the Creator-Saviour God.

[35] G. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 147.
G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan:
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), p. 391.
The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol.2 (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 683.
For further details on these points see D. Rasquinha, "A Dalit Christian Understanding of God and Jesus in the Indian Context" in

humans lies in their being in the likeness of God. He is ***LOVE*** i.e., ***Self-gift***. In this lies his ***dignity***. The Father, Son and Spirit fully give themselves to and receive each other. God is truth and he has reason which knows the truth. God has a will and is totally free. Hence, God's ***dignity*** also lies in his ***reason*** and ***will***. And so, the dignity of the human person lies in his reason and will, and in his being called and being given the capacity to love fellow humans, the self and God, to take care of the cosmos and to be loved by the one creator (Gen. 1:26-28). The human person is dignified, because he is also called to represent God to fellow humans and the cosmos. Since the whole of humankind and each human person is created with the same human dignity by the one creator, the whole of humankind is one, all human persons are equal and hence, entitled to equal rights and responsibilities in society. God is thus the foundation of the ***human dignity, equality and oneness*** (***unity***) of humankind.

The Triune God is a community of three equal persons relating in love. This God creates in his own image the human family, with the capacity to relate and form a community where there is love and justice, and therefore fraternity. Thus for Christians the ***Triune God*** is the foundation of ***community, fraternity*** and ***justice***.[36]

Journal of Indian Theology, Vol. III, No. 3, September-December, 2010, pp. 25-28.

36 J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), p.108.
J. Neuner & J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2004), pp. 139-140.
K. Rahner, *"Theos in the New Testament"* in K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1(London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), pp. 79-148, especially pp. 125-148.

Human dignity is the core of human identity and remains stable and permanent. Its dynamic aspect lies in its realization on the part of Sant Ravidas, who proclaims that he is human as a chamar and so, equal to a brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra who are all dignified, equal members of one human community. Hence, Ravidas' faith-commitment to these values manifests the action of God. He also enables Ravidas to relate to Hindus and Muslims as members of one human community, and to work for the establishment of communal harmony and against religious communalism. It divides humans on the basis of religion, by asserting that the various interests of different religions are antagonistic to each other, and by proclaiming the religious identity as the fundamental identity of humans. This contradicts God's will in creation. Communalism also contradicts the meaning of true religion, whose function is to link humans to God who establishes their well-being. For Sant Ravidas ***Ram*** and ***Rahim***, the ***mandir*** and ***masjid*** symbolize and represent the different religions and mediations which come from, contain and point to the one, absolute, ultimate mystery which Jesus decisively reveals (Jn. 1:18).

6.2 God Sets Humans Free from Oppression and Sin and Re-establishes Justice and the Dignity, Equality, Community and Oneness of the Oppressed and All People

The essence of the God whom Jesus reveals to us is unconditional and universal love (Mt. 5:43-45; Jn. 3:14-

---

For further details on these points see D. Rasquinha, "A Dalit...," pp. 25-28.

D. Rasquinha, "The Quest of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: A Theological Interpretation" in *In Christo*, Vol. 48, No. 2, April, 2010, pp. 153-154.

16; 1Jn. 4:7ff.). However, given the situation of inequality in society caused by injustice, God can only love all unconditionally and equally, by making an ***option of priority to save the oppressed poor*** as a clear expression of his will to save all people.[37] This action of God is witnessed to by the O.T. and the N.T.

6.2.1 God's Saving Action as Articulated by the O.T.

In the O.T. the starting point of Israel's understanding of its God is the Exodus event, wherein God relates to the oppressed slaves of Egypt as their Saviour from oppression and bondage (Ex. 3:7-12; 6:2-7; Dt. 6: 20-23; 26:5-9).[38] God's saving love for the poor and the oppressed is expressed in his defence of the "widow, the orphan and the refugee" (Ex. 22:21-24; Dt. 10:17-19). God saves "the oppressed of all the earth" (Ps. 76:9; 103:6), protects the poor (Is. 3:13-15; Zeph. 3:12; Ps. 14:6), comforts them (Is. 49:13) and identifies with them (Pr. 14:31; 17:5; 19:17).[39]

The oppressed cry out to God to save them (Is. 40:27; Ps. 35:23). He responds to them because he is a just saviour (Is. 45:21; Ps. 98:2) and because he is love. Hence, he perceives them as human, created in his own image and likeness, his children. He sees that oppression violates

---

[37] A. Durand, "Relating to the Poor as a Constitutive Element of Faith" in *VJTR*, November 1989, pp. 618-619.

[38] A. Durand, "Relating...," p. 615.
G. Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical "Poor" A Social Class?" in *VJTR*, Vol. 49, No. 7, August 1985, p. 338.

[39] T. Hanks, *God So Loved The Third World: The Bible, the Reformation, and Liberation Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), Translated by James Dekker, p. 7.
G. Soares-Prabhu, "Class...," p. 334.

their human dignity, that of the oppressors and his dream in creation. Hence, God intervenes to uphold the dignity of the victims of oppression [once "No People", now "God's People" (Ex. 19:5-6)], and through them he challenges the oppressor to set the oppressed free, in accordance with his own humanity.[40]

God's love is universal, hence his saving love for Israel, is an expression of his love for the oppressed of all the earth, with whom he is identified. Moreover, Israel is seen as a representative and symbol of all the oppressed, and not just a particular ethnic group whose religion and culture is governed by faith in Yahweh. The oppressed of the O.T. and the dalits of Indian society both share in different ways in the reality of oppression, which denies their dignity. Moreover, the God who saves the oppressed of the O.T. is the very same God who saves the dalits. Hence, the oppressed of the O.T. symbolize and represent the dalits. And so the God of the O.T. makes a priority of option to save the dalits, as a sign of his will to save all. In this process he re-establishes the human dignity of the dalits and their oppressors and inter-human relationships which promote the realization of the humanity of all.[41]

6.2.2 God's Saving Action as Articulated by the N.T.

According to G. Soares-Prabhu, there is a growing consensus today that in the New Testament, even more than in the Old, the word "poor" is a sociological category even in the three good-news-to the-poor texts found in Mt. 11:5 = Lk. 7.22; Lk. 4:18 and Lk. 6:20.[42] Normally the

---

[40] D. Rasquinha, "A Dalit...," p. 31.

[41] D. Rasquinha, "A Dalit...," p. 31.

[42] G. Soares-Prabhu, "Class...," p. 331.

meaning of the term ***ptochos*** is destitute. However, in these three texts, the term ***ptochos*** has a wider sociological meaning than the expression destitute. The poor who are declared as blessed and to whom the good news is preached are the economically indigent, the social outcasts (Mk. 2:15-17; Lk. 15:1-2 such as the tax-collectors and sinners), the illiterate whom Matthew terms as "the little ones" (Mt. 18:10), those who were physically infirm (the blind, the deaf, the lame, the dumb, the sick in Mk. 1:32-34; 3:7-12; 6:53-56) and the mentally sick i.e., those possessed by demons and suffering from epilepsy (Mt. 9:14-29; 5:1-20). These people are seen as the oppressed. They are victimized by human beings (the social outcasts and the destitute) or by demons (the sick, the physically handicapped and the possessed),[43] since people in Jesus' time did not differentiate between his healings and his exorcisms (Mt. 12:22; cf. Acts 10:38).[44] Oppression reduces them to a condition of diminished worth or capacity and inferiority. The oppressed of the N.T. represent and symbolize the dalits of today.

In total freedom and knowledge, Jesus fully commits himself to love the oppressed and all sinful people unconditionally (Lk. 4:16ff; 6:20ff; 7:22; Rom. 5: 6-8). He takes the consequences of so doing, because of his intimate communion with God (Mk. 1:9ff.; 10:39- 40;

---

43 G. Soares-Prabhu, "Class...," pp. 331-332.
G. Soares-Prabhu, "Good News to the Poor! The Social Implications of the Message of Jesus" in D. Amalorpavadass (ed.), *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1981), p. 623.

44 G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Miracles: Subversion of a Power Structure?" in S. Kappen (ed.), *Jesus Today* (Madras: AICUF House, 1985), pp. 25-27.

14:36; Mt.3:17; 4:4; 5:45; 6:26; 11:25-27; Lk. 4:16ff; Jn. 4:34; 15:9; 17:20-23), through which he realizes that God loves him, the oppressed and all sinful humans unconditionally.[45]

Jesus is crucified as the King of the Jews by the Romans, at the instigation of the Jewish leaders, that is by the rich and the powerful. His death is a direct consequence of his setting free the oppressed (Lk. 4:18) out of love. This expresses itself in his solidarity and identification with them (Mk. 14:36; 15:29-31, 34; Lk. 9:1-3, 58; 10:4; 23:32-39, 46; Jn. 13; 19:20, 23, 30; Heb. 13:12-13), his stand for justice (Lk. 6:20; 7:22), his fellowship with social outcasts (Mk. 2:14-17; Mt. 9:9-13; 11:19; Lk. 5:27-32), his establishment of fraternity in society (Mk. 3:32-35; Mt. 5:44-45; Lk. 11:2-4), his forgiving sinners, even those murdering him (Mk. 2:5,10; Lk. 7:47-48; 23:34) and his healing those oppressed by evil spirits (Lk.10:38). Setting free the oppressed can be understood as the historical content of the obedience of Jesus who does so out of gratitude to and love for the Father and people (Lk. 4:18; Mk. 14:36; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:7-10; Jn. 13:1; Jn. 15:9). Thus Jesus makes clear the socio-historical dimension of salvation as liberation of the oppressed from social, economic, political, cultural and religious oppression.[46]

---

[45] D. Rasquinha, "The Cross: Foolish or Triumphant?" in *VJTR*, Vol. 74, No. 9, September 2010, p. 692. The intimate communion that Jesus has with the Father, is the basis of his commitment to save the oppressed and all people. God's Word and Spirit are active in this communion, and in the close relationship that Sant Ravidas has with God, leading to Ravidas' commitment to dalit liberation.

[46] D. Rasquinha, "The Cross: Foolish...," p. 693.
D. Rasquinha, "A Dalit...," pp. 33-35.

Jesus is sinless and holy (Heb. 7:26; 2 Cor. 5:21) i.e., his love is full and stronger than its rejection. Hence, at the historical level as Jesus sets free the oppressed, at the depth level the God of love i.e., LOVE breaks the power of sin, death and oppression, raises Jesus from the dead and chooses to dwell within the womb of human history (1 Cor. 15: 12-57, especially 54-57; Rom. 5:20). And so, the God of the N.T. makes a priority of option to save the dalits as a sign of his will to save all. In this process he re-establishes justice and the dignity, equality, community and oneness of the oppressed and of all people which have been negated by sin. This love is available to the oppressed, Christians and all people.[47]

God's love is poured out into the hearts of the dalits and

L. Nereparampil, "A New Commandment I Give You": Johannine Understanding of Love" in *Jeevadhara*, Vol. 13, No. 74, March-April 1983, pp. 104-105.

V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1974), Second Edition, pp. 588-589.

G. Soares-Prabhu, "Good...," pp. 618-623.

G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Miracles...," pp. 25-27.

J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), Second Edition, pp. 532, 664, 667-668.

J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1978), Translated by John Bowden, pp. 103-104.

G. Soares-Prabhu, "Jesus and the Poor" in J. Murickan (ed.), *Poverty in India: Challenges and Responses* (Bangalore: Xavier Board, 1988), pp. 266, 274, 280.

G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Spirituality of Jesus as a Spirituality of Solidarity and Struggle" in J. Vattamatton, V. Theckanath, S. Arockiasamy & T. John (eds.), *Liberative Struggles in a Violent Society* (Hyderabad: A Forum Publication, 1991), p. 146.

[47] D. Rasquinha, "The Cross: Foolish...," pp. 693-694.
D. Rasquinha, "A Dalit...," pp. 39-40.

all people through the Holy Spirit. He incorporates them and makes it possible for them to enter into a relationship with the Father as his children (Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 5:5; 8:14-17), as brothers and sisters of the Son who do the will of God (Mk. 3:35), as members of the kingdom of God (Mt. 25:31-40) and thus to progressively relate in society as redeemed humans, whose dignity and oneness have been re-established.[48]

6.3 Sant Ravidas Manifests God's Action through his Contribution to Dalit Liberation

On the basis of what we have articulated in points 6, 6.1, 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 we can say that God is active in Sant Ravidas in his struggle against brahminism. It upholds the principle of graded inequality as the basis of the social structure, and grades the dignity of humans using the criteria of purity-pollution. Consequently many of them have been declared as ***no humans***, untouchables. The Spirit empowers Ravidas to challenge the brahminic ideology and structures with love and forgiveness, and not anger and revenge against the brahmins who try to suppress his protest. God enables Ravidas to positively advocate the establishment of a society where there is equality of persons, justice and equity, so that there is food for everyone.

In his struggle against religious hypocrisy, ritualism and traditionalism, Sant Ravidas manifests God's action through the prophets (Is. 1:11-15; Am. 5:14, 21-24; Hos. 6:6) and Jesus (Mt. 6:1-18). They challenge hypocrisy and false religion and uphold true religion which affirms

---

[48] *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) nos. 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 24 and 26 reaffirm the dignity of the human person.

human well-being and deals with human intentions and motivations (Mk. 2: 23-28; 7:1-23). Moses (Ex. 3:1-22; , 6:1-13; 20:1-20), the prophets (Am. 2:6; 4:1-3; 5:10-12; 6:4-7; 8:6; Mic. 2:1-3; Is. 5:8-10 ; 3:13-15) and Jesus (Lk. 4:16-21; 6:20ff; 7:22) through their voices, articulate the voice of the voiceless and of God against oppression and for justice and human dignity. This mystery is continued in Sant Ravidas, who is the voice of the voiceless. He enables them to give up their sense of worthlessness, rediscover the dignity and identity which they think they have lost and live with confidence and courage.

God's power is seen most clearly in Sant Ravidas when he makes the dalits aware that they are human and equal to all people in society, and so need to give up the inferiority and shame in their hearts, which lead them to hide their identity. Dalits need to imbibe this true consciousness by giving up their false consciousness i.e., a real change of mind and heart (Mk. 1:14-16). The divine preferential love and mercy operative in the life of Mary, a representative of the oppressed (Lk. 1:46-55) ***frees*** Ravidas from the cultural and psychological impact of social discrimination and gives him the wisdom, knowledge and power, which brahminism denies to dalits. Consequently, he shows that a human person, especially a dalit has the capacity to face the hard reality of oppression, lead a dignified life and attain great spiritual heights.

The stand of Sant Ravidas on purity and pollution manifests the action of God. He sees that matter and the creatures he has created are good (Gen. 1:18, 21, 31) and so non-polluting. The cosmos is described as the visible expression of the invisible beauty and power of God (Wis.

13:1-9; Sir. 17:8; Rom. 1:20).[49] All things are created through the Word. Hence, it has an inbuilt relation to the cosmos. When the Word becomes flesh, it becomes an intimate part of matter and history to which it has given shape, and further increases the value of matter. Thus matter cannot pollute as brahminism asserts. And finally the resurrection of Jesus who continues to be incarnate, but with a glorified body, and the hope of humankind to share in that destiny, tell us that matter is now glorified and raised to the highest possible level in history and beyond (1 Cor. 15; Jn. 20:19-21:13; Lk. 24:1-50). Because in Jesus, the Word becomes flesh and loves, suffers, dies and rises liberating humankind, Paul can speak of the hope of liberation of the material universe (Rom. 8:18-23; 1 Cor. 8:1-6; Col. 1:1-29 Eph. 1:1-14), and the book of Revelation can look forward to a total renewal of the universe, as ***a new heavens and a new earth*** (Rev. 26:1). Thus matter can never pollute.[50]

Food habits and involvement with matter neither pollute nor purify humans, and what God declares as clean we are not to consider unclean (Acts 10:10-15). No person is ritually unclean or defiled, and nothing that goes inside a person makes him unclean, but that which comes out of a person's heart defiles him (Zech. 7:10; Mk.7: 15-23; Rom. 7:8, 17, 20, 23). Purity is a question of the intentions, desires, thoughts and motivation of the human heart (Mt. 5: 8). Jesus declares all things clean and reinterprets the meaning of purity and pollution (Mk. 7:1-23). Hence, the brahminic understanding of matter and

---

[49] *GS* nos. 12 and 26 reaffirm the goodness of creation.

[50] D. Rasquinha, "A Dalit...," pp. 38-39.

purity-pollution does not stand.[51] Sant Ravidas by articulating and living according to the true meaning of purity and pollution and the goodness of organic matter, cannot be denied access to God, whom he finds in all things. And so, he contributes to dalit liberation at the social, cultural, spiritual and psychological levels manifesting the action of the Creator-Saviour God.

6.4 Sant Ravidas Manifests God's Action through his Spirit of Hard Labour and Poverty

In creation humans are called to relate to the cosmos *like* God and as his *image* i.e., to realize their dignity and in accordance with it (Gen. 1:28-31). This means using the earth and taking care of it (Gen. 2:15).[52] When dalits engage in hard physical labour out of love they humanize nature, contribute to human and cosmic well-being and so realize their human dignity. Hence, far from polluting them through contact with organic matter, their labour is good and valuable. It manifests the action of the Creator-Saviour God who labours to give the abundance of life to people and the cosmos (Gen. 1; Jn. 10:10; Rom. 8:19-23; Rev. 21:1).

Sant Ravidas articulates the dignity and importance of physical labour (especially that of the dalits) in word and deed. He does not want the miracles of God to take away the struggle and value of honest labour, which he sees as an expression of his devotion to God, and as leading to the experience of God, the truth. And so as truth prevails, labour also prevails. Hence, Ravidas manifests the action

---

51 D. Rasquinha, "A Dalit...," p. 39.

52 D. Rasquinha, "The Care for Creation: A Theological Perspective" in *In Christo*, Vol. 48, No. 3, July 2010, pp. 239-240.

of God whose reliable love (the truth) sets us free from sin, its manifestations and effects (Jn. 1:14; 8:32; 14:6; 17:17; 1 Cor. 15:28, 54-57).

The poor are those who are oppressed in any way and so reduced to a condition of diminished capacity or worth (Lk. 4:16-21; 6:20ff; 7:22).[53] The poor in spirit are those who in their poverty and helplessness rely absolutely and exclusively on God (Mt. 5:5).[54] Jesus is ***the*** poor person who lives a life of actual poverty in full identification with the poor (Lk. 9:58), and total dependence on God (Mt. 4:4), revealing the action of a loving God.[55] He is active in the life of Sant Ravidas who lives on the meagre income from his hard labour as a cobbler, refusing to beg or accept the gifts of his disciples. Although he lives a life of poverty, he accepts it in total dependence on God and donates generously to the poor like the widow of the gospels (Mk. 12:41-44; Lk. 21:1-4).

Conclusion

The mission of the Church is to participate in, cooperate with and enable the oppressed and all people to respond to the action of the Creator-Saviour God. Hence, the Church in India is called to enable the *ravidasas* (including Christians who are ravidasas) to come to the true understanding of the name-identity

---

53 Refer to point 6.2.2 of the article.

54 G. Soares-Prabhu, "Good News to the Poor: The Social Implications of the Message of Jesus" in Francis D'Sa (ed.), *The Dharma of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 238. A. Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1964).

55 Refer to point 6.2.2 of the article.

ravidas/ravidasa/ravidasi, follow the teaching of Sant Ravidas (in as much as it does not contradict the truth revealed by Jesus) and respond to the action of God present in it. The Church is also called to help all dalits to understand the life and message of Sant Ravidas, through which God is energizing them in their struggle for liberation. We hope that as the Church fulfils these aspects of her mission, she herself is inspired, energized, guided and transformed by the life and message of Sant Ravidas, and the action of God that they manifest.

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011, 128-149

Healing From The Effects Of Sexual Abuse: How Formators and Spiritual Directors Can Help

Jose Parappully, SDB, PhD
Sumedha Centre for Psychology and Spirituality,
Jeolikote, Uttarakhand.
E-mail address: sumedha.bps@gmail.com

Abstract: Those who have suffered sexual abuse require help to overcome their trauma, shame and guilt. If qualified professional helpers are not available, then other formators can help. Providing a conducive environment for sharing, building trust through empathetic listening, encouraging, self-nurturing, are among the useful methods that help. Supervision and referring to those more competent for guidance, may become necessary at times.

Keywords: Sexual abuse, formators, overcoming sexual trauma, helpful techniques.

Please Note: Dr. Jose Parappully is a clinical psychologist and Founder-Director of *Bosco Psychological Services*, New Delhi and *Sumedha Centre for Psychology and Spirituality*, Jeolikote, Uttarakhand. He is grateful to Sr. Agnes Panikulam, Dr. Joe Mannath and Dr. Peter Lourdes for their comments and suggestions on the draft of this article. He is especially indebted to Dr Karen Peoples, his former professor and guide at the *California Institute of Integral Studies*, San Francisco, for the many minor and major modification she suggested on the draft and which have been incorporated in the current version of the article. Comments on this article may be sent to the author at sumedha.bps@gmail.com

Sexual abuse is getting a good deal of attention especially in the media. The Catholic Church has been caught in a whirlwind of revelations of sexual abuse of children by priests and the mishandling of the issue by

Church authorities. However, sexual abuse is not an issue that affects the Catholic Church alone. It is a society-wide problem. Children, both male and female, are frequently subject to such abuse. Nor are the victims only children. Adults too, men as well as women, are victims of sexual abuse.

Many women religious in particular have been victims of sexual abuse as adults. An earlier article in this Journal (Parappully, 2003) showed that while childhood sexual abuse rates for religious women and for lay women were almost the same, the rate of abuse for adult religious women was much higher than that for lay women. There is also anecdotal evidence that a large number of candidates now entering religious life have been victims of sexual abuse.

Another article (Parappully, 2007) described the consequences of sexual abuse. These were described under three categories – physical, psychological and spiritual. Sexual abuse has a significant negative impact on survivors' self-concept, their relationships and their attitudes towards the body and sexuality. Their ability to trust people is seriously undermined. They live in fear. They experience inordinate shame, guilt, anxiety and anger. They experience intrusive flashbacks of their abuse experience. Their psychological functioning is generally impaired. Their capacity to live joyfully and work productively is often compromised, depending on the nature and severity of the violation.

However, survivors can work through these effects and find healing. In most cases, they are not able to do this on their own and require help from others. Such help is given mostly by specially-trained therapists. However, many

candidates and religious survivors of sexual abuse do not have access to trained therapists. In this situation formators and spiritual directors can provide some help. It is important to note here, however, that it is preferable that survivors be referred to trained therapists for help. It is only when such help is not available that formators and spiritual directors should offer help. Also, it is important that in the case that the formator or spiritual director has been a victim of sexual exploitation, she or he should not undertake to help other survivors unless their own trauma has been effectively worked through. Otherwise, the helper's own issues are very likely to interfere with her/his efforts to help.

Regardless of whether the formator who is trying to help has been abused or not, the nature of working with survivors is such that he or she must be emotionally open to *vicariously experiencing* similar feelings to the survivor, and is thus *likely* to undergo disturbing reactions internally. In other words, the helper will often experience the pain and emotional turbulence that the survivor experiences and can be disturbed by them. It is important that the formator learns to handle these feelings in a healthy way. Having someone to consult and seek guidance in regard to these vicarious experiences is important.

The ultimate goal of helping is to assist the survivor in healing from the negative consequences of the abuse; to accept the abuse as part of his or her personal history and to transform self-loathing into compassion for a more positive sense of self, enabling the survivor look to the future with hope and live her life in more peaceful and satisfying ways. This requires recalling and emotionally re-experiencing the traumatic aspects of the abuse in the

context of a trustworthy relationship, over time leading to an attitudinal reframing of the abuse experience and its aftermath.

This process must unfold slowly, safely and in an emotionally manageable way for the survivor. It cannot be rushed. In this process, the issues that will come up and require working through include: distorted self-concept and thought processes, painful emotions such as uncontrolled anger, shame, anxiety and guilt as well as the dysfunctional behaviours that flow from them; negative attitudes toward body and sexuality; impaired relationships; and difficulties around trust and intimacy. Helping the survivor resolve these issues effectively is complex and demanding work and would require, as has been already pointed out, the presence and skills of a trained therapist. However, in the absence of such competent professionals, there are things that a formator can do to make their trauma more bearable for the survivor, to help her or him experience some healing, and live life more meaningfully and with greater satisfaction. A number of steps the formator can take to assist the survivor in this process are described below.

It is worthwhile to note here that what facilitates healing is not technique per se but the quality of presence (sensitive, empathic, caring, respectful, non-judgmental) that the formator brings to the helping encounter and the kind of relationship (safe, trustworthy, reliable) that he or she establishes with the survivor. A formator can develop such presence and relationship through his or her dedication even if he or she lacks professional therapy training.

1. Offer to Help

When a formator (I include spiritual directors here) comes to know that a candidate or religious has been sexually victimised, a first step is to let the survivor know that healing is possible. She (I will be using the female pronoun consistently to refer to both male and female formators as well as survivors) can suggest names of therapists or counsellors when they are available. In contexts where these trained helpers are not available, the formator can offer help herself. She can simply say that in case the survivor wants to talk about her experiences she will be available.

Survivors are usually reluctant to disclose abuse to anyone fearing that it could feel hurtful to self or to others to talk about what is distressing them. Even in situations where the survivor may not have disclosed the abuse, there are signs and symptoms that can alert the formator to the possibility of abuse. Behavioural manifestation of the effects of abuse as described in the previous article (Parappully, 2007) can alert the formator to its possibility. For example, when the formator finds that a candidate is consistently manifesting sadness, anger, withdrawal, oversensitivity to sexual matters, or any of the other behaviours described in the previous article, she can tell the candidate that she has observed these and simply ask her, "Is there something that you want talk about? If you want to talk, I will make time for you." It is likely that the candidate's immediate response is "I am fine. There isn't anything to talk about." However, after a while, sometime after weeks or months, the candidate might come to the formator and ask "Do you have some time. There is something I would like to talk about."

When a candidate or religious takes the initiative to request an opportunity to talk, it is very important that the

formator makes the time immediately, even if it is only for a short while. The candidate or religious has taken a bold and vulnerable first step toward seeking help. If the formator refuses or postpones, the survivor may never again take the initiative to open up.

2. Create a Conducive Environment

Once a survivor has opted to seek help, it is very important that the formator finds a place where she feels safe to open up. This means a room (and not public space like corridors and halls) where the survivor feels safe, where she has some privacy. Such physical space is very important.

Psychological safety is also very important. The survivor has to feel safe to open up and share her experiences. One way a formator can provide psychological safety is by offering confidentiality. She has to assure the survivor that whatever is disclosed will not be shared with anyone else.

Ideally, the formator in question should not be one who may be involved in decision-making concerning the survivor's future in religious life. In case the formator is involved in such decision-making, it will be difficult for her to offer the survivor the necessary confidentiality. This also applies in contexts where the formator, even if not involved in the decision-making, has to provide reports to major superiors on the basis of which decisions are made. This dual role that a formator plays—decision-maker/information-provider and helper—can complicate the helping process. It cannot lead to a successful healing because in this situation the formator has too much power and authority over the survivor, which makes it difficult for the survivor to develop the necessary trust and

confidence, regardless of how reassuring the authority figure is.

Seeking help in the context of sexual victimization is not an easy thing do. The formator can enhance psychological safety by affirming and validating the survivor's willingness to seek help. Her words and attitudes at every stage need to be free of moral or other judgment.

Imparting hope of recovery can enhance the feeling of safety and encourage the survivor to engage in the challenging task of healing and recovery.

3. Build Connectedness and Trust

Sexual victimization is a very personal matter that survivors find hard to talk about. Disclosure is facilitated when the survivor experiences trustworthiness and emotional connectedness with the formator. Building such connectedness is one of the basic requirements for effective work with survivors. A strong relational bond with the formator is necessary to cope with the painful feelings of isolation, alienation and helplessness that accompany the healing work.

Since many survivors have been violated by a person to whom they were dependent emotionally or socially, interpersonal trust is one dynamic that is seriously impaired by the abuse experience. Hence, building trust in the helping context is very challenging. The formator has to strive with great patience, sensitivity and respect to win the survivor's trust.

The quality of the formator's presence in the helping situation is very important. It has to be a very empathic and caring presence. The survivor has to sense that the

formator is on her side, is her advocate, cares deeply for her, is interested in her healing and well-being and will respect her no matter what her experiences. Genuine attentive and empathically sensitive listening conveys to the survivor the message that the formator is really interested in her and cares for her.

Connectedness and trust are built by believing and validating whatever the survivor discloses. It is important to affirm and validate the trust the survivor has already placed in the formator by taking initiative to seek help. "I really appreciate you trusting me enough to tell me this. I know it is not easy to talk about such things; things which persons would normally prefer to keep to themselves." Such validation counters the feelings of being alone, worthless and undeserving.

It is important not to react with shock or disbelief to whatever the survivor discloses, but to calmly listen and respond with appropriate concern. A response like "Oh, my God, I can't believe people could do such a thing" is not helpful, since an expression of shock often translates into judgment or condemnation or downplaying or even doubting the veracity of what the survivor discloses. Moreover, such a response invariably deepens the damage, driving the survivor further into shame and isolation.

One fear that many sexual abuse survivors have, as do clients in general, is "What will my formator/therapist think of me if she really knows who I am or what has happened to me." It is very important to allay these fears right at the start of the helping process, saying something like "No matter what you share with me, I will not think less of you. I am not here to judge you or condemn you and think badly of you." It is very important that there is

genuine congruence between such assurances and the formator's body language. Her bodily messages, such as eyebrow-raising, facial tensions, hands or leg-fidgeting should not neutralize her verbal assurances.

The survivor needs such reassurance not only at the beginning but from time to time in order to ward off the shame and self-rejection that often accompany sexual victimization. One client I have been working with for a number of years is so very appreciative and relieved even now, when from time to time, I assure her I don't think any less of her, no matter how messy her experiences.

4. Help the Survivor Tell Her Story

This is one of the most important functions of a helper. Great healing can occur in the very act of narrating what has happened. This is something very difficult for the survivor to do. She is reluctant and often unwilling to tell the story. Abuse is something that the survivor has often tried hard to forget, or has unconsciously dissociated or denied. Retelling that experience brings up painful memories and that is something that the survivor wants to avoid. Yet it is in retelling the story and looking at it differently (reframing) that healing begins.

There is also great secrecy involved in sexual victimization because of the shame, guilt and fear that accompany it. Shame arises from a deeply felt sense of badness associated with the abuse which the survivor wants to hide from others. Guilt makes the survivor feel she is responsible for what has happened. She is afraid that others may not believe her story and instead might blame her. Often the perpetrator threatens the victim with dire consequences in case she discloses the abuse. For these and other reasons the survivor feels it is wise to keep the

abuse a secret. A research on the sexual abuse experience of North American nuns (Chibnall, Wolf, & Duckro, 1998) showed that 23.6 percent of those who were abused had never discussed the abuse with another person. *These women had kept their experience of sexual abuse secret for an average of 54.3 years.* For those who had discussed the abuse, an average of 24.7 years had elapsed between the onset of the abuse and their first disclosure. Keeping secrets, though a normal practice among survivors, takes a toll on them. Helping them to break the secret in a safe, trusted relationship is in itself a healing exercise.

However, the formator has to respect the reluctance of the survivor to tell the story and not put any pressure on her to disclose quickly and fully. She has to communicate to the survivor that she knows it is not easy for the survivor to speak of things that are very personal and painful and which she is trying to forget. At the same time the formator needs to communicate to the survivor that telling her story is very helpful for her and encourage her to share as much of her experience as she feels comfortable. For example, one might say, "I know it is very painful and difficult for you to recall these things that you are trying to forget, and more especially to share it with someone. Take all the time you want. You can begin when you want and stop when you want. You can choose what you want to narrate and you can proceed at the pace you feel comfortable. There is no hurry." This kind of message emphasizes the survivor's control or self-agency over the process, the very thing she was robbed off in the abuse.

Sometimes, especially in the first meeting, the survivor will say, "I don't know how to begin" or "I don't know where to begin." A helpful response is "You can begin

wherever you want" or "You can say whatever you want, or whatever comes to your mind." Such open responses reduce the pressure and anxiety of the survivor and help to make her feel more at ease. It is also good to check with the survivor if she has any worry or concern about sharing her experiences. If she has, the formator has first to address these.

The formator listens with great attention and respect to what the survivor says, affirming the person through eye contact and body posture and responding with empathy and warmth. Simply paraphrasing (repeating, summarizing) occasionally what the survivor has said and affirming with simple head-nods and sub-vocals like "Hmm," "I see," or empathic responses like "That must have been really hard," or "frightening" or "painful" etc., or affirming words like "Thank you for trusting me to share that with me" or encouraging words like 'I am with you. Go on..." or "It will help if you share a little more of that..." can help the survivor to disclose deeper and deeper.

It is not just the act of narrating one's story that brings about healing, but being listened to with respect and sensitivity and without judgment, evaluation, blaming or unnecessary interruptions or intrusions. Non-judgmental listening calls for hearing the story without the lens of morality and sin, themes so much part of a formator's training and orientation. Hearing the story through such lenses becomes an obstacle to being truly present to the survivor and her experience. It is important to respond with human rather than moral or legalistic understanding.

It is also very important to communicate to the survivor that the abuse is not her fault. Survivors often feel guilty,

blaming themselves for what had happened. Assurance from the formator that the abuse was not their fault has enormous healing power. Someone on whom she was dependent or whose domination she was too weak to resist took advantage of her dependency and weakness. The survivor has to hold the perpetrator responsible for what happened.

Being listened to this way is a rare and privileged experience for the survivor. Such respectful and sensitive approach to the survivor's experience helps to further strengthen trust and connectedness. One challenge for the formator is learning to listen this way.

5. Provide Helpful Information

Sexual abuse survivors often feel very isolated. They think that they are the only ones who have had such an experience. In this context, telling the survivor that she is not alone, that sexual abuse is the experience of many children, as well as many women who have entered religious life, is very relieving. At the same time it is important not to dilute the uniqueness of the experience of the particular survivor. While letting her know that many others have also been abused, the formator must also convey to the survivor that she is in no way minimizing her experience and all the difficulties and problems that accompany it.

It helps the survivor to know that many survivors like her have been able to work through their pain and lead normal lives. At the same time she has also to be informed that healing from abuse takes time and involves pain. Sharing the story in itself can bring about some healing, but deeper healing involves much effort, time and also pain. It is very helpful to inform the survivor that normally

the symptoms get worse, that is, she will experience them more acutely, in the early stage of the healing work, before getting better. Such information prevents the survivor from feeling discouraged and quitting the healing work.

Repeatedly providing information about the nature of abuse, its consequences, particularly the traumatic symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, dissociation, numbing, intense emotional reactions and hyper-vigilance, helps to break down feelings of isolation and abnormality. Sharing the healing experiences of others instills hope of recovery. Information on the approaches and techniques that facilitate healing encourages the survivor to make use of them.

Providing the survivor with books and articles that describe the nature and consequences of abuse, along with approaches and techniques that enhance the healing process is very helpful. There are also books written by abuse survivors sharing both their victimization and their healing experiences.

It would also be a good practice to make the topic of sexual abuse part of the curriculum in the early stages of formation. It would be helpful to provide the formees information about the prevalence of sexual abuse, its effects, the secrecy that surrounds it, the kinds of help that are available and that recovery is possible. The healing that can come from disclosing the abuse to someone they trust and who has the skills to help them is to be specially emphasized. Dissemination of such information can encourage survivors to seek the help they need.

In order to be helpful, the formator herself has to be well informed. She has to know about the complex and confusing dynamics that follow sexual victimization,

especially the traumatic impact of abuse and the many ways it manifests itself. She has to know how to accompany the survivor and how to be helpful. She prepares for this kind of work by reading and attending awareness and training seminars.

6. Encourage Expression of Feelings

Sexual victimization evokes a number of painful emotions, especially anger, grief, fear and shame. Often the survivor suppresses them. She has to be encouraged to get in touch with these feelings and express them. Saying something like, "This is one place where you have the freedom to feel whatever you need to feel and to express your feelings in whatever way you want" is helpful.

It is important to note here that it is not the venting of feelings in itself that brings healing, but processing the experience of venting. That is, it is not enough to encourage the survivor to access and express feelings. She has to be helped to reflect upon and talk about what the experience of venting was like, what it did for her. It is through this kind of processing that the survivor learns to reframe her abuse experience, that is, change her attitudes toward it and begin to feel differently about it.

The formator can invite the survivor to process the experience by saying something like the following: "I wonder how you feel about what you just experienced." Or, "What did this experience of expressing all these feelings do for you?" The formator can also point out what she observed during the experience and ask what that meant for the survivor. It is also important to give the survivor time and space to sit quietly with the experience for a while before inviting her to talk about it.

7. Use Helpful Techniques

There are a number of techniques that are useful not only for facilitating the expression of feelings but also for bringing about healing in other ways as well. Among these techniques, two that formators can employ are expressive writing and drawing. Behavioural techniques such as anger management and assertiveness training are also very useful.

Expressive writing is a very easy yet effective technique. It consists in focusing on the traumatic experience for a while and then writing freely whatever comes to mind. It is important not to censor any thought or feeling but give free expression in writing to anything one experiences. Such writing heals by bringing about changes in the traumatic memory tracks in the brain.

It is important to note here that although such writing may look simple, yet it is not always very easy to do. Focusing on the trauma and writing about it can bring up some very powerful emotions. The formator should be available to accompany the survivor with empathic support in such emotionally distressing situations.

Drawing is another simple yet useful technique. Invite the survivor to focus on the traumatic experience for a while and then using crayons draw whatever one feels like. A three-step technique can then be used to process the drawing. The steps are: 1) See; 2) Free-associate; and 3) Feel the Emotional Impact.

One has to look carefully to see all that there is in a drawing. Many images in the drawing will come into focus only when one takes time to contemplate the drawing. In the free association stage, one allows the various images and colours in the drawing to trigger in

oneself any associations in terms of memories, thoughts, feelings, longings, fantasies and so on. In the emotional impact stage one gets in touch with the mood and feelings the drawing and the association to it evoke in oneself.

Such drawing can help the survivor to tell her story in pictures when verbalization is difficult. More than this, drawing like this and processing it a number of times will gradually loosen the grip of the trauma and bring about healing. Free body movements and bio-energetic techniques also help loosen and free the somatic memories of the trauma embedded in the muscles and tissues of the body. Any formator who is interested in helping survivors will acquaint herself with some of these techniques and learn the skills involved in using them.

8. Encourage Self-Nurturing

Sexual victimization affects body, mind and soul. Survivors often develop a very negative attitude toward their body. Sometimes survivors believe that they were targeted by the perpetrator because they had an attractive body. Consequently, they seek to make themselves as unattractive as possible. One way they do this is neglecting the body. Survivors may neglect grooming, hygiene and exercise. They may dress carelessly. They may overeat or undereat to make themselves look fat or emaciated and that way less attractive to others.

Alternatively, some survivors believe they were targeted because they felt worthless and unlovable to begin with, and deserved the abuse. Typically, survivors hold themselves responsible for what happened and feel guilty. They feel they now have no right to celebrate life in any way. Consequently they withdraw from pleasurable activities. Sometimes they consider such withdrawal and

neglect of body as ways to punish themselves for what they consider to be their "sin." Their sense of inner worthlessness, too, leads them to neglect self-care.

In this context, it is very important not only to challenge their irrational guilt and distorted thinking but also to encourage them to engage in self-nurturing and self-caring activities. They have to be encouraged to take care of their appearance, hygiene and health and to participate in social and recreational activities.

9. Utilize Supervision

I have mentioned at the beginning of this article that helping survivors of sexual abuse requires specialized training; it is normally to be done by trained therapists and counsellors. Formators will engage in such helping only when these professionals are not available.

Since formators are not normally trained to do this kind of work, it is important that they have access to trained professionals for consultation and supervision.

Trained professionals also require supervision because there will arise situations which they don't know how to handle effectively. If this is the case with trained professionals, it is even more important that formators consult someone who can give them guidance. Such consultation need not always be face-to-face. In this age of advanced communication technologies, such supervision can be had even if the supervisor is far away, using any of the communication channels available.

In getting such supervision or expert help, it is important to remember that confidentiality must be safeguarded. The formator cannot reveal the identity of the person she is trying to help.

Supervision is especially needed to deal with the countertransference issues (reactions triggered in the formator by the survivor and the survivor's experience); issues that arise in the course of helping. Anger, confusion, helplessness, ambivalent feelings toward the survivor and about working with her, and memories of one's own traumatic experience can arise in the course of working with survivors; these can affect the formator's ability to work effectively. These reactions must be expected, as they are unavoidable in treating trauma survivors. Supervision can provide a safe and emotionally supportive relationship in which the formator can sort through her own feelings.

10. Make Referrals

It can happen that, after beginning to work with a survivor, a formator recognises that because of the severity and complexity of the abuse and its effects, she is not competent to help effectively. In such a case, it is very important that the formator acknowledges this to the survivor and suggest that she see a professional who can really help her. The formator then provides names and contact numbers of professionals she trusts, encouraging the survivor to contact one of them. It is the responsibility of the formator to have with her information about some such professionals.

Such referrals have to be done very delicately. After having opened up her story to one person, the survivor usually will not be happy to have to go to someone else and start the process all over again. The formator should convey to the survivor that, if she so wishes, the formator can provide the selected professional an update on the work done with her so far and that the survivor then has

the choice of how much she wants to share with the new helper. The formator should also convey she is making the referral because of her own lack of expertise and wants her to get the kind of help she is not competent enough to provide.

Conclusion

Working with survivors of sexual abuse is a challenging task which requires adequate training and competence. However, there are not enough trained professionals available in many parts of the country. In such a situation, formators can provide some help. This article has provided some suggestions that can assist the formator in this delicate work. Attending some basic counselling skills training will be an added asset for the formator in this task.

However, it is important to note that at the heart of the healing encounter is the quality of the helper's presence and the kind of relationship the helper builds with the client. It is not the sophistication of techniques that brings about healing, but the experience of being accepted unconditionally, listened to with empathy and sensitivity, being understood, respected and cared for. Such a caring and sensitive presence provides the survivor with an experience so different from what she is used to, and for that very reason makes it a corrective healing experience. Hence, even if a formator is not therapeutically trained, she can be an effective helper by cultivating and enhancing her capacity to provide such healing presence and relationship. Consultation with trained professionals is useful in developing and enhancing this capacity as well.

It is also important to note here that this article has only described help for survivors of sexual abuse from a

psychological perspective. However, psychological work is only one aspect of healing the whole person. There are other ways of helping, especially spiritual approaches, such as prayer and the sacraments, which also need to be harnessed to facilitate healing from the effects of sexual abuse.

References

Chibnall, J. T., Wolf, A., & Duckro, P. N. (1998). A national survey of the sexual trauma experiences of catholic nuns. *Review of Religious Research, 40(2)*, 142-167.

Parappully, J. (2003). Sexual abuse: Data from clinical experience. *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, 6(2)*, 146-157.

Parappully, J. (2007). Effects of sexual abuse: Data from clinical experience. *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, 10(1)*, 153-165.

Select Bibliography

Bass, F., & Davis, L. (1994). *The courage to heal* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Harper Perennial.

Briere, J. (1996). *Therapy for adults molested as children: Beyond survival* (2nd ed. rev. and expanded). New York: Springer.

Brier, J. N. (1992). *Child abuse trauma: Theory and treatment of the lasting effects.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Browne, A., & Finkelhor, D. (2000). Impact of child sexual abuse. In A. C. Donnelly & K. Oates (Eds.), *Classic papers in child abuse* (pp. 217-238). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chu, J. A. (1992). The therapeutic roller coaster:

Dilemmas in the treatment of childhood abuse survivors. *Journal of Psychotherapy Practice,1(4),* 351-370.

Courtois, C. (1988). *Healing the incest wound: Adult survivors in therapy.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Courtois, C. A. (2004). Complex trauma, complex reactions, assessment and treatment. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 41(4),* 412-425.

Draucker, C. B. (1992). *Counselling survivors of childhood sexual abuse.* London: Sage.

Gil, E. (1983). *Outgrowing the pain: A book for and about adults abused as children.* New Yoirk: Dell Publishing

Kirschner, S., Kirschner, D. A., & Rappaport, R. L. (1993). *Working with adult incest survivors: The healing journey.* New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Kristsberg, W. (1993). *The invisible wound: A new approach to healing childhood sexual trauma.* New York: Bantam.

Pennebaker, J. W. (1990). *Opening up: The healing power of expressing emotions.* New York: Guilford.

RAHI. (1999). *The house I grew up in: Five Indian women's experiences of childhood incest and its impact on their lives.* New Delhi: Author.

Rogers, N. (1993). *The creative connection: Expressive arts as healing.* Palo Alto, CA: Science & Behaviour Books.

Rossetti, S. J. (Ed.). (1990). *Slayer of the Soul: Child sexual abuse and the Catholic Church.* Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications.

Rutter, P. (1989). *Sex in the forbidden zone: When men in power—therapists, doctors, clergy, teachers and others—betray women's trust.* New York: Fawcett Crest.

Rutter, P. (1996). *Sex, power & boundaries: Understanding and preventing sexual harassment.* New York: Bantam.

Scott, M. J. (2008). *Moving on after trauma: A guide for survivors, family and friends.* London and New York: Routledge.

Virani, P. (2000) *Bitter chocolate: Child sexual abuse in India.* New Delhi: Penguin.

JPJRS 14/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2011, 150-176

Cosmotheandric Vision - A Call To Integration: *A Tribute To Raimundo Panikkar*

Dr. Isaac Parackal, OIC
Faculty of Philosophy,
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune 411014.

Abstract: Raimundo Panikkar proposes a cosmotheandric vision of reality which integrates the essential elements of reality, and thus is global, holistic and original. It synthesizes the best in the East and the West. Panikkar provides a new understanding of ecology, proposes a new anthropology, and offers a new understanding of matter, the world, and time, and provides a new outlook on human work.

Keywords: cosmotheandric vision, mystery aspect, integration, symbol, holistic perspective, ecosofy, re-visioning, time.

Introduction

Every age is blessed with great personalities. However, it is rarely honoured with great thinkers whose vision makes an influence in the society at large. Raimundo Panikkar was a great visionary and thinker whose ideas have made deep impact on the thinking patterns of contemporary society. The cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar cuts across the barriers of time and distance, caste and creed, science and religion, sacred and secular. Any view that compartmentalizes reality, whether philosophical, theological or scientific, cannot explain reality meaningfully. However, in the cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar, the uniqueness of each dimension of reality, namely Divine, human and cosmic is properly

upheld and meaningfully explained. One dimension is not exalted at the cost of the other, nor is it reduced to the other. Panikkar has articulated well the relation between these dimensions of reality and the "mystery aspect" of their interrelation without confusion. The beauty of the cosmotheandric vision lies in its affirming the uniqueness and the indispensability of the Divine, the human and the cosmic. This triadic notion constitutes reality and makes it real. That means, one dimension cannot be parted from reality without annihilating reality itself. Reality is neither *one* nor *many* but *polarity*. In this holistic vision, all the three dimensions of reality – Divine, human and cosmic – are equally important and in that way, every being is Trinitarian. The nature of reality is polar and each pole is constitutive of the "whole". This intuition results from a mystical experience in which knower, known and knowledge meet.[1] In this article, I shall analyse the cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar and its relevance to the present life situation.

A. A Call to Integration

The cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar opens up a new horizon of understanding that extends to all levels of life. It touches every core of reality and enhances a basic confidence in reality. Dynamic with playfulness and filled with great insights, his vision covers a breathtaking range – encompassing many disciplines, the entire globe, and the sweep of history. His writings have subsumed natural science, philosophy, theology, history of religions, hermeneutics and many other allied disciplines. The depth

---

[1] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, ed. Scott Eastham, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1983, p. 72

of Panikkar's thought is immeasurable. Its internal dimensions are so vast and dizzying and always appear beyond reach. Panikkar is at once a philosopher, a scientist, a theologian, and a mystic. However, even with these terms we cannot capture the heart of Panikkar's vision. Though we approach Panikkar's vision with the available tools of these different disciplines, still it eludes our immediate understanding because of its originality and incomprehensibility. Panikkar's vision is a revelation to all those who view reality with their coloured eyeglasses of partial worldviews.

The crisis we face today is threefold, namely, the ecological predicament, the humanistic crisis and the theological dilemma. The one-sided anthropocentric worldview, which is controlled and carried by reason, made us forget the interconnectedness of reality. We fail to make a synthesis among the different spheres of life because of our lack of patience empowered by reason, and overconfidence that originates from sensory knowledge. What is at stake then is a satisfactory and sufficient account of reality, an integrated understanding of the Divine, the world and the human. We see this division in all areas of life, the body-soul split, the sacred-secular bifurcation, the God-world-human separation, the past-present-future partition, science-faith severance, worship-work segregation, etc. In this situation, Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision urges us to make a complete transformation, which removes the dichotomy and fragmentation and helps us view reality as an 'integrated whole' that accommodates the human, the cosmic and the Divine. *Panikkar's vision attempts to overcome the absolute instrumentalization of the world, fragmentation of the human and the meaninglessness of the Divine.* His

vision seems to stretch beyond the rational and tends towards the intuitive realm that gives us a mystical orientation and insight. His words are evocative in the realm of the spirit.

B. Global and Holistic Perspective

Panikkar's vision opens up new horizons of wholeness and inter-mingling. Humans can no longer live in splendid isolation without having contact and communication with one another. To live in geographical boxes, closeted in the neat compartments, segregated into economical capsules, cultural areas, racial ghettoes, separated by the citadels of caste-superiority have become the things of the past.[2] One example may support this: over a century ago, only a very small percentage of people moved more than a hundred miles from their birthplaces. The modern technologies have made travel easier and in a matter of hours, we can travel across the seas, in and around the world. This has made possible not only the intermingling of peoples, but also the coming together of cultures and values.[3] A good number of contemporary western youth are irresistibly attracted to oriental spiritualities, while oriental youth are also fascinated by the western life-style and culture. The

---

[2] Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel-A Meditation on Non-violence" in *Cross Currents*, 29 (Summer1979), p. 202.

[3] Cf. R. Panikkar, "Indology as a Cross-Cultural Catalyst", *Numen* 18 (December 1971), p. 175. Hereafter, this article will be referred to as "Indology": "Geographical boundaries are rapidly losing their importance as barriers to the spread of cultural values: not only are gadgets diffused all over the globe within a few years of their invention: popularized ideas from all the continents are now travelling at the speed of light to the furthest corners not only of the world but also of the human psyche."

African drums are invading western music, and western technology invades Africa and Asia.[4]

Panikkar analyses the present day situation with factual evidences. In his writings, the contemporary situation is pictured very well. Panikkar strongly believes that "the time for one-way traffic in the meeting of cultures and religions is, at least theoretically over."[5] For him, each culture has a proper place in the globe and has something to offer for the other. In this way, Panikkar's vision accommodates everything globally and interconnects everything with the thread of non-dualism (*advaita*). *Panikkar's vision stands as something that overcomes not only the dichotomies spawned by compartmentalisation (including the body-soul split) but also the estrangement of human and nature and the dualism of God and the world.* The Divine, the human and the cosmos become less and less real because of human blindness to see the unity in the mere apparent diversity. This fragmentation of seeing and knowing becomes the fragmentation of reality itself. For example, the myth of space and time: the myth of space with its threefold division of 'God above', 'human in between' and 'underworld below' needs to be re-interpreted. The myth of time with its stringent division of 'past, present, future' stands in need of new hermeneutics. In this situation, Panikkar's vision provides a unified and integrated perception of reality. Underneath the diversity of common experience, Panikkar discovers a rhythm of harmonious oneness which weaves together the

---

[4] Cf. R. Panikkar, "Cross-Cultural Studies", Monchanin 50 (June-December 1975), p. 13.

[5] R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, London, Paulist Press, 1978, p. 99.

inner vitality of life and reality. Panikkar realizes the beauty of this interrelatedness that brings everything to a concordance.

C. A Vision of Originality

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision stands as a vision of life, which results from his urge to encompass, become, and to live reality to the fullest.[6] We can trace this interest to get immersed totally in life, right from his early years. His concern was always to have communion with reality and to have a grip of it, not only with the intellect but also with the whole person. This can be seen in his way of treating the ultimate questions of reality with the total participation of his person rather than explaining in a merely theoretical way.[7] We can see that the cosmotheandric vision is the crystallisation of his thinking.[8]

The total involvement of his person is manifested in his writings and ideas. He does not want to separate his "personal life" and "professional occupation." He confesses that he has chosen both the paths of a

---

[6] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, tran. Annemarie S. Kidder, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993, p. 90: "As long as I can remember, I have felt a great need to encompass reality, or better, to become reality- to live."

[7] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 90: "Thus all my life I have been dealing with ultimate questions-not in a purely theoretical manner but by fully participating in them as person."

[8] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, pp. 4-5: "For well over fifty years I have been thematically concerned with the problem spelled out in this book...my lifelong fondness for synthesis, theandrism, myth and apophatism, all vouch for this attitude which I now formulate as a hypothesis..."

specialized academic and an a-cosmic monk because he sensed the attractive and appealing power of both. For him, a professor is not a businessperson but a "confessor" who makes a confession about his own life. Moreover, in his opinion, a monk is not a loner of *monachos*, but one struggling to be unified within. So, he views his vocation as a struggle to make a synthesis which is all-embracing and wholesome. In this regard, his vision is the reflection of his personal life itself, which originates from his own struggle to understand reality. Therefore, his writings are his "confessions" concerning his internal struggle for unity and synthesis, and the accomplishment of his vocation as a professor and a monk.[9]

His life can be seen as the fulfilment of his words: "In order to be authentic, the experiment must be also an experience; it must originate in the deepest corners of 'one's personal' being."[10] He himself acknowledges the excruciating tensions he has gone through and the "existential risk," he has taken to articulate his vision that does justice to reality.[11] He did not want to lose or mislay anything that exists, in this long and tedious process. He mentions that he has passed through different stages and ultimately reaches the stage of a monk who carries with himself the heaviest burden in the existential venture.[12]

---

[9] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 91.

[10] R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p.93. Cf. also p.92: "Personal circumstances (of biological, historical and biographical nature) prompted me to *accept* the venture of a conversion without alienation, of appropriation without repudiation, of synthesis without syncretism, of symbiosis without eclecticism."

[11] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 93.

[12] He notes that he has passed through all the different stages as a scientist who experiments with objects, as a philosopher with ideas,

The originality and authenticity of his vision can be traced well from his own words. Panikkar has the personal conviction that his ideas are not mere secretions of the brain but the condensation of his life lived and the experiences suffered.[13] The integrity of Panikkar is more evident as he himself witnesses, "Everything somewhat is autobiographical. I am using in my writing only words whose meaning I myself have grasped."[14] He acknowledges that his writing is a meditation and medicine to him. It allows him to ponder and contemplate deeply the mystery of reality. He even conceives it as an incarnation process.[15] Here, we see a sage in Panikkar who, meditating on the cells of an organism discovers a network of dynamic interrelatedness, which consolidates and weaves together the inner vitality of reality.

The originality of his vision is very well expressed in

---

and a monk with himself.

[13] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 1982, p. x: "If one writes a book with one's life and pays for it with one's blood, if intellectual activity consists of life lived and experience suffered, rather than being a mere secretion of the brain, then what I have written is part of what I was; and what I was cannot be blotted out."

[14] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 77.

[15] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 79: "Writing, to me, is meditation-that is medicine-and also moderation, order for this world...writing allows and almost forces me to ponder deeply the mystery of reality. It certainly involves thinking, contemplation. But at the same time, writing means that I have to add form, shape, beauty, expression, revelation to this mystery of reality...Writing presupposes thinking but also shaping and carving our thoughts; cleaning them, clothing them with colours, smells and forms, even strengthening and putting them to action. It is an incarnation process where the "word becomes flesh."

his idea of re-visioning of reality. In this re-visioning, he urges to have an "anthropological turn" or a "cultural mutation." This involves a change in human perception of reality. In other words, a complete change of heart (a radical *metanoia*) amounts to a "mutation" in human self-understanding. This radical re-vision certainly calls for a new understanding of space and time. Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision stands on the re-built pillars of space and time. Just as there can stand no building without pillars, so too there exists no reality without these two dimensions of space and time. In this respect, Panikkar appears as an architect and a poet, for "the architect senses the space of his time, while the poet rhymes the times of his space."[16] As an architect and a poet Panikkar seems to sense and discover (or re-cover) the rhythm of reality in his vision.

D. Synthesis of East and West

Being a child of two cultures (an Indian Father and a Spanish mother), Panikkar had the privilege to go through both traditions of East and West and compare them in the light of his own life experiences. This life experience helped him understand the goodness of each tradition and synthesise them without losing their uniqueness.

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision can be seen as a synthesis of East and West. In his writings, Panikkar combines the ideas of the eastern and the western traditions. For example, Panikkar makes use of the non-dualistic idea of *advaita* tradition of India throughout his vision. Also, he vividly uses the Buddhist notion of reality

---

[16] R. Panikkar, "There is No Outer without Inner Space," in *Cross Currents* XXXIV, (Spring 1993), p. 69.

especially when he speaks of radical relativity, etc. We can see many ideas of the western tradition in his writings that range from Pre-Socratics to post modern thinkers.[17] It is somehow evident that he is most especially influenced by the philosophy of life and existentialism.[18] Panikkar views East and West as two centres of thought, which cannot be seen as geographical locations but as anthropological categories. Interestingly, he states, "Each one of us has an 'East' and a 'West,' an Orient and an Occident."[19] He considers them as symbols, which are not the exclusive possession of some groups or religious families.

E. A Vision of Accommodative Character

Panikkar's attempt to fuse the eastern and the western ideas indicates the accommodative character of his vision which surpasses the "either or" question of reality. He presents a balanced view without extremes, and blends the basic dimensions of reality in an appealing manner. He explains the need for harmonious blending of ideas because his vision itself is a vision of relation. For him, being is essentially a relation. The very structure of reality reveals a relation.[20] The very feeling of our limitedness

---

[17] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony, Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility,* ed. Harry James Cargas, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, p. 59-60; cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 144, footnote 17.

[18] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 169. This passage points to this fact.

[19] R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype*, New York, Seasbury Press, 1982, p. 17. Also cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 145.

[20] Cf. R. Panikkar, "Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical

and insufficiency makes us tend towards others and be in relation.

Panikkar understands the different worldviews as creative and he believes that the different ideas can be accommodated and transformed into creative polarities. As Panikkar's methodology would make it clear, no worldview can claim monopoly because, by its very definition, it is only one particular perspective of the world. No worldview can provide us the real picture of the world. No single outlook can become the norm that evaluates the other views. All are valid and complementary.[21] According to Panikkar this is what the Trinitarian dynamic is all about; it is where everything contains in everything else; each person represents the community and each tradition corrects, complements and challenges the other.[22]

The accommodative attitude of Panikkar is very inspiring. For him, unity implies diversity and harmony of reality implies the presence of dialectically opposite polarities. The world order itself is maintained only by one dimension pulling in one direction and the other in the opposite. This is the "discordant concord" of different voices of human traditions. If all the discordant voices are reduced into one voice, the beauty will be lost.[23]

Challenge" *Religious Pluralism*, ed. Leory S. Rouner, Norte Dame, Universty of Norte Dame Press, 1984, p. 113.

[21] Cf. F. D'Sa, "Myth, History and Cosmos", *Jeevadhara*, 25 (January 1984), p. 18.

[22] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 142.

[23] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 180. Here Panikkar observes the beauty of pluralism as a symphony – the inexplicable concord out of so many dissenting voices. Pluralism tells us that one should not assume for oneself the role of being a conductor of the cosmic

Therefore, Panikkar's pluralistic vision allows for polar and 'tensible' coexistence between different human attitudes, cultures and traditions. This is what is meant by creative polarity.[24]

Another motivating element in Panikkar's thinking is that Panikkar adapts himself to diverse worldviews. He is willing to admit that his thinking is no more than one opinion among many.[25] He acknowledges that his opinions, beliefs, philosophy or religion are as limited, vulnerable, debatable and subjected to critique as any other is.[26] He also admits that his vision is not at all a well-articulated or finished vision once and for all.[27] We can

---

orchestra.

[24] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 13: "We need a horizon in order to see and to understand, but we are aware that other people have other horizons; we aspire to embrace them, but we are aware of the ever-elusive character of any horizon and its constitutive openness." Also cf. R. Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-Style", pp. 202-203. He views the *adavitic* approach as a conjoining substitute. According to Panikkar, *advaita* is the basic intuition that opens up a worldview in which the diversities are neither absolutized (dualism) nor ignored (monism), nor idolized(pantheism), nor reduced to mere shadows(monotheism). Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", p. 226: "And this advaitic approach has the confidence that what appears to be in conflicts (when viewed dialectically), can be transformed into creative polarities."

[25] Cf. R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", *The Intercultural Challenge of R. Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 247: "In short, my criticism on universalism is not a universal affirmation [...] it tallies with my defence of pluralism, which is not a pluralistic statement [...] it is simply my opinion, which I am striving to defend in a convincing manner." See also R. Panikkar "A Self-Critical Dialogue", p. 254.

[26] Cf. R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", p. 257.

[27] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 17.

provisionally call it the "unifying myth" that is not yet spelled out; it is not yet logos.[28] It is only a starting point.[29] It is still an emerging vision which represents the emerging religious consciousness of our time.[30] This itself shows the intellectual humility of Panikkar to acknowledge the limitedness and inadequacy of his vision.

F. An Integrated Eco Vision

Modern human being endowed with reason and assisted by a limited anthropocentric vision of reality has insrtumentalized nature for his/her own purposes. Guided by the goddess of reason and the objective thinking of science, human being has the belief that the mastery over nature leads to the height of success. His/her adoration and admiration have gone after the progressive thinking of science. This exploitative mentality is considered as the progressive thinking of the modern world. Human being has looked down upon anything that has to do with the "mystery." The mystery aspect of reality is perceived as something that is against the spirit of science. Human being's scientific and technological pride feels threatened and offended at the thought of anything beyond his/her control. "Mystery" has given way to "mastery." Dazzled and overwhelmed by the astounding accomplishments of science, modern human being thinks that the most efficacious approach to know reality is the experiment. However, through experiment one can never know earth's wisdom just as by experiment alone, one will never

---

[28] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 77.

[29] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 72.

[30] Cf. R. Panikkar, "Towards a Dialogical Dalogue", *Interculture*, 20(1987), pp. 14-15.

discover the mystery aspect of the human body and its real life. This experimenting attitude results not only in the disrespect of the Divine and the human but also the exploitation of nature. In this context, we can see the integrated "eco-vision" of Panikkar.

G. A New Understanding of Ecology

Panikkar analyses very beautifully the estrangement of humans from nature while he deals with historical consciousness.[31] In this moment of historical consciousness human being seems to be in dialectical opposition to nature and being a civilized human being he/she considers him/herself as a non-natural being. His/her home is no longer the earth but the ideal world. Historical human being tames and subjugates nature. Nature is 'demythicized'; there is no mystery about it. The sacred thread of collegiality that has woven the artistry of nature becomes broken and scattered into pieces.[32] Human beings have not simply taken their sustenance from the earth, but they have further exploited and violated her.[33] The way Panikkar puts forward this idea of further exploitation is remarkable: "But the cosmotheandric circle is broken if we convert *agriculture* which is a sort of love-making with the Earth, into *agribusiness*, which amounts to the violation of Nature, significantly called world "resources," for the profit of the exploiter."[34] The "maximum" has replaced the "optimum." The denuded forests, the polluted atmosphere and the stained seas are

---

[31] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 105.

[32] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, pp. 52-53.

[33] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 52.

[34] R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue" p. 288. Italics mine.

the best example of this exploitation.

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision has an inspirational analysis of nature. He elevates nature to the level of a person. For Panikkar, the earth is our mother. She is our very self.[35] To destroy our relationship with nature is to destroy our very selves. In this sense, human survival is inextricably linked with the survival of nature. The elevation of nature from objective level to a personal realm further implies the need of experience to understand the earth rather than to experiment. In this experiential level, we allow nature to penetrate us. Here, we are not only "seeing" but "hearing" too. That means, this process of experience is both active and passive at the same time. By allowing her to speak, we discover the earth's wisdom.

Panikkar flavours his ecological vision further with the traditional idea of *anima mundi.* By this concept, Panikkar states that life is not the privilege of humans alone but human person shares in the life of the universe.[36] In other words, human being as a microcosm is sharing the life of the earth, which is the macrocosm. Panikkar makes a remarkable comparison in order to show the dignity of the earth. He makes use of the ideas from the Indian philosophy and the western traditions.[37] In this

---

[35] Cf. R. Panikkar, "A New Society for a New Millennium", *Journal of Dharma*, vo.27, no.1, (January-March 2002), p. 14.

[36] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 138.

[37] Panikkar shows the dual dimensionality of the Earth using the Indian traditional terms: *bhoomi* and *prithvi*. The term *bhoomi* implies that which exists here before us and that which natures all creatures. *Prithvi* means that which stretches out before us in an ever-expanding horizon and that which receives all steps we make, all the growth that may occur in us. The Christian scholastics considered the world to be the primary source of knowledge. In addition, he mentions about the

comparative analysis, we can see the mind of a hermit who gives obvious preferentiality to the philosophy of nature and eschews the modern scientific approach. Panikkar's view seems to be very similar to the Hermetic philosophy of nature.[38] Also, it shows the traits of Jaina philosophy.[39]

Another notable thing in Panikkar's ecological vision is his use of "ecosofy" instead of ecology. Panikkar justifies this shift because "ecosophy" adopts a dialogical attitude towards the earth seeing it as "Thou." He is of the opinion that mere ecology is not adequate to convey the meaningfulness of our view regarding nature. Also, Panikkar opines that we have to hold a dialogue with the earth. This idea of dialogue runs parallel with his fundamental view that human task is to participate in reality and its cosmic rhythms.[39] This participation also implies the cultivation of friendship with her. Aside from the reason Panikkar presented above, I think, there are three other reasons for this shift. Firstly, Panikkar avoids the terms, which have too much affinity with reason or modern scientific thinking; the term "ecology" is pregnant with rational connotations. Secondly, Panikkar prefers to coin his own terms instead of using the traditional ones in order to picture reality more effectively.[40] The name he has given to his vision itself stands as an evidence to this. Thirdly, Panikkar understands the new vision about the

---

empiricist philosophy and the German philosophy (*Grund*, *Urgrund* etc.).

[38] Hermetic philosophy is a philosophical view which has a religious approach to the cosmos involving a regenerative experience.

[39] Cf. R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", pp. 288-289.

[40] Panikkar has coined many terms like *cosmothenadric*, *tempiternity*, etc.

earth as the new wisdom. This is precisely the new innocence, about which he speaks of constantly.[41] Therefore, in my opinion, he avoids the traditional term "ecology" and replaces it with "ecosofy" in order to convey this new vision or wisdom.[42]

H. A New Understanding of Matter and World

In Panikkar's writings, we see a positive appreciation and admiration of matter and the world. For Panikkar, every being stands in the world and shares its secularity. Our every day experience discloses that there is nothing that enters human consciousness without at once entering in relation with the world.[43] This implies that we cannot even think of God and human beings who may fail to partake in secularity. If there is nothing, it amounts to absolute nothingness. The final foundation for the belief for the existence of something is that the world exists.

The way, in which Panikkar shows the significance of matter and the world is interesting. Panikkar elevates

---

[41] Cf. Ewert Cousins, "Raimundo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future", *Cross Currents* (Summer 1979), p. 152. Here, Cousins compares Panikkar with Francis of Assisi.

[42] The title of one of the Italian books of Panikkar itself is *Ecosofia: la nuova saggeza-per una spiritualità della terra* published from Assisi in 1993. For a detailed discussion of this theme, cf. D'Sa Francis, "*Sacramentum mundi*: Preface to a Cross-Cultural Re-Vision of Sacraments," *The World as Sacrament: Interdisciplinary Bridge-Building of the Sacred and Secular*, eds., Francis X. D'Sa, Isaac Padinjarekuttu and Jacob Parapally, Pune, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, I, 1998, pp. 263-264.

[43] Panikkar argues that even the extra-mundane things have their reference necessary to the world (*saeculum*) though these might also be somehow negative. For more, see R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 64.

matter to a higher realm by saying that "every material thing that is, is God's, or more precisely, God's thing, God's own World."[44] Likewise, Panikkar explains human relationship with the world too. Human beings cannot survive without the cosmos. Moreover, our needs are dependent on the cosmos.[45] To become human, one has to be cosmic. However, there is no question of "has to" because human being is always cosmic and he/she has no existence other than here in the world.

The idea of the world as a symbol is another notable contribution of Panikkar. In his cosmotheandric vision, the world is the symbol of the Divine. His idea of symbol is noteworthy: symbol has a revelatory function and it reveals the symbolized reality in a symbolic way. The relation between the symbol and the symbolized is ontological.[46] The symbolised exists in and through the symbol.[47] Reality is not exhausted in the symbol, but there is no reality out of or independent from the symbol. Here, Panikkar brings forward the example of human body: my body is a symbol of my person. "I" exist in my body and my person reveals itself through my body. However, my body does not exhaust my whole personality. I am more than my body. Nevertheless, without my body, my personality cannot exist.[48] In this way, Panikkar gives a

---

[44] R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 66.

[45] The human, for example, cannot survive without breathing, food, etc.

[46] Panikkar shared with me this idea during my meeting with him in Barcelona on 19th November 2005.

[47] R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-cultural Studies*, New York, Paulist Press, 1979, p. 6.

[48] This idea is shared by Panikkar during my meeting with him, with a

very positive value to the world and matter and raises them to the symbol, which symbolizes the Divine. Therefore, the world and matter are indispensable in the understanding of reality.[49]

Moreover, this view contributes to a better understanding of the *sacramentality* of the world. Panikkar seems to be bold enough to affirm, "the *saeculum* (world) is not in jest or passing, provisional, unreal or a shadow or what we would like to call it in order to attenuate the impact of an unjust and violent status quo."[50] Here, we see the voice of a prophet who is very much concerned about the contemporary situation of the society. He urges us to take the world seriously. By this, he asserts that the material world is real and insuperable though not exclusive or complete. The real cannot be disassociated from the bodily and it cannot exist without matter, though it does not consist of matter only.[51] Life is not only about the material world. Life means the incorporation of the Divine in the human and its impregnation of all the structures of the material world.[52] The world is no longer that which is fleeting but it is the very clothing of the

---

caution that every example is misleading.

[49] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 83: "It (contemporary monkhood) cannot renounce the secular world because *it does not believe it to be secondary*; it cannot renounce activity in the world because it believes this to be *indispensable*." Bracket and italics are mine.

[50] R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 84.

[51] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, p. 90. Here, Panikkar acknowledges that the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body has become a symbol to him.

[52] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 84.

permanent, the eternal and the immutable.[53] This is precisely what we mean by *sacramentality* of the world.

I. Towards a New Anthropology

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision has high esteem for human beings. For Panikkar, "To be Man is not just to be a small piece of intelligent matter crawling in the universe, or a great individual walking on earth. Man is a conscious agent in the very destiny of the universe."[54] Therefore, it is very clear that human beings have a great role to play in the universe. Human dignity lies in his/her being commissioned to bring the universe to perfection.[55] For Panikkar, human being is the microcosm that mirrors and transforms the macrocosm, the world.[56] They influence mutually.

Panikkar's anthropology provides us a new insight that extends to the realm of the cosmic and the Divine dimensions. Panikkar even uses the notion of humans as a reflection, an image of the whole reality.[57] Does it mean only a passive reflection? No, it is an active partaking. "Man participates in the cosmic rhythm not only as a "spectator" or an "actor," but even as a "co-author" and a "priest" by whose active participation, the cosmic rhythms are transformed."[58] The overall development of human beings goes hand in hand with the transformation of

---

[53] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 85.

[54] R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", p. 276.

[55] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, p. 62.

[56] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 131.

[57] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 131.

[58] Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, p. 62.

reality because of the intrinsic ontological connection between human beings and reality. Therefore, the enhancing of human beings also entails the enhancing of reality.[59] This view is certainly a guideline and incentive to all those who work for the betterment of the human society. For Panikkar, a human being is not just one of the many rings in a lifeless chain of entities but is unique and irreplaceable because of the infinite value namely the Divine.[60]

J. Re-visioning of Time

One of the prominent features of Panikkar's vision is his idea of time. For him, time originally connoted a predominantly qualitative intuition in the sense that each being has its own time.[61] It is tantamount to saying that time is the peculiar way in which each being can exist. Therefore, time and being are co-extensive. There is time as long as being exists and being exists so long as it has time to exist. This shows that time is not exterior to being. Instead, it is part and parcel of the constitution of being. It is interior to being. Temporality is an essential dimension of reality though reality is not exhausted by it.

Panikkar makes a very good blend of the ancient Greek and the Indian traditions in order to express the original meaning of time. In the Greek tradition, time originally implies the "life" of being. This shows the intrinsic

---

[59] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 65.

[60] Cf. R. Panikkar, "Mysticism of Jesus the Christ", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Baümer, New Delhi, D.K. Printworld, 1997, pp. 128-130.

[61] Cf. R. Panikkar, "Toward a Typology of Time and Temporality", *Philosophy East and West*, XXIV, (April 1974), pp. 161-164.

connection between time and reality in the deepest level. In the Indian tradition, time is the "life-breath" of reality (*prāna*).[62] Life matures beings and encompasses being. Further, it is time again that makes change in being. He nicely puts together all these traditional insights in his cosmotheandric vision to show the dynamic character of reality.

Another interesting feature in the idea of time is the significance of the "present." Panikkar observes that the modern human being has no time to live in the "present" as he/she idolizes the future. The consequence is that he/she becomes a machine losing his/her uniqueness.[63] Human being, like a machine, works and lives almost in an automatic manner. This implies that human values like love, friendship, beauty, inner joy, etc. hardly have a place in this world of acceleration and repetition. Human beings hardly get time for nurturing human values and fellowship. This has created a sense of estrangement from the Divine, other human beings and nature. Eternity becomes a real problem and a threat. In this dialectical opposition between temporality and eternity, Panikkar locates his inspiring notion of *tempiternity* as a solution to this problem. What he proposes is that human being does not need to look for eternity in the future. It is something already present "here and now" in the present moment itself.[64] Therefore, he urges to live "life in its fullness" in

---

[62] Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 142. Another term for time in the Vedic tradition is *āyus*, which means the vital force of being, the existential span or duration of every being.

[63] Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Law of *Karman* and the Historical Dimension of Man," *Philosophy East and West*, XXII, no.1 (January 1972), p. 38.

[64] It seems to be similar to the Christian theology which says, "already, but not yet"

the "present".[65] The implication of this view is tremendous in the modern scenario of work, which we will deal in the coming section.

K. New Outlook on Human Work

Panikkar's understanding of work is very much connected with his understanding of time. He proposes a contemplative attitude to both, time and work. The manner, in which he mingles these ideas, is noteworthy. His idea of *tempiternity* has a great influence in his concept of work. The cosmotheandric intuition, according to Panikkar, is the emergence of new consciousness that is an invitation towards a contemplative mood. This mood is closely connected with Panikkar's understanding of the third moment of consciousness, namely the *trans-historical consciousness*; indeed, contemplation is the trans-temporal mode in which one lives fully in the present moment.[66]

Panikkar combines work and *tempiternity*. Work enables us to live in the "present" and it is through working within time and space that we are able to transcend our historical predicament and thereby

---

[65] Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity," *Cross Currents*, XXXIV (Fall 1981), p. 265. Panikkar's view encourages us to live reality in its fullness without desperation. Panikkar's view corresponds to the modern slogans like: "The best day is today," "The best moment is the present moment" etc. There is nothing to come better tomorrow. Do not expect something better tomorrow. Tomorrow is already present now. The best thing is to live the present in its totality and fullness. Then tomorrow would be automatically better for us.

[66] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 18.

transform time itself.[67] It is in work where *time* and *timefulness* meet and enable the worker to enjoy the present and to consecrate his/her life authentically and fruitfully. Work becomes a contemplation and worship that helps a human being to be fully him/herself; in fact, an act of worship is an act which allows and enables us to realize our being, to realize in the cosmos what they really are.[68]

This does not mean that any work becomes automatically contemplation or worship. Panikkar sets one condition for this: it must be a desireless action. He compares the unmotivated action of the contemplative with the understanding of the *Bhagavadgita* that the highest action is desireless action doing for the act itself. Therefore, the result of the action is renounced by the contemplative. An act is done simply for the sake of itself without asking a "why." The primacy is to the act itself so that work will have to yield its own meaning.[69] In this manner, "kiss will be a kiss; the dance a dance; the poem a poem."[70]

The contemplative act is creative, a new beginning not

---

[67] Cf. R. Panikkar, "Time and Sacrifice: The Sacrifice of Time and the Ritual of Modernity," *The Study of Time III: Proceedings of the Third Conference of the International Society for the Study of Time, Alpbach-Austria*, J.T. Fraser ed. New York, Springer-Verlag, 1978, p. 702.

[68] Cf. R. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man,* London, Darton, Longman & Todd, p. 48.

[69] It seems that Panikkar also advocates for actions that will be useful for others instead of personal gain. For more, see Panikkar, "Samdhya, The Vedic Prayer" *Indian Theological Studies*, 14, no.1 (March 1977), pp. 27-28.

[70] R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 12.

a conclusion.[71] Here, Panikkar presents with much enthusiasm a very risky and adventurous way of living without looking into the future. The examples he gives for contemplative life, seem to be evocative and provocative at the same time: "If you are a contemplative, you may become a Samaritan on the way and come late to the meeting, or just remain playing with some trifle which happened to catch your fancy. Ultimately, you have no way to go, no place to reach."[72] After all, the meaning of life does not rest in its achievement. The authenticity of these words becomes clear when we compare these words with Panikkar's personal confession: "I remember having spontaneously avoided situations where I could have acquired honours and power. I have never regretted avoiding these, but I must admit that I thought about them in weak moments."[73] These words seem to be genuine and exemplary; indeed, they point towards a desireless life.[74]

The contemplative expects nothing from the future, and for him/her, happiness is now, not in the future or in

---

[71] Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Contemplative Mood", p. 264.

[72] R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 8.

[73] R. Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-Style", p. 93. The authenticity of Panikkar is revealed more in the following sentences: "The idea of becoming a political figure, a bishop, a general director, or something like that is not always unpleasant. It took years before I could even mention this. And I still suppress here a page of my original manuscript." Also, he observes that he has passed through the three stages: of a scientist who experiments with objects, of a philosopher who experiments with ideas and of a monk who experiments with himself. The third stage carries with it the heaviest burden of existential venture. Here the experiment becomes experience.

[74] Panikkar points out that in order to be authentic, it must originate from the deepest corners of "one's personal being." For more see R. Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-Style", p. 93.

achieving anything.[75] For Panikkar, how long we live doesn't matter, because nothing is there to be achieved in the future. The contemplative has achieved it today itself: "Your life will not be unfulfilled even if you do not reach your golden age but meet with an accident along the road."[76] Though these words appear to be a kind of "indifference" or "disinterest" to life, they have something remarkable to convey to all who become desperate or disappointed even with small failures in life. When a worker attains this contemplative mood, according to Panikkar, his/her work becomes worship; after all, human realization takes place not in the future, but in every moment of life, and the final achievement is present from the beginning until the end.[77]

Conclusion

In this article, I was trying to tread through the narrow forest trails of the cosmotheandric vision which is yet to be better interpreted or meaningfully explored (or re-discovered). As we know well, no understanding of reality can explain fully the totality of reality because of the inability of human reason to explain exhaustively the totality of human experience. Each understanding of reality is a genuine attempt to comprehend reality in its own way. Therefore, each metaphysical vision of reality can be seen as a paradigm, which throws light onto reality partially, but in its own uniqueness. This uniqueness

---

[75] In this way, time has been redeemed, overcome or denied.

[76] R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 8.

[77] R. Panikkar, "The Contemplative Mood", p. 267. As we have seen earlier, the idea of Panikkar has great affinity with existentialism and the philosophy of life.

makes a particular vision attractive and impressive. In outlining reality in its own way, each paradigm of reality gets confronted and complemented by other models of reality, and this leads to a synthesis of different visions. Each model has its own merits and demerits, which can be compared and confronted with other models. This process is continuously taking place, and in turn, it may lead to a better understanding of reality and to the attainment of progress in the whole cosmos. Panikkar's rhythmic understanding of time and the contemplative attitude for an integration of life make his vision appealing and inspiring. His vision challenges us to build a better world, which gives dignity to human values, enhances respect for nature, and entails an ever more emphasized notion of God who is vigilant over His creation. It promotes harmony with the cosmos, communion among all humans and confidence in the Divine. Therefore, a spirituality based on the cosmotheandric vision would be a deeper awareness of the sacredness of creation that would lead us to live a life of harmony, respect and love.

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth

Master's Programmes In JDV

-Multi-disciplinary Spirituality.

-Pastoral Management.

-Missiology

-Systematic theology.

-Philosophy.

-Science And Religion.

Address all correspondence to:

The Registrar,

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth,

Ramwadi, Nagar Road, Pune 411014, India.

Phone: 91-(0)20-41036111.

E-mail: regisjdv@gmail.com

ISSN 972-33315